PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 302

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
1 December—12 December 1997

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1 December 1997

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 302**

NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 1 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Territorial Army

1. **Mr. Brazier:** What steps he is taking to ensure that Territorial Army units can continue to conduct unit-level exercises and participate, as units, in formation–level training. [16794]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): Territorial Army units take part in a minimum of six days collective training each year and two of those are spent on a unit or formation-level exercise. The future training requirement for TA units will depend on the outcome of strategic defence review work into the future size and shape of the Regular and Reserve forces.

Mr. Brazier: Is the Minister aware that such unit and formation-level exercises attract and retain the best-quality people in the TA? Is it true that an admiral has been asked to head the relevant strategic defence review team which will conduct the Reserve forces study? The Royal Navy has so run down the resources for its own Reserve that it is now almost the worst-recruited section of the Reserve forces.

Dr. Reid: In response to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we recognise the importance of collective training for individuals. The TA units took part in four formation-level exercises this year, compared with two last year, and four are planned for next year. We shall obviously bear that in mind during the strategic defence review considerations.

As regards the make-up of the project team, senior personnel at two-star level have been given the task of overseeing each of the main project areas under consideration in the strategic defence review. The study on the Reserves is being conducted by a mixed civil and military team and includes the Director of Reserves and Cadets, Richard Holmes, whom I shall see tomorrow as part of those discussions. Brigadier Holmes and that group are overseen by an assistant chief of the defence staff programmes, who, as the hon. Gentleman says, is an admiral, but is also a purple post.

Mr. Edwards: May I remind my hon. Friend that the oldest Territorial regiment in the British Army is the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers, based in Monmouth in my constituency? Does he agree with me that the outstanding work that it has performed in Bosnia recently demonstrates the important operational role that the Territorial forces can play following the strategic defence review?

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for that observation. I am sure that the whole House will join me in paying tribute not only to the generality of the TA, but, in particular, to the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers. We particularly recall those who have done and continue to do such sterling work in areas such as Bosnia. We are truly fortunate to be able to call upon such dedicated, professional and highly motivated individuals who make up the voluntary Reserves. We are intent on ensuring that their use is as flexible as possible. Indeed,

only today, a reservist officer has been called up for service with UNSCOM in Iraq, which again demonstrates the flexibility and utility of our Reserve forces.

Royal Engineers

2. **Mrs. Roe:** If he will make a statement on the *(a)* financial and *(b)* service personnel impact for the Royal Engineers of his Department's land mines strategy. [16795]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): Our land mines strategy will have no significant impact on the operating costs or manpower of the Royal Engineers. I am pleased to say that they will be playing a direct role in the Mine Information and Training Centre at Minley.

Mrs. Roe: I am grateful for that reply. Does the Minister envisage that Royal Engineers personnel will play a more active role on the ground in mine clearing overseas?

Mr. Robertson: In peacetime, it is not the role of our soldiers to get involved in humanitarian mine clearing, although they have considerable expertise in the clearance of areas following conflicts. I assure the hon. Lady, and I am proud to say, that the Royal Engineers will play a distinguished part in the work of the Mine Information and Training Centre. Its expertise and knowledge will be used in Government and non-governmental organisations to ensure that the task of humanitarian de-mining, which is of such great importance in the world today, is conducted in the most professional and expert way possible.

Mr. Savidge: With the Ottawa treaty being signed this Wednesday, does the Secretary of State agree that we should now be concentrating on the task of ridding ourselves of those land mines that have already been sown? Will he tell us more about what the Government will be doing to assist those involved in the humanitarian task of de-mining?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A significant moment in history will occur on Wednesday when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will be in Canada to sign the Ottawa treaty, which will ban the export, import, transfer, manufacture and, ultimately, use of anti-personnel land mines. That, in itself, is one step in the direction in which, I believe, the world wishes to go.

All across the globe there are the legacies of previous conflicts—areas that cannot be walked on owing to the potential terrible, wanton destruction of anti-personnel land mines that lie in the way of so many civilians. I am pleased to say that British Army expertise is to be used at a much greater level to assist in that project. Already, British troops have been involved in helping to rid parts of the world of the scourge of land mines. Those areas include Afghanistan, Angola, Belize, Cambodia and Cyprus. This country played an important part in establishing the United Nations mines action centre in Bosnia. We shall play our part and I hope that other countries will do the same.

Mr. Martin Bell: Is the Minister aware that the position of the head of his Department's humanitarian mine clearance is as yet unfilled and there is a sense of urgency and concern in the mine clearance community that it should have been filled earlier?

Mr. Robertson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, in every area where there is concern on humanitarian de-mining, we are moving with expedition. My visit to Bosnia was designed to highlight a new five-point programme on humanitarian de-mining. Colonel Alastair McAslan has been nominated as the British Army's representative on humanitarian de-mining. We are fulfilling all the obligations which, as a major military nation, we should.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I hope that the Secretary of State had an interesting visit to the Royal School of Military Engineering at Minley in my constituency. I was interested to hear him say that he reckons that the centre of mine expertise will not have a significant financial impact. When it was announced in October, it was reported that it would cost £125,000 to set up the centre. Will that money come out of the defence budget or that of the Overseas Development Administration?

Mr. Robertson: Of course it will come from the defence budget, as it should, as it involves military de-mining. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is as proud as I am of the work that has been and will be done at Minley. The £125,000 is a good investment in the sort of jobs that will be done at that establishment by the Royal Engineers.

Former Prisoners of War

3. **Mr. Gill:** If Her Majesty's Government will repay to former prisoners of war the amount deducted from their pay on which they had paid taxes and which was not refunded to the German and Italian Governments in a post–war settlement. [16796]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): My decision on the review of officer prisoners of war and protected personnel pay deductions during the second world war was taken after very careful consideration of the submissions from ex-officer prisoners of war and protected personnel, and of the long and detailed report of the review, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. I concurred with the findings of previous Ministers that the contemporary evidence did not support the claims being made for further refunding of deductions.

Mr. Gill: The Minister will be aware that this matter was discussed in the House earlier in the year, when there was support for the plight of ex-officer prisoners of war on both sides of the House. They will be disappointed in the answer that he has just given to my question. One of those who will be disappointed will be my constituent, Squadron Leader B. A. James MC, who, along with thousands of other people in the same circumstances, feels that he has been ignored and treated very badly. This question has rumbled on since 1980 and it is disappointing to hear the Minister say that he is not prepared to review the matter. Those involved would like there to be an independent inquiry at which prisoners of war could express their evidence in a way that they have previously been unable to do.

Mr. Spellar: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, we have, as promised, reviewed the situation. I have gone

through a mass of documentation, including representations from ex-officer prisoners of war and protected personnel, and through the documentation produced by the Department. However, after full examination, I have to say that the case is not made, which is why we felt it right and proper to confirm the previous Administration's decision.

Mr. Dalyell: Roughly how many people and how much money are involved?

Mr. Spellar: There is considerable argument about several aspects of this matter, especially as much of it relates to records that no longer exist. All the issues were fully discussed in the House and fully examined by the then Government after the second world war and decisions were made on that basis. Successive Governments have gone through the information and confirmed those decisions because the case for doing otherwise has not been made.

Mr. Rendel: I understand that the Government accept that money was deducted from prisoners of war and should therefore have been paid back after the war; but that, now that they have lost all their records, it is impossible to go over the case once again and decide who should be paid and how much. Can we have an assurance from the Government that, at least, individuals who have kept their own records and can prove how much they lost will be paid back?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman is not looking at the case. In reality, a number of those who came back after the war were refunded by the authorities. There was discussion about that at the time. In a number of other cases, camp funds were put together, but that is a separate issue. Many of those who had had moneys deducted and who were able to demonstrate that they did not receive the moneys in the camp got a refund after the war. All that forms part of the body of facts that we have established and gone through, which is why we made the decision.

Mr. Gibb: In preparing the report, what steps were taken to ensure that the first-hand experiences of the officers involved were reflected in that report? Is the Minister aware that those ex-prisoners of war, who served our country valiantly and selflessly during the last world war, feel strongly that they have been cheated and that they cannot get justice? Would it not be wiser to offer some consultation with them or, better still, to appoint an independent person to arbitrate on that matter?

Mr. Spellar: All hon. Members, this Administration and previous Administrations fully understand the tremendous contribution made by many of those individuals, both before they were taken prisoner and, in many cases, afterwards, when they tied up many German and Italian troops in trying to recapture escaping prisoners of war. That is common ground. When we move on to the question of whether deductions were adequately repaid, we find that many of the investigations took place immediately after the war, that the issues were discussed in the House of Commons and that parliamentary questions were tabled. At that time, contemporary evidence was closely examined, which is why the previous Conservative Government made the decision that they did and why, having examined the evidence after having entered office after the general election, we had to concur with their finding.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: Will my hon. Friend accept that much of the evidence on which he relies was produced before the election of the Labour Government? Several of my constituents have written to me saying that they understood that they had no hope with the other lot, but that they hoped that fresh consideration would be given to this matter. Much of the evidence put to me and to my hon. Friends is new evidence, and I ask that it be reconsidered.

Mr. Spellar: Much of the evidence was considered by the Attlee Labour Government after the last war and the issues examined by those who were much closer to the evidence at the time. That evidence was re-examined by the previous Administration and by this Administration and, when we did it, we looked at a number of representations from those with an individual viewpoint, both officer POWs and protected personnel. We examined that evidence and compared it with the contemporary evidence and with the documentation. It was for that reason that we took our decision.

Royal Yacht

5. **Mr. Godman:** What recent representations he has received anent the future of the royal yacht Britannia. [16798]

9. **Mr. Syms:** If he will make a statement on the future of the royal yacht Britannia. [16802]

Mr. George Robertson: My Department has received a large number of approaches about Britannia's future. Seven substantive preservation proposals are being examined in detail. I should prefer the yacht to be preserved, providing that the use is fitting and that there can be adequate arrangements to ensure that her fine appearance can be maintained. I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Godman: I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has decided to ignore the suggestion, or request, from Buckingham palace that the vessel be scuttled or scrapped. Does he agree that neither London nor Leith has a legitimate claim on her and that, in all fairness, she should go to the Clyde, to be berthed at the Govan dry dock close to the proposed science park? The ship should not finish up at the bottom of the Atlantic; she should be returned to the Clyde, where she was built.

Mr. Robertson: Buckingham palace has been kept closely informed of the options for the ship's future, and has made it clear that the decision should and will be taken by the Government. Britannia is regarded by most people as a national treasure. She has given 44 years of distinguished service to the Queen and the country. My preferred option is that the yacht should be preserved, but its use must be fitting and there must be adequate arrangements to maintain its appearance. All seven bids will be considered fairly and in detail, and we shall come to a conclusion in the near future.

Mr. Syms: May I press the Secretary of State further? When will he come to the House with a decision?

The public are greatly concerned that the yacht's use should be appropriate. May I make a plea for the south coast—particularly for Portsmouth, which has a very good claim to have the yacht berthed there?

Mr. Robertson: It is critical that we look at each of the proposals in some detail. I am concerned to preserve Britannia, and to ensure that her dignity and long-term future are absolutely assured. I shall take no prior view of which option is best. They will all be considered on exactly the same basis, and I hope to be able to make a decision shortly.

Mrs. Gilroy: The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) has just issued a plea for the south coast. It will not surprise my right hon. Friend if I rise to make a plea, backed by the representations, which I know that he has received, for Plymouth. I ask not only that the vessel be preserved but that, by means of a private finance initiative, she is kept in use. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give serious consideration to that idea, along with the other representations that he has received.

Mr. Robertson: I am not certain whether my hon. Friend made a slip of the tongue when she said Plymouth—perhaps she meant Portsmouth, as Plymouth has not entered a bid for consideration. We need to take a dispassionate and objective view of the proposals, and to consider all representations. I appreciate that there are strong views in each of the localities involved in the decision. They serve to underline the fact that there are strong feelings in the country that Britannia should be preserved. It is my responsibility to ensure that, if she is preserved, that is done in a way most fitting for the ship and for the country.

Mr. Hancock: Most of my constituents will be delighted that the Secretary of State shares their opinion and not the opinion of the Princess Royal, which was that the ship should be scuttled. Indeed, they have made a strong case for Britannia to go to her natural home, in Portsmouth. However, if the ship is to be kept as a national treasure, I suggest that that can be done only if the Government keep some control over her by providing a dowry to ensure that the ship is restored in the way most people would expect her to be.

Mr. Robertson: It has been made clear that there will be no call on public funds, but we must ascertain that in connection with any of the seven bids that are being considered. The Britannia will not be replaced or rebuilt; that decision is final. All the private finance options would have been viable only with substantial amounts of public money. I appreciate that, inevitably, the hon. Gentleman will favour the Portsmouth option, and it will be carefully considered among all the other options.

I look forward to being in Portsmouth next Thursday for the decommissioning of HMY Britannia.

Defence Diversification Agency

6. **Jacqui Smith:** If he will make a statement on the Government's plans for a defence diversification agency. [16799]

Mr. Spellar: Our aim is to fulfil our manifesto commitment to facilitate the wider application of defence industry expertise to civil uses. Although I previously announced our hope to publish a Green Paper on this before Christmas, preparatory work has taken longer than anticipated. We now expect to publish the Green Paper early in the new year. However, I can assure the House that this remains a matter of the highest priority.

Jacqui Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for his assurance that this remains a priority, especially in the light of a survey of companies in my Redditch constituency with defence involvement, which suggested that, despite a reduction in their defence turnover, they believe that jobs could be preserved by defence diversification. What role will there be for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in the Government's plans for defence diversification? Will the Government learn from the experience of industries and other countries in that process?

Mr. Spellar: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the question of industries in her Redditch constituency, because many of those are the small and medium enterprises that are very much the core of our defence industry. Sometimes we concentrate too much on the prime contractors, to the exclusion of SMEs.

Obviously, I cannot go into all the details of the paper now but, in answer to my hon. Friend's question about the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, we shall consider how to diffuse the technology and expertise in the agency into the wider economy. We shall study the experience of many of the major companies in this country that have diversified some of their activities, and the example of other countries—not least the United States—and the successful work that they have undertaken in diffusing defence technology more widely into industry.

Departmental Land and Buildings

7. **Mr. Pike:** What estimates his Department has made of the potential for disposal of its land and buildings over the next five years. [16800]

Mr. Spellar: In addition to forecast receipts this year of £140 million, we expect to receive about £200 million over the next two years for land and buildings that have already been identified as surplus. The strategic defence review is examining vigorously the scope for further disposals.

Mr. Pike: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Can he assure me that the review is as vigorous as possible, to ensure both that every possible piece of land and building that can be disposed of in the new defence situation that we are facing can be sold and the money realised for the nation and that use of large parts of our land will not be blocked?

Mr. Spellar: There has already been a considerable reduction in the defence estate. Further disposal will follow the identification of other areas. Of course we want to ensure that land and buildings are used to the maximum efficiency, not only to realise money for the defence budget but, quite properly, to ensure that land is available for regeneration and housing. Many local authorities are

discussing those matters with us and many hon. Members are approaching us with useful, imaginative and exciting ideas for the use of that land.

Mr. Viggers: Can the Minister give an undertaking that, when defence land is released, the broader range of issues will be taken into account? I think especially of land in my constituency at Royal Clarence yard, where the Ministry of Defence is proposing to retain nine and a half acres, which is central to the millennium project for the development of Portsmouth harbour. Will he ensure that the Ministry of Defence is given an assurance by Government generally that broader interests are taken into account?

Mr. Spellar: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. We try to take regeneration issues into account and to work with local authorities and other planning agencies wherever possible, but in many cases we must retain sites for strategic defence interests. We should not consider alienating that land if it were to the detriment of training or of the operations of the services. We are mindful of the need for regeneration and the ability, through that, to contribute to the regeneration of the whole country.

Sir George Young: Where land and buildings are surplus to the Department's requirements, will the Minister liaise closely with planning departments, such as those in Hampshire, to see whether the sites could be put to housing use, thereby reducing the threat of green-field development on which so many of his hon. Friends seem hellbent?

Mr. Spellar: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who perhaps strayed into one of his previous incarnations in asking that question; but I take his point. We try to work with planning authorities at an early stage. That is important because it can facilitate the disposal of land, which can then be brought into effective use for the benefit of the community—with, incidentally, the best possible return for the defence budget.

NATO

8. **Ann Clwyd:** What assessment he has made of the cost to Her Majesty's Government of NATO expansion. [16801]

Mr. George Robertson: Our assessment is that the costs associated with the enlargement of NATO to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic will be manageable. I and other NATO Defence Ministers will be considering tomorrow a report from NATO staffs on the military and financial implications of enlargement.

Ann Clwyd: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but I have been asking the question for some time and I would have expected the Government to have been able to give an assessment of the costs of NATO expansion by now. Can he assure us that the cost of expansion will be met from the current defence budget and that he will not be asking for an extra penny from what many of us already consider to be much too large a budget?

Mr. Robertson: Any additional cost to our NATO subscription arising from enlargement will be met from the defence budget. Currently, that subscription costs 1 per cent. of the funds allocated to the defence budget. I believe that NATO is worth every penny that we spend on it.

I have just told my hon. Friend that, tomorrow, Defence Ministers will receive the report from NATO on its assessment of the cost of enlargement. I would be most surprised if NATO expenditure were to rise significantly in real terms. There will certainly be a cost, but we believe it to be manageable and we shall pay our contribution.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that there is no pressure on Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic to spend huge sums trying to integrate into NATO? Will he also confirm that there is no pressure on us and no urgent requirement beyond what might be described as command and control procedures, integrated air defence and so on?

Mr. Robertson: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the cost of NATO enlargement will be spread over a considerable period. For the new countries—the invitees to the membership of NATO—participating in collective defence is preferable to, and cheaper than, attempting to provide the same security on a national basis. Any nation—ours as well as the new countries—must be secure before it can do anything. Inevitably, the new countries would have been involved in assuring their future security by expenditure on military capability. Our country has been able to live in peace and security for almost half a century because of our membership of NATO. It is clear that the 12 nations that have applied for membership did so because they wanted the same.

Mr. Llew Smith: What savings would come to the United Kingdom if we were to link our defence expenditure to the average of other western European countries?

Mr. Robertson: I do not believe that we should link our defence expenditure to any average or any particular figure. This country should be defended strongly and it should be defended well. It is important that we establish the priorities for our country not only as a nation, but as a partner in NATO and a member of the United Nations Security Council. We make our own decisions. That was the position taken by the Labour Government in 1945 when they took Britain into NATO, and it is the position taken by the Labour Government who were elected this year.

Sir George Young: The hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) asked about the size of the budget. Does the Secretary of State agree with what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in last week's pre-Budget statement: that defence is not a priority?

Mr. Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the Labour party was elected on a manifesto that said that we would assure the strong defence of this country. Of course it is a priority and it will remain so. This nation's defence is safe in this Government's hands.

Heavy Lift Transport Aircraft

10. **Mr. Wilkinson:** What assessment he has made of the adequacy of heavy lift transport aircraft in Royal Air Force service. [16804]

Dr. Reid: Our strategic lift requirements, in terms both of air lift and of sea lift, are being scrutinised closely in the strategic defence review, which aims to ensure that our armed forces are properly equipped to undertake their tasks. That scrutiny is, of course, informed by my Department's assessment of the adequacy of our currently available assets.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful for that answer. In peace maintenance as in war fighting, is it not important to get to the critical spot firstest with the mostest, particularly when the United Kingdom is increasingly withdrawing from overseas bases? Will the Minister therefore assure the House that, after the review, the RAF will be able to procure at the earliest possible date a proven aircraft—the C17, which can carry a main battle tank and has been an admirable aeroplane in the United States air force?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman, who is well known for his interest and expertise in these matters, is absolutely right about the nature of the threats we now face. The old simplicities and certainties of the cold war have gone. We live in a more volatile, less predictable world and our ability to react quickly is paramount. It is also important that we have a variety of equipment, which the RAF cannot, at present, move by air. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been at pains to make that point. Several options merit consideration, including, perhaps, the future large aircraft and C17.

Mr. McCabe: When considering the future of RAF heavy lift, will my hon. Friend ensure that adequate attention is paid to preserving aircraft that have served us well, particularly as we approach the millennium?

Dr. Reid: That is absolutely correct. I am pleased to say that, today, I presented a charter mark award to the RAF museum, which has played such an important role in maintaining and exhibiting our RAF heritage. I am also pleased to tell the House that, Treasury and Parliament permitting, as of today the RAF intends to pass the ownership of the vast majority—121 out of 122—of its historic aeroplanes to the RAF museum, thus showing our confidence in it and our commitment, as we approach the millennium, to retaining the heritage of past generations of the RAF for future generations.

Regiments

11. **Mr. Robathan:** What assessment he has made of the importance of the regimental system. [16805]

Dr. Reid: The strategic defence review's examination of the future structure of the Army is taking full account of the recognised strengths of the regimental system. It would, however, be premature for me to speculate on any particular aspect of the review's outcome.

Mr. Robathan: I welcome the Minister's statement because I know that he is personally committed to the regimental system. Will he ensure that the strategic defence review does not undermine the system, which is one of the strengths of the British Army? Does he agree that the current selection procedures throughout the armed forces and in regiments are based on merit and not anything that is politically correct?

Dr. Reid: I whole-heartedly agree with the hon. Gentleman on both statements.

Mr. Davidson: Does my hon. Friend agree that tradition in the regimental system can be a burden as well as a benefit? What steps will he take to ensure that regimental traditions that restrict access to the officer class are swept away? In particular, what steps is he taking to ensure that youngsters who are not from public schools can become officers and, say, guards in the cavalry regiments?

Dr. Reid: I have the utmost respect for the esprit de corps, the ethos and the almost concrete capacity of the regimental system to instil the will to fight in men—and, I hope, women—in the most difficult circumstances. As for the second part of my hon. Friend's question, we have made it clear that we want the best and the brightest in the British armed forces. We want the widest possible pool of recruits and we want the pathways to progress in the armed forces to be open to all, irrespective of sex, ethnic background or social class. We shall maintain that commitment.

Mr. Key: On how many occasions since 1 May has the chain of command's responsibility for military discipline been the subject of intervention by Ministers, including the Lord Chancellor?

Dr. Reid: As far as Defence Ministers are concerned, none. I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises, when he makes such imputations, that although he may be attempting to slur the Government Front Bench, he is also—wrongly—bringing into question the integrity of those in the Army chain of command, who would never allow such a thing. As for the hon. Gentleman's reference to the Lord Chancellor, I have no intention of commenting on internal advice or correspondence between Ministers, which I have already withheld under exemption 2 of the code of practice on access to information. The hon. Gentleman should know that that is always the position taken on such matters.

Ethnic Minorities

12. **Mrs. Mahon:** What steps his Department is taking to improve levels of recruitment from the United Kingdom's ethnic minorities. [16806]

Dr. Reid: Our aim is that the armed forces should fully embrace diversity and better reflect the ethnic composition of the society they defend. I am glad that all three services are tackling the issue with considerable energy, and that a number of local initiatives are in place. Complementing those are the tri-service initiatives in Newham and Sandwell and the Army's specific ethnic minorities recruitment campaign.

Mrs. Mahon: Does my hon. Friend agree that the number of men and women from our ethnic minorities who serve in the armed forces is disappointingly low? I think that it is about 1 per cent. I welcome the Army's new recruitment initiative. What are the other two services doing?

Dr. Reid: I agree with my hon. Friend. She will know that we are determined to ensure that access to our armed forces is open to the widest possible reservoir of talent. She may be aware of our initiatives in Newham and Sandwell. She will also be aware that the Ministry of Defence is 19 months into a five-year action plan with the Commission for Racial Equality. I welcome the recent initiative of the Chief of the General Staff, who introduced a series of measures to combat racism in the Army whenever it raises its head. I am glad to announce that the Army and the Royal Air Force are today introducing a confidential support hotline for counselling and advice on such matters. It will operate outside the chain of command and has the support of the chiefs of the services and the chain of command.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I welcome the Minister's comments. I urge him to meet the chairman of the Greenwich foundation for the Royal Naval college to discuss the options for ethnic minority recruitment. Will he also reassure us that the delay and the buck passing will come to an end and that the outstanding questions will be resolved so that that jewel in the nation's heritage is properly established and occupied in time for the millennium?

Madam Speaker: Order. That question does not have much to do with recruitment.

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes, it does.

Madam Speaker: Not in my judgment.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Is not one of the least attractive features of bullying in the armed services the fact that it is often related to racism? That provides a substantial disincentive for people from the ethnic minorities to join any of the armed services. Should not such matters be the responsibility of the chain of command? Is it not clear that if there is bullying and racism in any unit, the ultimate responsibility must rest with the commanding officer of that unit?

Dr. Reid: I am not sure whether the hon. and learned Gentleman was here when I praised the chain of command and the chiefs of staff for the proactive, dynamic and absolutely committed way in which they have approached racism and bullying in the armed forces. I have no hesitation in saying that this is not being pushed as a political imperative on the chiefs of staff; it is a measure to which they are individually and collectively committed. I congratulate them on that. It is also a matter for congratulation that they have introduced, for the purposes of counselling, an independent hotline, which will serve as another building block to combat racism in the armed forces.

Trident

13. **Mr. McAllion:** How many representations his Department has received on the Trident nuclear weapons system since 1 May; and how many *(a)* supported and *(b)* opposed retention of Trident. [16808]

Mr. George Robertson: We have received more than 150 letters and submissions about our nuclear deterrent since inviting public contributions to the strategic defence review. The majority have called for Trident to be included in the review. We have already made it clear that the review will examine all aspects of our deterrent postures to ensure that it meets changing strategic circumstances.

Mr. McAllion: My right hon. Friend will recall that retaining Trident was a manifesto commitment of both Labour and the Tory party at the general election. Will he acknowledge that it is, at the very least, open to interpretation whether the British people embraced Trident by voting Labour in or rejected Trident by voting the Tories out? Given that uncertainty, will he take on board the latest polling evidence, which shows that 63 per cent. of British people believe that money spent on Trident is wasted public expenditure and that 59 per cent. of British people believe that this country would be much safer without nuclear weapons altogether? If we really are the people's Government, why do we not listen to the people and rid ourselves once and for all of these obscene weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Robertson: I should point out that the competition to my hon. Friend in Dundee, East came not from the Tory party but from the Scottish National party, which was in favour of abolishing Trident—and that my hon. Friend won and the SNP lost. Does not that suggest that people are in favour of Trident? Whatever is the preponderance of letters in the postbag or the outcome of occasional opinion polls, people believed what we said in our manifesto and they have every right to believe that we will conduct ourselves differently from the previous Government.

The retention of Trident was one of the policy principles on which we will base our work in the strategic defence review, but within that framework the review will look at all aspects of our current deterrence requirements, including nuclear warhead numbers. We are committed to the global elimination of nuclear weapons. There might be some differences on how we get to that point, but the British people were in no doubt when they voted for my hon. Friend and me in the general election.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I welcome that robust response from the Secretary of State. Is he aware that, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, when anxiety about nuclear deterrence was at its height, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament consistently produced strangely worded poll questions to get results such as that which has just been cited, but that whenever the British public were asked: "Do you think that Britain should continue to possess nuclear weapons as long as other countries have them?" poll after poll showed two thirds of British people in favour of retention and never more than a quarter against it?

Mr. Robertson: I am not concerned with the ups and downs of individual opinion polls. After many years of

deep consideration, the Labour party came to the electorate with an absolutely clear commitment to the retention of the Trident submarine fleet and with a much more urgent and determined attitude to arms control—especially nuclear arms control—than any previous Government. That is one reason why we were so emphatically returned at the general election.

Armed Forces (Women)

14. **Laura Moffatt:** What steps his Department is taking to expand employment opportunities for women in the armed forces. [16809]

Dr. Reid: Women already make a substantial contribution to the armed forces and serve alongside their male colleagues in many roles. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in a defence debate on 27 October that, from April next year, the proportion of posts open to women in the Army will rise from 47 to 70 per cent. We have also commissioned a review that will enable us to decide whether any of the remaining restrictions on employment opportunities for women in all three services can be reduced or removed.

Laura Moffatt: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that women have always proved themselves—especially in Bosnia, as I have witnessed—able to take part in the armed forces? Does he agree also that women are capable of taking part in combat roles in the Royal Navy? Does not that put paid to the claim that women are not suitable and that such roles are suitable only for the chaps? Thank you.

Dr. Reid: It is a pleasure. The Government, as my hon. Friend would expect, and the armed forces are committed to expanding career opportunities for women. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that service women now represent 7 per cent. of total strength and that in the 12 months to 1 September 1997 14 per cent. of new recruits were women. As I said earlier, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 October that from 1 April next year the proportion of posts in the Army open to women will increase to 70 per cent.

I am glad to say that the Ministry of Defence has a good working relationship with the Equal Opportunities Commission. Later today I shall meet Kamlesh Bahl, its chairwoman, to see how much further we can expand opportunities for women in the armed forces.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Ethical Investments

33. **Ann Clwyd:** What assessment he has made of the impact of the contacts between the Church's ethical investment working group and GEC on GEC's arms exporting policy. [16829]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): In the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), I am answering these questions as a Church Commissioner and as the member of the Cabinet with responsibility for Church matters.

The commissioners believe that the impact has been positive. The ethical investment working group put four questions to the company at its annual general meeting on 5 September as an encouragement to GEC to disclose hopeful information in a public arena about its defence-related business. The group will continue to inform itself about GEC's business strategy and will maintain contact with the company.

Ann Clwyd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. May I put it to him, however, that since the so-called dialogue began, GEC has continually expanded its defence manufacturing and increased its exports to Indonesia—a country with one of the worst human rights records? Is there any point in this dialogue if that is the result?

Mr. Straw: I think that there is. It is fair to say that the commissioners are now being much more proactive about their investments in pursuit of their approach not to invest in any company whose main business is in armaments, gambling, breweries, distilleries, tobacco or newspapers.

I understand that, over the past three years, GEC's exports to Indonesia have totalled only £20 million and comprised simulation and training equipment for the navy, short-wave broadcasting equipment for the national network, transmitters for commercial broadcasters and five omniphones.

Mr. Burns: Does the Home Secretary appreciate that, in a constituency with four GEC companies in it, a distinction must be drawn between weapons and weapons systems that are produced for the bona fide defence of a country from external attack and weapons such as land mines, that are universally condemned?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman makes an entirely fair point. Speaking not as a Church Commissioner but as the Member of Parliament for Blackburn, I must tell the House that many of my constituents' jobs depend on defence contractors. It is also fair to add that NATO countries account for some £2 billion of the £2.4 billion—85 per cent.—of GEC defence sales.

Pensions

34. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the impact of pension provisions on the number of people applying for a career in the Church since Parliament approved the current pension provisions. [16831]

Mr. Straw: This is not strictly a matter for the Church Commissioners. I understand, however, from the advisory board of ministry that the number of candidates recommended for training for the ministry increased significantly in 1996 and this year. Confidence in the Church's arrangements for funding the ministry may have played a part in this encouraging development.

Mr. O'Brien: Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is time that the Church Commissioners took far more

interest in ensuring that those who serve in the Church receive proper pensions and other rights? I consider that they are entitled to the same pension rights as Members of Parliament. I hope that the Church Commissioners will take some interest in the future of those who serve in the Church.

Mr. Straw: I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's remarks are passed on to the commissioners who deal directly and professionally with the issue. It is reasonable to point out that the number of people recommended for training was 420 in 1995, 453 in 1996 and 486 so far in 1997. The Church Commissioners are concerned to maintain the funding of clergy pensions and that is why they have made new arrangements. From 1 January next year, dioceses will meet the cost from funds provided by parishes of all clergy pension rights for future service, but not for past service. That is being done not least so that the commissioners can ensure the future funding of stipends in needy areas.

Mr. Sayeed: In his Budget, the Chancellor imposed a £5 billion tax on pensions. How much will it cost parishioners to fund that tax?

Mr. Straw: I think that the hon. Gentleman is talking about changes to advance corporation tax. The cost to the Church Commissioners will be £12 million per annum in 1997 values. The commissioners tell me that they welcome the time allowed by the Government to plan for the removal of ACT relief and the phasing of its impact between 1999 and 2004.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

National Audit Office

35. **Miss McIntosh:** How many lawyers are employed by the National Audit Office. [16832]

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The National Audit Office does not employ staff as lawyers, although 10 graduates in law are employed by its auditors. The National Audit Office obtains legal advice as required from various sources including commercial firms and the Treasury Solicitor.

Miss McIntosh: Is any of those people sufficiently qualified in public procurement contracts for tender under European Union regulations? Was any of them consulted before the contract was awarded for the refurbishment of Canary Wharf prior to the recent Anglo-French summit?

Mr. Sheldon: There is a big difference between the way in which auditors are employed by the National Audit Office and the way in which they are employed on the continent. In other countries, auditors have legal representation because they regard that as rather more important than the auditing function. The hon. Lady should understand that the Public Accounts Committee looks at value for money extremely well. I am sure that its Chairman, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), will want to satisfy himself that that continues to be the case.

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Persian Gulf

15. **Mr. Waterson:** What is the level of Her Majesty's forces currently deployed in the Persian gulf. [16810]

Dr. Reid: UK forces currently deployed in the Gulf consist of HMS Coventry, supported by Royal Fleet Auxiliary Bayleaf, as part of the Armilla patrol. Shore-based forces in the Gulf area comprise six RAF Tornado aircraft operating from Saudi Arabia, supported by two RAF VC10 tankers in Bahrain, which contribute to the enforcement of the no-fly zone over southern Iraq. A UK battalion is currently exercising in Kuwait as part of a routine training programme.

Mr. Waterson: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm that, as long as there is a perceived threat in the region, this country will continue to maintain similar forces? Does he agree that the current regime in Iraq is all too willing to perceive as a sign of weakness any reduction in our forces or those of our allies in the area? That is another good reason for maintaining the current level of availability of British forces in the region.

Dr. Reid: Yes, we have made absolutely plain our concern about the potential existence and use of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq under the control of Saddam Hussein. That is why we have made it clear throughout this period that although we have of course sought, and will continue to seek, a diplomatic solution, we will not rule out the use of force. As the hon. Gentleman will know, HMS Invincible remains in the Mediterranean, ready to respond at short notice, giving the UK flexibility in the near future should Saddam's promise of co-operation with UNSCOM prove illusory.

The hon. Gentleman may also be aware that in the past few days my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited HMS Invincible to speak to the men and women who are serving on that aircraft carrier and who will be discharging the responsibility of this country in the efforts of the international community to ensure that the will of the United Nations cannot be thwarted and that the danger and menace of weapons of mass destruction is not held over the head of the global community.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following the actions of Welsh farmers in Holyhead last night, has the Secretary of State for Wales asked to make a statement to the House today? I make it plain that I cannot condone the actions of those farmers—we could never condone such illegal actions—but the Secretary of State should answer some pertinent questions about the problems that those farmers face.

For example, recent figures show that there has been at least a 30 per cent. drop in the incomes of Welsh farmers, a strengthening of the green pound because of the Government's economic actions, and a £16 million clawback of the hill livestock compensatory allowance payments to farmers in less-favoured areas—all this at a time when money is generally being made available because of the ewe premium rebate, which should be coming back to support Welsh farmers.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now getting into a policy argument. I let him continue because I wanted to check when Welsh questions were—they happen to be on Wednesday.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not yet finished. The question was whether the Secretary of State for Wales had asked to make a statement. The answer is no, I have not been informed that he is seeking to do so. The hon. Gentleman raised a lengthy point of order—I hope that those on the Government Front Bench have taken note of it and that the House has noted that Welsh questions are on Wednesday.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My question relates to the tabling of oral questions. I understand from the media that the Lord Chancellor has let it be known that he sees himself as having a new co-ordinating role across Government Departments as, in his words, "a new Cardinal Wolsey". If we wish to question him on that matter in the Chamber, should we do so through his Parliamentary Secretary or through the Department concerned? He appears to have started with the Ministry of Defence.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am not responsible for the rota of when Ministers answer questions. That is determined through the usual channels. It is for the individual Member to determine which Minister is responsible for answering the question that is tabled. If there are any problems, I know that the Clerks in the Table Office will provide guidelines and as much help as possible.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not want in any way to quibble with your response to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), but I would want to raise under Standing Order No. 24 the issue that has been concerning us overnight. It is a matter not just for Welsh Ministers but for the whole of the rural community, the whole of the United Kingdom and all of us who represent agricultural constituencies. I would suggest that when patient people such as British farmers resort to civil disorder on the scale that they have, it is a very serious matter and, although we would not wish to condone their action, we should have an opportunity to debate it in the House.

Madam Speaker: I remind the hon. Gentleman, and all those who might want to touch on this subject, that there was ample time before 12 o'clock today to make an application under Standing Order No. 24. I have made my views known on the matter. I want no further points of order on the issue; I have dealt with it as far as it is my responsibility to do so.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I fear that there may have been a misunderstanding in the reply of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) to my question during Question Time.

I have put the same question to the Prime Minister. He has been asked about the costs of refurbishing Canary Wharf for the Anglo-French summit. To my knowledge, he has not replied. The point that I was trying to make in Question 35 was that we are obliged, under European law—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is trying to extend Question Time. She asked how many lawyers are employed by the National Audit Office. I cannot extend Question Time.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has the Chancellor of the Exchequer given you any indication that he wants to make a statement on the tax-avoidance schemes of the Paymaster General, especially since the Chancellor appears to have changed Government policy on the issue without informing the House? At last year's Labour party conference, the Chancellor said:

"A Labour Chancellor will not permit tax relief to millionaires in offshore tax havens."

He should tell the House whether that still applies to all millionaires or only to millionaire Treasury Ministers.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I will hear a further point of order. I want to deal with this matter.

Mr. Jenkin: Do you agree, Madam Speaker, that, if a matter is of sufficient importance that it requires a Minister to rush out a statement clarifying why there has been a change of Government policy, that statement should be read out in the House by the Minister? Therefore, should not either the Paymaster General or the Chancellor of the Exchequer come to the House to clarify Government policy?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, I can deal with this, thank you very much, Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: All right. It is fair enough to hear one from the Government Benches.

Mr. Skinner: I remember that, in years gone by, when the Tories were in power, I used to try might and main to find out just what had happened to the £65 million concerning the then Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—where he had got it, where he had put it, who was in charge of it. I got the brush-off from the Speaker at the time.

What is more, I saw in the papers at the weekend that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), was to ask a question about the matter. Well, he is not present. I can only assume that he is still in his French investment over the channel.

Madam Speaker: I assure the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that he is not likely to get the brush-off from me.

On the very serious point, any hon. Member on either side of the House who believes that a Minister has acted outside Government guidelines should make representations to the Prime Minister, who is responsible for ministerial guidelines covering all Ministers. I hope that, if there is any thought of that in relation to this issue, hon. Members who are concerned will make proper representations, with evidence, to the Prime Minister.

WELSH AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee),

That the matter of government expenditure in Wales in 1998–99, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Question agreed to.

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Welfare, Pensions and Disabled People

Madam Speaker: I should inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.38 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I beg to move,

That this House deeply regrets the unnecessary delay to proposals on pension and welfare reform; finds it inconceivable that having attacked reductions to lone parent benefits proposed by the previous Government this Government now plans to implement the same reductions; and urges the Government to take this opportunity to reassure people with disabilities that they will not tax Disability Living Allowance or transfer disability benefits from disabled individuals to bureaucracies such as local government's social services departments.

The debate is timely not only because of the internal Labour rows over cuts to lone parent benefit but because, after seven months in office, it affords us an opportunity—

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): What rows?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The real rows come from among the hon. Gentleman's friends and all those sitting on the Back Benches behind him.

With briefing, counter-briefing and leaks, the Department for Social Security is developing a sense of confusion which bodes ill. The Secretary of State and her party came to power on a promise—among many promises—of large-scale pension and welfare reform. The Prime Minister established that as one of his main priorities. He said that his Ministers would "think the unthinkable" and

"end welfare as we know it."

In office, the Prime Minister reaffirmed that commitment as recently as October. He said:

"We need to invest more as a country in savings and pensions. But Government's role is going to be to organise provision—like new stakeholder pensions—not fund it all through ever higher taxes."

He was equally explicit about welfare. He said:

"it means fundamental reform of our welfare state, of the deal between citizen and society".

I shall deal with pensions first. After the Labour party's scurrilous attack during the general election campaign on basic pension plus—which was essentially a proposal for discussion, not dissimilar to a Green Paper—it was legitimate to expect that the new Government were ready to move fast on pensions. One would think that they had an alternative, but apparently they did not.

Expectations were underlined by the appointment in May of the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is in his place. He was the Prime Minister's personal appointment and carries the unprecedented title of Minister for Welfare Reform. Given the amount that he has written on the subject in

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

the recent past, the country would have been forgiven for expecting an early Green Paper on pensions. After all, the very phrase "stakeholder pension" is one which he coined in his pamphlet "How to pay for stakeholder welfare".

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He was the author of a notorious pamphlet in 1993, which struck a chill into the heart of every pensioner in the country, for the No Turning Back group, that ultra-right-wing, reactionary Thatcherite group. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is reading."] I am reading because I am quoting. In that pamphlet, the hon. Gentleman proposed that people be allowed to opt out of their basic state pension. Is that still his policy—yes or no?

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point and I am pleased that he has bothered to read my pamphlet. I have been waiting some time for him to get round to it. The Secretary of State for Social Security might do well to read it herself. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that pension reform requires one to consider all aspects—

Mr. MacShane: Answer the question.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman should listen to the answer. I do not resile for one moment from the idea that, as the Prime Minister said, pension reform requires one to think the unthinkable. Ministers are doing very little thinking, unthinkable or otherwise. What I wrote in 1993 went further towards pension reform than anything that Ministers have produced.

The pamphlet by the Minister for Welfare Reform is very interesting, and the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) should read it. He might be interested to find out what the Minister's opinions are. The pamphlet was the product of a number of years' thought on how to provide second pensions for all, and such thought was also evident in other pamphlets such as "Private pensions for all: squaring the circle" and "A national savings plan", which was about universalising private pension provision.

Those pamphlets emerged before the election, but, instead of the expected early Green Paper, which the hon. Member for Rotherham is so keen on, a pensions review was announced in July. Instead of being actively led by the Minister for Welfare Reform, it was run by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). It took him until September to announce the members of the review panel and on 31 October the review was closed, only to be reopened until May 1998. We still have no sense of what basic policy the Government will pursue.

Even the review is confused. After 1,800 responses, the Under-Secretary announced on 3 November in a written answer:

"The Government intends to publish its initial framework for change in the first part of 1998. There will then be a further period of consultation before firm proposals are developed."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. *90*.]

On 19 November, the Under-Secretary opened another, separate review, before he had read and digested all the responses from what he called the stakeholder consultation. What was the purpose of the first review? I was not aware that it left out stakeholder provision; indeed, various people commented on that subject in their submissions. The Government seem to be making policy by procrastination.

It is worth reminding ourselves what the Minister for Welfare Reform said just before the election. Speaking about his party leader—now the Prime Minister—on 18 October 1996, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"His aim is for Labour to enter Government with a sufficiently well created plan that it can be part of the first Queen's speech and a draft Bill in the first year, allowing for a year for debate."

He went further, saying that it was

"crucial to avoid the mistakes of Dick Crossman and Harold Wilson who spent four years consulting and lost their plan in the 1970 election".

I heard the right hon. Gentleman say earlier from a sedentary position, "It will be." We are already reaching the end of the year and no Green Paper is even evident. As he knows, the review process is stretching out to the latter part of next year. He says that there will be something, but we see nothing coming up.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): The hon. Gentleman talks about the pensions review, but does he not agree that, in cutting value added tax on fuel, eliminating the gas levy and announcing increases for winter fuel of £20 to all pensioner households and £50 for those on income support, we have done more for pensioners in the past six months than the Conservatives did in 18 years?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman is doing very well, is he not? He rose to take a position on pensions, but he talked about a giveaway in the green Budget, which was more about protecting the position of those on the Government Front Bench than anything else. It was cobbled together quickly to get them out of a hole because they are getting nowhere over all their so-called reform processes.

The hon. Gentleman should try answering the question: when will they go for the Prime Minister's position of full pension and welfare reform? There has not been a word so far about where all that is. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to answer that question. When will that be? There is no answer, is there? So it goes on. I can understand the frustration of the Minister for Welfare Reform as he perceives the process being delayed; after all, he has written about it. As I said, he wrote all that on pensions alone.

The delay goes back to the emergency Budget that the Chancellor produced for, it now appears, no reason at all. He went further than he said and not merely on the windfall tax. He set about pensions. Let us put on one side for a moment the Chancellor's attack on pensions, which will cost those who need to invest in their pensions billions of pounds and lose them a lot of money.

With the abolition of advance corporation tax dividend tax credit, the right hon. Gentleman devalued the national insurance rebate. Having made those changes, far from leaving the state earnings-related pension scheme as an option for those who wished to remain in it, as the Labour

manifesto said—a rather vague commitment—he has gone a stage further and has enhanced the option of SERPS, increasing the number of people opting in. That is happening now and research by Scottish Life clearly shows that,

"Based on somebody earning £15,000 a year, remaining out of SERPS could cost them the equivalent of £360 a year in retirement income. And for higher earners it could be far more."

So people are opting back in. On the margins, there is no purpose in staying out as the rebate has been so devalued.

The Minister for Welfare Reform is also fairly unequivocal about SERPS, as the Secretary of State knows. The Minister said:

"A failure to close SERPS will mean substantial tax bills for future generations."

I agree, as I am sure does the Secretary of State. I am also intrigued by how the Minister views his colleagues, given that he said at some point:

"Anyone persuaded SERPS had a future ought to be made a ward of court".

On 29 October, given all the confusion, the Prime Minister had clearly lost track of who was running what. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) asked straightforwardly at Prime Minister's Question Time whether the Minister for Welfare Reform had his support for thinking the unthinkable and proposing pension improvements. The Prime Minister expressed himself in complete confidence with the Minister for Welfare Reform's duties—an interesting choice of words—but went on to say that the Minister would be producing a Green Paper shortly. We are talking about pensions, let us remember. Are we to assume that the Minister will also be carrying out a separate review of pensions? Perhaps he could let me know.

The Minister for Welfare Reform (Mr. Frank Field) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Duncan Smith: I see that the right hon. Gentleman is nodding, so we have established that. In that case, what was the purpose of the review by the Under-Secretary of State, and if the Prime Minister thought in October that the Green Paper would be issued shortly, why do we have to wait until the new year to receive it? Nothing has happened. Three months after that promise, we will still be waiting.

The Secretary of State, who may or may not be listening, has said remarkably little about pensions in the past few months, either in the House or outside. Pensions reform is being pushed into the blue yonder. It is too difficult to rectify, and there are too many hard choices to make, so the Government prefer to slide it out into the future and leave only the minimum change that can be made. So it goes on.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): How many people suffered the abuse of pensions mis-selling under the previous Government? The hon. Gentleman is outlining duties; what duty and responsibility did the Tory Government have to prevent that?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Lady asks a serious question. The issue of pensions mis-selling is being dealt with, and was being dealt with before the general election. I understand from the Treasury figures that the sum under investigation is £2 billion maximum, and perhaps less.

That is a serious matter, but why do Labour Members never mention the fact that, as a result of all the changes that the Conservative party made before the general election, about £750 billion—more than in the whole of the rest of Europe put together—is now invested in private pensions here? They never mention that success. How do they intend to persuade members of the public to invest in pensions if they never talk about the success of private pensions, which were driven forward by the Conservative party over the years against perpetual opposition from Labour?

The process with welfare reform appears to be similar. We have a series of proposals that need to be implemented quickly, so that the changes can be bedded down and we can have proper discussion to make sure that there are no problems. All through the summer, no one would answer the important questions: when and whether there would be a Green Paper on welfare reform, and who would produce it.

Throughout the summer, a series of leaks and counter-briefings in the press took the debate beyond the House, but still we have no answers. The *Financial Times* reported that someone in the Treasury, who is apparently close to the Minister for Welfare Reform, said:

"His package now seems insufficiently new Labour."

The summer was dominated by a war of words, with briefing and counter-briefing between the Secretary of State and the Minister for Welfare Reform. There was no progress until finally, at the end of the summer, she was forced to agree to his producing a Green Paper; but not, apparently, until early in the new year.

Is the Chancellor's welfare review—it is run by Martin Taylor and has nothing to do with the Department of Social Security—which is supposed to be considering merging tax and benefits, taking priority? Does the Chancellor not like what the Minister for Welfare Reform has written progressively over the years? In his green Budget, the Chancellor continued to refer to the Minister's proposals, even though it appears that they are being rapidly watered down and now focus solely on making family credit payable through pay-as-you-earn rather than through the benefits system.

The clash between the Minister for Welfare Reform's views on the ending of means testing and the Chancellor's view that means testing is necessary through the tax system may explain some of the problems.

There is also the thorny point of what the Secretary of State thinks of the Chancellor's proposals. After all, she has long said that she does not like the idea of benefits being paid through the wallet rather than through the purse. There was a big debate, and she always argued that benefits should be paid to the person at home. Then again, if the Chancellor requires the change she will no doubt change her mind and implement it. That seems to be the process, and it is what we have come to expect.

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): I remind the hon. Gentleman of his celebrated comments in a pamphlet in 1993, when he suggested that disability living allowance should be means-tested. Does he write in one tone and talk in another?

Mr. Duncan Smith: If the hon. Lady were to check the intervention list from her Whips Office, she might

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

understand that she has got most of that wrong. I will discuss the disability living allowance later, but the simple fact is that no welfare reform package or review is on offer. The hon. Lady cannot substitute that fact with an attempt by her Whips Office to find out exactly what someone else, who is not even in government, proposed. The Labour party are in government; the hon. Lady is in government; when are we going to get some proposals from them? We have heard no answers from them. The hon. Lady should check her Whips Office little list again, because it has got it quite wrong.

I posed a series of questions of the Secretary of State when she first announced in the Budget debate how she intended to operate some of her proposals, such as the new deal for lone parents. The right hon. Lady stuck with single-minded determination to that new deal; that is what she has spoken most about and has issued most press releases about. It seems to be the main drive behind most of what she has said and done.

Assuming that the pilot programmes were meant to inform us whether the policy on the new deal for lone parents is working, I said from the beginning that the right hon. Lady would need to institute proper control groups inside the pilot programmes to measure the effectiveness of each pilot. Most of those comments were obviously ignored.

As I and my team went around the pilot centres during the summer, it became absolutely clear that, with the absence of control groups, it would be impossible to measure why people got jobs and whether that was because of the new deal. We are now told that some time in September the Department of Social Security partially changed its mind about control groups. It did so retrospectively—that was never mentioned in the original plan, and the right hon. Lady never answered that question. The Department now needs to tell us how those control groups will work. I gather that it is even trying to backdate the information from those so-called pilot areas.

When the control groups were set up, there was a flurry of press releases—long before any real success or failure could possibly be measured. Of particular interest was the Secretary of State's press release of 23 September, just two months after the programme began, which spoke glowingly about how successful it was. The other important press release was that issued on 23 October, when the Secretary of State readvertised her programme as a huge success, after just three months.

The time came to analyse those figures, and we found that when the Secretary of State announced that they were a huge success she was talking about a 20 per cent. success rate. She failed to tell us that 433 people taking jobs out of the 8,600 to whom letters were sent is equivalent to a 5 per cent. response rate. She has never yet once explained how she can make a success out of 5 per cent., when so many people have not even bothered to respond to those letters.

What has happened to all those people who did not respond? Have the Government studied the reasons for that lack of response? Not one comment have we heard from the Government. Now we discover from figures apparently released by the right hon. Lady's Department that the chances of people getting work from the programme are roughly the same as they would be were they not in that programme.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 20 minutes and, apart from attacking the fact that the Government are reviewing the welfare system, he has said absolutely nothing about the Opposition's views on welfare reform. At the very least, will he say whether he supports the Government's proposal on the new deal for lone parents?

Mr. Duncan Smith: Frankly, if the hon. Lady tries to persuade her right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to make us all offers to move over to the Government Benches, we will listen. The truth is that, believe it or not, the hon. Lady is in government. Those on her Front Bench are there to make decisions. When will they do so? The Government do not like the fact that I am simply saying that when they promise major reforms, and then do absolutely nothing, they are misleading the public. The longer we go on about that, the less they like it. We have been offered no reform.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Could it not be that, while the Minister for Welfare Reform said:

"Women with children of school age should be under an obligation to look for work",

the Secretary of State cannot make up her mind? In October, she said on television:

"Compulsion is absolutely not the issue."

While they are busily arguing among themselves, they cannot come up with a consistent policy.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That is the point that I am coming to. The reality is that there is one dispute after another. The Secretary of State is arguing with the Minister for Welfare Reform about who should be in charge. He wants compulsion; she does not. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) that it is one endless internal dispute after another, which is why we are not getting anywhere with the reforms. There have been no reforms at all.

The new deal for lone parents is becoming more and more of a trumpeting exercise in publicity rather than a serious study about how people can get into work and how they can be assisted in doing so if they wish.

The Conservative Government proposed some changes to cut child benefit and the supplement to income support in their final Budget last November. The present Secretary of State attacked the proposals and immediately said that she did not intend to implement them once in government. She went further in an interview with Polly Toynbee of *The Independent*. When asked whether she would introduce the changes to lone parent benefit, she said, "No, of course not." On 28 November 1996, she said:

"The Secretary of State says that he is cutting benefits to lone mothers because they are at an advantage compared to married mothers. . . but it is not fair on the families of women who bring up children on their own. They will be worse off."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 501.]

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that on the two occasions in this

Session when there have been votes on the abolition of benefits for lone parents, the Conservative party has abstained, thus proving that it has no opinion?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman asked what our position is. Had we won the last election and been in government now, we would, without question, have implemented the changes. I have told the Government that.

I can tell the Liberal Democrats that the simple position is that we certainly shall not oppose any such changes if the Government introduce them. That is straightforward and our position is clear. We have not broken a pledge, unlike the Labour party—the party of the hon. Member for Rotherham. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should calm down—he is obviously being vibrated too much by his Whips Office. He and his hon. Friends have broken a pledge—the Secretary of State has broken it more than anyone else.

In the interests of clarity—*[Interruption.]* It is no good trying to protect the Secretary of State; I just want to hear from her about it. In 1996 and 1997, she made it absolutely clear that she would not implement the change. Will she tell us exactly what changed her opinion? If she disagrees with the policy in principle—as it seems from those quotes and from all the speeches that she has made and discussions that she has had—will she now give an undertaking that if, at any time, the Exchequer moves into the black and starts to repay debt, she will reverse the cuts? She might do so if she does not agree with the policy in principle and it is only about saving money. At some point in the future, will she change her opinion, or will she stand by the reductions in lone parent benefit that we proposed before the election and she attacked? Would she like to answer that question? No, she does not want to answer.

The Secretary of State's view that the Labour party in government would not implement the cuts was supported by the Prime Minister—her Back-Bench colleagues should remember that. When he was asked on "World at One" whether he would implement the cuts, he said:

"No. We believe that we can avoid that situation within the existing budget".

He knew what he was saying; he was referring to what the Secretary of State had said to Polly Toynbee in an article in *The Independent*. He was clear and unequivocal. He knew exactly what the Labour party was planning to do in government: stick to existing spending totals.

It is no good Labour Members saying that, before the election, the Conservatives instigated a devious plot to change the spending totals; they knew what they were, and the present Secretary of State and the Prime Minister knew that.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: I shall give way later.

Our position has been clear. Had we been in power after the election we would have stuck to our pledge and implemented the policy, because we believed that it was the right thing to do.

The most important result of the right hon. Lady's problems with her Back Benchers and her Department was that, at the last moment, the Chancellor decided to cobble together a rescue package in the green Budget and buy off the animosity against those changes with the announcement about after-school clubs. What gave the game away was that, in answer to a written question about the policy on after-school clubs, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), had written:

"We are currently developing a National Childcare Strategy which will help parents . . . I will make an announcement in the first part of next year."—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. *361*.]

That is true, is it not? He wrote that at the same time as the Chancellor was rising to his feet to announce that there were to be after-school clubs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Alan Howarth) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Minister was absolutely clear that they were going to give the details of the package next year. They changed their plans simply because the right hon. Lady was in trouble, along with her right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale) *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: There is no point in rising to protect them—the hon. Gentleman should stop trying to be an air raid shelter taking some of the flak for the Secretary of State. The reality is that the Chancellor suddenly managed to find £200 million from the lottery, £50 million from the Department for Education and Employment and £30 million from the windfall tax to pay for after-school clubs.

The announcement that 50,000 people were to be trained to be child carers was given as though it was something new, but it had already been mentioned in the Budget. During the Budget debate, I told the Secretary of State that it would be difficult to find 50,000 child carers from the welfare-to-work programme, given that numbers were falling fast because so many jobs were being found. In an attempt to find those extra 50,000 people, the Government have again decided to backtrack by opening up training to all young unemployed, whether or not they have been unemployed for more than six months.

There is a problem with that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, there is."] I am glad Labour Members admit that there is a problem. The interesting thing is that Labour Back Benchers do not seem to understand that the age limit has been set below 26 because of the minimum wage. It appears now that the Government will exempt all those under 26 from the minimum wage, so that they will not have to pay the extra sums that they know they cannot afford.

The Secretary of State and her right hon. and hon. Friends have worked it out very carefully. Will the right hon. Lady let us know whether they will train people over 26 if they cannot find enough people to train as child carers, regardless of whether the exemption on the minimum wage stands for those under 26? Will she tell us that, either in her speech or in an intervention now?

All right, fine. We will not get an answer on that.

Mr. MacShane: Get on with it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shouting—getting on with it is the simple process of

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

discovering from the Secretary of State exactly what her plans are. Not surprisingly, we will now move on to disabilities.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way before leaving the subject. Is the problem not merely the number of people the Government have to find to take on child care, but the serious nature of the business of child care, which is not a matter for any frivolity? Carers must be of high quality and properly trained, and that will take a long time.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Interestingly, we will have people trained for child care through the welfare-to-work programme who might have to be compelled into that process, but they might be looking after the children of those whom the right hon. Lady refuses to compel to go into work. That is a dichotomy: on the one hand, we will have people not compelled to take up jobs and, on the other hand, people being compelled to train to look after the first group's children. Child care is a serious subject and the Government are treating it with a great deal of frivolity.

I have some serious questions to ask the right hon. Lady about disability benefits; I want to give her the opportunity to clarify one or two problems.

First, there are some people with disabilities who have been awarded disability living allowance for life. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that life means life, and that she intends no change?

Secondly, we hear that the Government are considering taxing disability living allowance. The Labour manifesto stated that there would be no new taxes; given the raid on pensions, who would now believe that? Where do these pledges leave people on disability living allowance? Do the Government plan to single them out, or does the right hon. Lady deny that such a proposal exists?

On 17 November, the right hon. Lady answered a question at the Dispatch Box, saying that she and her colleagues had spoken to more than 40 organisations representing people with disabilities; yet on the "Link" programme on ITV yesterday, disability groups were adamant that they had not been approached, and they accused the Secretary of State of misleading the House of Commons. The programme had contacted 28 leading organisations, including the Royal National Institute for the Blind, all of which said that they had not been consulted or approached by the Secretary of State or the Department. Will the right hon. Lady take this chance to clear that up? Did she intentionally or otherwise mislead us during oral answers to questions or does she stand by her claim that she contacted these organisations?

Benefits Agency staff have been making home visits to 150,000 people who receive disability living allowance at the higher rate in both care and mobility components. What training have those people had? These are all serious questions to which we demand serious answers, either from the right hon. Lady or at the end of the debate.

Mr. Mike Hall *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am concluding.

The debate would not have been necessary if the right hon. Lady and her team had set about their brief in line with what the Prime Minister has said. In a rhetorical flourish, he told them to think the unthinkable; they would change welfare and engage in sweeping pension reform. The right hon. Lady and her team have not done that. They promised before the election not to cut lone parent benefit and the supplement on income support, yet they are doing just that.

In everything that is going on we perceive delay, vacillation and policy U-turns. The cross-briefings and disputes between the people running the Department do not bode well for the biggest Department in government or for the Secretary of State's stewardship of it. Labour party members charged around when they were in opposition—many of them still think they are in opposition—promising Back Benchers and pressure groups to deliver on their most favoured programmes; a nod here and a wink there. It was not so much a case of a wet Wednesday in Dudley as of a United Kingdom programme of empty promises seven days a week.

The Treasury seems determined to make spending cuts, while departmental Ministers are more worried about their jobs than anything else. They are so busy trying to extricate the knives from each other's backs that they have no time to think about where the next cut will fall.

No wonder Labour Back Benchers have smelt a rat. Someone needs to take control of the Department before it descends into chaos. I urge the right hon. Lady to get a grip and to get these reviews moving, as she promised to do. She must also explain why she has reneged on her promise before the election not to cut benefits. She must get the Department focused.

The Secretary of State says that no Green Paper is ready yet. The Minister for Welfare Reform has already published quite enough to form the basis of a Green Paper, but the right hon. Lady simply has not bothered. Instead, her Department is led by press release, cross-briefing and dispute. It is time she started to change—fast.

4.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women (Ms Harriet Harman): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government for the progress that has already been made on reforming the welfare state to tackle social exclusion and welfare dependency; backs the Government's strategy of offering hope, opportunity and a better standard of living for people through its welfare to work programmes for lone parents, disabled people and those with long-standing illness, young unemployed people and the long-term unemployed, and the National Childcare Strategy, in contrast to the previous Government's approach of writing millions of people off to a life dependent on benefit; welcomes the Government's determination to ensure security in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners through the pensions review and the action the Government has already taken to get help to Britain's pensioners, particularly the poorest pensioners, by cutting VAT on fuel and through the £20 winter fuel payment to pensioner households and the £50 winter fuel payment to pensioner households on Income Support; and congratulates the Government for keeping its promises and delivering its manifesto commitments to the British people.".

This debate has shown that the Tory Opposition have nothing to say about welfare reform, nothing to say about tackling worklessness and poverty, and nothing to say

about social exclusion or the problems of pensioners. However, the debate does allow Labour Members the opportunity to expose the full extent of the previous Government's legacy of failure, to set out the Government's approach to tackling that failure and to talk about the progress that we have already made.

Reforming the welfare state to tackle poverty and welfare dependency is a priority of the Government. We are delivering on that commitment. There is a new deal for the young and long-term unemployed, and the biggest employment programme for 40 years. A new deal for lone parents is already up and running and transforming the lives of lone parents and their children. There is the first national child care strategy for Britain, with the biggest ever investment in out-of-school child care. There is a new programme to give extra help and opportunities to people who were written off by the previous Government as long-term sick and disabled. We are getting help to all Britain's pensioners, with extra help to the poorest. That is what we said before the election that we would do, and that is what we are doing, now that we are in government.

Before I continue, I want to place the debate in context. The social security system that we inherited failed to tackle poverty. It trapped people on benefit and did nothing to help them into work. Under the previous Government, spending on social security rose to £100 billion a year—£25 billion more than the total amount of income tax collected in any one year.

Despite that huge growth in welfare spending, during 18 years of Tory rule, more and more people were excluded from the main stream of society. The system was not working because it had failed to respond to social and economic change. The Tories got it wrong. Growing social exclusion—for the benefit of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), who does not seem to know what it means—means adults deprived of work, children deprived of a decent education, whole communities cut off from their more prosperous neighbours, and a growing gap between rich and poor.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): The Secretary of State said that the Tories got it wrong. If that is correct, why has she now decided to implement one of the policies which, according to her, the Tories got wrong—the cuts in lone-parent benefit, which the right hon. Lady constantly condemned at the time and said that she would not implement? Will she once and for all tell the House what has gone through her mind to make her change her policy, announced last winter, that she would not implement those cuts?

Ms Harman: The Tories got it wrong on lone mothers, because their proposals left 1 million lone mothers bringing up 2 million children on income support, and offered no help or opportunities for them to work, despite a growing economy.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way again. Now will she answer the question? Why is she now implementing the cuts that we proposed, which she condemned as wrong?

Ms Harman: I have answered the question. We said time and again that our approach to lone mothers would be to help them to work, so that they could be better off than they would ever be on benefit.

In a growing economy, increasing numbers of people were left behind. There are now 3.5 million households of working age in which no one works. A quarter of all children are growing up in families in which no one works, and the poorest pensioners are being left behind. Although one in eight pensioners are among the richest 20 per cent. of people in the country, a quarter are entitled to income support.

Mr. Burns: Answer the question now.

Ms Harman: I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question. We said that we would have a welfare-to-work approach to tackle the poverty of lone parents and their social exclusion and that of their children. The previous Government proposed no opportunities programmes for lone mothers.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Harman: I will not give way to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns); I have given way to him twice to answer the same question. I give way to his hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May).

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Did the right hon. Lady have the opportunity this morning, as I did, to listen to the radio phone-in programme on welfare benefits? A single mother rang to say that, although the Government claim to be doing so much to get lone parents into work, if she were to take temporary work over the Christmas period to earn money to provide for her children, she would go back on to lone-parent benefit at the reduced rate. How would the right hon. Lady answer that lone parent?

Ms Harman: We do not believe that the changes will be a disincentive to work for lone parents; if we did, we would not be introducing them. Our approach to lone parents is to help them to become better off, by working, than they could ever be on benefits.

Mrs. Gorman: If what the right hon. Lady is saying is correct, why have more than 100 Labour Back Benchers signed an early-day motion and written letters privately condemning her policies?

Ms Harman: The hon. Lady speaking out on behalf of Labour Back Benchers is a touching spectacle, but they are probably more than capable of speaking out for themselves.

The British people have had enough of division. The general election showed that they were no longer prepared to put up with such a deeply divided society. They gave us a clear mandate to tackle social exclusion and to build a better one-nation society.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, according to the latest published figures, in parts of my constituency the average gross household income, including all non-housing benefits, is—and I ask hon. Members to listen carefully—less than £3,000 a year? That is less than 60 quid a week to support

[Mr. John Smith]

a household. Those people have been excluded and they are looking forward to my right hon. Friend and the new Labour Government giving them hope.

Ms Harman: That is why the people in my hon. Friend's constituency will welcome our proposals for a minimum wage and a working families tax credit to make work pay.

The British people gave us a mandate not just to tackle social exclusion, but on how to tackle it—not simply by adding to the benefits bill, which had been tried and had not worked, but by investing wisely in extending economic opportunity to all.

We have two equal but quite distinct duties in government—a duty to invest in helping those who can work to do so, and a duty to focus help properly on those who cannot work. The key failure of social policy in recent years has been the failure to differentiate between those two groups. That has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people of working age being written off to a life of dependence on benefit, when the Government should have been helping them to work. Work is central to this Government's attack on social exclusion.

Mr. Rendel: The right hon. Lady said that she was hoping to focus benefits on those who were not able to get work. In what sense is the cut in lone-parent benefit focusing benefits on lone parents who cannot get work?

Ms Harman: No lone parent currently in receipt of income support will have their benefit affected. However, there will be a welfare-to-work programme—and I know that the hon. Gentleman agrees with us on this—because the best way to tackle poverty among lone parents and their families is to ensure that they are much better off in work than they could ever be on benefit.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the housing benefit system works in such a way as to lock people into unemployment. Why do we not take a far more imaginative approach and directly interfere in the free market for rents, thereby reducing housing benefit and saving hundreds of millions of pounds—far more than anything we could gain by the measures that she is considering?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the housing benefit system locks people into dependence on benefit and deters people from working. I and Ministers in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions have said that, in reviewing the social security system, we shall examine the role of housing benefit to ensure that the housing support system accords with our priorities: that people have every incentive to work and do not remain—as they were under the Tories for 18 years—trapped on benefit when they want to work and be independent.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My right hon. Friend has missed my point. High rents mean high housing benefit and they exist in a free market for rents, which affects millions of people. Why do we not interfere there, thereby slashing the benefit bill in a major way, instead of concentrating our efforts on lone parents?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises some interesting points, which we shall make part of our housing benefit review. We shall go out of our way to discuss with him his constructive proposals, so that they can feed into our thorough and comprehensive review.

Work is central to the Government's attack on social exclusion. Work is the way in which people provide for themselves and their children. It is how people set an example to their children.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when the Conservatives were in government, all they did was to chastise and castigate lone parents? This Government are presenting them with real opportunities. Will she join me in congratulating the Cambridge benefits agency on being close to getting its 100th lone parent back into work?

Ms Harman: I congratulate not only the Cambridge benefits agency, but my hon. Friend, who had a role in pioneering the ideas behind this programme of bringing together all the advice and information about jobs, training and child care, to enable lone parents to move off benefit and into work, where they can be better off.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) *rose—*

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Ms Harman: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Skinner: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in a perfect world, the idea of getting everyone a job is sound? However, it is an imperfect world and it will always remain so, whether the Conservative or Labour party is in power. Welfare to work is a wonderful-sounding notion, yet in large parts of Britain, including my constituency, many people would like to get into work but cannot, and that will apply to lone parents as well.

Another question has to be taken into account. Some lone parents want not to work, but to look after their children, and they should not be penalised because they take that honourable stance. The question is: where is all the work in this imperfect world, and why should people be penalised because they want to bring up their kids?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend makes a point about people in his constituency without work. The economy may be growing, but some people in my constituency and in his constituency are simply left behind. In my constituency, some young people do not have the proper skills and educational qualifications to allow them to apply for the jobs that are available. Some lone mothers do not have child care or help to enable them to take the jobs that are available, and there are people who have been made redundant in their late 40s and who think that no employer will ever look at them again because they have been written off.

Our welfare-to-work programmes not only sound nice, but will transform the lives of people who were written off under the Conservative Government; for those people, the programmes will bring the dignity of work. Work is essential, helping people to provide for their children during their working years and to provide for themselves in retirement. Work by those who can helps to support those who cannot. Work is not just about earning a living. It is central to independence and self-respect.

We all have constituency experience of families with a spring in their step who have hope and the prospect of a better future, and of others with no hope and no prospects who are downcast. That is the difference between a family with work and a family without work. Work makes the difference between a decent standard of living and never-ending benefit dependency; the difference between a cohesive society and a divided one. That is why we are reforming the welfare state around the work ethic.

We have put into place the biggest welfare programme ever in this country, tearing down the barriers to work, enabling people to realise their potential and thereby increasing the prosperity of society. We are investing more than £3 billion in a new deal for the young and the long-term unemployed.

Too many of our young people have never had a job. They feel that they have been thrown on the scrap heap before they have begun. That was acceptable to the previous Government, but it is not acceptable to us. From April, every young person unemployed for more than six months will be given real opportunities, with worthwhile jobs and quality training.

Too many people who lose their job and cannot find another feel that they will never work again. That was acceptable to the previous Government, but it is not acceptable to us. From next June, employers will be encouraged with a payment of £75 a week to take on someone who has been unemployed for more than two years.

Our welfare-to-work programme recognises that the problem of worklessness that grew under the previous Government goes far beyond the official unemployment statistics. Too many lone mothers have been written off to a life of dependence on income support. We now have 1 million lone mothers bringing up 2 million children on benefit as a result of the previous Government's policies.

Mr. Brazier: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I have given way about 15 times. I intend to press on with my speech. The hon. Gentleman should try again later, when I have made some progress. He might need the time to think up a sensible question.

Lone mothers want to work for the same reasons as married women—for a better standard of living for their children. Lone mothers have even more reason to want to work—not just for the money, but to set an example to their children that life is about work, not just about being on benefit. Lone mothers who most need and want to work are less likely than married mothers to be working, because they are trapped on benefit. Our new deal for lone parents is a radical programme that recognises and backs lone mothers' desire to work. It is already up and running in eight areas. It is based on the simple idea of giving lone parents whatever help they need to get into work. That help is offered when their youngest child starts school at five.

What a contrast with the previous Government, who told lone parents to stay on benefit until their youngest child was 16. The previous Government then complained about the inevitable rise in the benefit bill and said that lone mothers posed a threat to society.

Last week, we announced that the national roll-out of the new deal for lone parents would be brought forward to April 1998 for all lone parents making a new claim for income support. In the eight pilot new deal areas, lone mothers with children under five have been asking for help from the programme, too. That is not surprising, when half the married women with children under five are working. That is why we have allocated an extra £25 million to our new deal—specifically for lone parents whose youngest child is under five—when it rolls out nationally next year.

The new deal has been welcomed by lone mothers, and employers have been offering them jobs. The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green can be dismissive about it, but it has transformed the lives of the lone parents whom it has already helped into work. One lone mother with four children, in Cardiff, who started work as a care assistant in September, wrote to us, saying:

"It feels good to be back at work. I haven't had a proper job for 14 years and I wouldn't have had the confidence to go out and look if it wasn't for the New Deal."

Of course, we are evaluating the programme. That was decided at the outset. We are spending the best part of £1 million on an evaluation between the eight pilot areas and six matching control areas, so the hon. Gentleman's point about a lack of evaluation is complete nonsense—like, unfortunately, so many of his other points. Does he welcome the help that we are giving to lone mothers, such as the one in Cardiff whom I mentioned? I shall give him the opportunity specifically to put it on the record. Does he back our new deal for work for lone parents?

Mr. Duncan Smith: Of course I back the efforts to help lone parents. The Secretary of State may recall that, when she came into government, there was already a programme to be set up in the same eight areas, called parent plus, which was started by the Conservative Government.

Ms Harman *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: No. The right hon. Lady asked me a question. She shall get the answer.

The right hon. Lady has grafted her policy on to ours, but she lost one essential part. She dropped the control groups that were part of the pilot areas, because she was interested solely in the publicity and in trumpeting success. She does not know why many lone parents get jobs, because she does not study the results.

Ms Harman: After 18 years of Conservative government, there was no programme for opportunities for lone mothers, only a programme of criticising them from the conference platform in Brighton and Blackpool. The hon. Gentleman is not able to listen to what I am telling him about the evaluation. We are having an evaluation, where we compare the eight pilot areas with six matching control areas.

Of course, one of the biggest headaches for mothers who want to work is child care. We are taking action on that, too. We are implementing a three-part national child care strategy to meet parents' demands, which for so long have not been met: for accessible, affordable, high-quality child care.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The right hon. Lady is talking about measuring the results. We visited the pilot areas in September. When officials were asked whether there were

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

control groups to measure the results, they knew absolutely nothing about it. They said that the control groups did not exist. Her Department cobbled them together in late September. That is the reality, because they were not there before. The right hon. Lady is misleading everybody.

Ms Harman: I am not misleading the House. The hon. Gentleman is having difficulty understanding this. The local officials were collecting the information. There is an academic programme of evaluation. That is how it is done.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It has been backdated.

Ms Harman: It has not. It was implemented at the outset.

As I said, we are implementing a three-part national child care strategy to meet parents' demands for accessible, affordable and high-quality child care.

First is accessibility. In his statement to the House last Tuesday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £300 million to extend out-of-school child care. That is another manifesto promise delivered. We shall extend out-of-school child care to every community in Britain. There will be an extra 30,000 out-of-school child care projects—up from only 3,500 at present. It will mean places for nearly a million children, so that child care will be available after school—possibly before school—and certainly in the school holidays and during in-service training days. We are making swift progress on our plans.

No blueprint will be imposed by Whitehall. We shall build on what works best at local level, using the expertise and experience of the public, private and voluntary sectors.

I wish to announce to the House that next month my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I will be bringing together the key child care players in a joint conference to drive forward our work on the national child care strategy, which will build up to a further announcement in January. The conference will be chaired by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth) and by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security with responsibilities for women, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock).

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green implies that our massive investment in child care was dreamed up over a weekend. I invite the hon. Gentleman to read the Labour party's manifesto, in which we stated that we would have a national child care strategy starting with a network of out-of-school clubs partially funded by the lottery. There is nothing mysterious or even spontaneous about our approach. Our policy is what parents want, and it is what we are delivering.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Harman: No, I shall not give way.

Secondly, there is affordability. We have already announced extra help for parents with the costs of child care through the £100 child care disregard in family credit. There will be more help with the cost of child care through the working families tax credit, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out in his pre-Budget statement last week.

Thirdly, I move on to quality. We have always argued that the issue is not only about more places but about quality, and that means high-quality child care. We must ensure that there is the proper quality of child care.

Mrs. Gorman: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Ms Harman: I shall not give way to the hon. Lady, because it is clear that she is trying to speak up for the Government rather than the Opposition. I shall not give way to her while she seeks to play that role. Of course, the hon. Lady was never much in support of the Conservative party when it was in government. Perhaps she is following a familiar line.

As part of ensuring that properly qualified staff are available as child care expands, we are investing £100 million to train 50,000 young people as nursery and play staff through our welfare-to-work programme, leading to qualifications as a play worker for the over-fives, or as a child care worker for the under-fives.

Together, those measures constitute the biggest programme of investment in child care that this country has ever seen. Child care is no longer an afterthought in social policy, but it was not even that under the previous Government. The Labour Government understand that child care is central to economic policy and welfare to work.

Mr. Webb: Will the Secretary of State clarify one aspect of her approach to lone parents with young children? This is a genuine question. I am not clear about the right hon. Lady's position. Does she think that it is a valid choice for lone parents with young children to stay at home to look after their children?

Ms Harman: It is a choice that married women who are not trapped on benefit make. Half of married women with children under five work, which means that half of married women with children do not. Only a quarter of lone parents with children under five work. The difference in the participation rate in the labour market, between lone parents and their married counterparts with children of the same age, reflects the fact that the benefit system and the lack of child care preclude lone parents from making the choice. They do not have the choice of going to work. They can only stay at home and live on benefit. Our child care expansion and the welfare-to-work programme will, for the first time, give lone parents a choice. It is a choice that previously has never been open to them.

Mr. Burns: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Ms Harman: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) asked his question in a much more intelligent way than the hon. Gentleman ever could.

It was not only lone parents whom the previous Government wrote off to a life of dependence on benefits. They also wrote off people claiming benefits for

long-term sickness and disability. Five million people identify themselves as sick or disabled, and more than 2 million of them work.

There are those whose ill health or disability means that they will never be able to work. They need and deserve proper support and a decent standard of living from the welfare state. There are others who want to work, and with the right help they could do so. However, for too long they have been written off. We shall tackle the exclusion of sick and disabled people, give them the same opportunities enjoyed by other people and empower them to play a fuller role in society.

To answer the questions of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, of course we are working with disabled people and the organisations that represent them. We are listening to their views. Two weeks ago, we held a major seminar on welfare to work, which was attended by over 40 organisations that represent disabled people. They are playing a crucial role in shaping our approach. For the hon. Gentleman to pose as the friend of disabled people and disability organisations—

Mr. Alan Howarth: Or anyone else.

Ms Harman: Indeed, or anyone else—is breathtaking.

Disabled people are denied opportunities and they face discrimination. We shall tackle that discrimination by taking action on civil rights and by establishing a disability rights commission, about which more will be said later.

We shall help people into work. We shall develop a package of innovative measures to help people with disabilities and health problems to get work and to stay in work. We are investing £195 million from the windfall tax in our new deal for the long-term sick and disabled.

I can announce today that we shall be inviting bids later this month to spend the money from the windfall tax. We shall award some contracts on a fast-track basis in late spring and the rest by early autumn.

Extending opportunities to work is not only about ensuring that people can be financially independent during their working lives. It is also about ensuring that they have a decent standard of living when they retire. We all know that that means having a good second pension on top of the basic state pension.

The previous Government failed both today's and tomorrow's pensioners. The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green made great play of our review of pensions, but we are proud of the way in which we are going about our consultation on pensions. The Conservative Government wrote "basic pension plus" on the back of an envelope only to ditch the scheme six months later. They failed both today's and tomorrow's pensioners. A quarter of today's pensioners have to rely on income support, and a further 1 million do not even claim the income support to which they are entitled. The problem is set to worsen for tomorrow's pensioners.

Two thirds of people in work now have no opportunity to save for a second pension in their retirement. They do not have an occupational pension at work and private pensions are a poor deal for them if they are on low earnings, if they work part-time or if they move from job to job.

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green cared much about the private pension industry's opportunities, but he never gave a thought to the people to whom I have referred. The Labour party's manifesto contained a promise to address the central areas of insecurity for pensioners. We said that we would give priority to the poorest pensioners, and we have already made progress. In July, I announced a fundamental and wide-ranging review of pension provision.

One of the key challenges is to provide decent pensions for all. Last week, as part of the review, we published a consultation document on the detailed framework for stakeholder pensions. We are making progress. Stakeholder pensions are designed to provide good pensions for people who do not have an occupational pension and for whom private pensions are poor value for money. They will provide a portable pension that is safe, simple and a guarantee of a good deal. At the same time, we are tackling the scandal of the people who lost out because they were mis-sold a personal pension under the previous Government's policies.

Our detailed proposals for stakeholder pensions will be published alongside our proposals for the long-term framework for the pensions review early next year. We have had 1,800 responses so far to our pensions review, and we are undertaking detailed consultation on the framework for stakeholder pensions. We want to build a consensus and to consult widely—not for us back-of-an-envelope proposals for pensions. We want pension proposals that will last.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I know that many of the submissions have proposed that the state earnings-related pension scheme should be phased out or abolished. Would the right hon. Lady be happy to get rid of SERPS, regardless of what the manifesto said?

Ms Harman: There is no such thing for this Government as "regardless of what the manifesto said". We are in government to implement our manifesto. People know that our manifesto said that SERPS would remain an option for those who wanted to remain in it—

Mr. Duncan Smith: So the right hon. Lady will not abolish it?

Ms Harman: We said in our manifesto that SERPS would remain an option for those who wanted to remain in it.

We are getting help to today's pensioners now. We have already helped pensioners with their fuel bills, by cutting VAT on fuel and reducing the gas levy to zero. Last Tuesday, in his pre-Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced that for this winter and next, every pensioner household would receive at least £20 to help with winter fuel bills. He announced that those on income support—almost 2 million of the poorest pensioner households—would receive an extra £50. The money will be paid in time to meet this winter's heating bills. Together with the cut in VAT on fuel and other changes, it means that the poorest pensioners will be

[Ms Harman]

helped by up to £130 a year. That is making progress on our manifesto commitment to get help to the poorest pensioners, and we are doing more.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who seeks to intervene on the subject of pensioners, unless he explains whether he still believes that he was right to insist on voting for VAT on pensioners' gas and electricity bills. Will he include that point?

Mr. Gill: I am pleased to answer the right hon. Lady on that very point. The Labour party made much of the fact that it reduced the level of VAT on fuel. Labour Members could not have done that without the support of my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). It was the votes of Conservative Members that helped Labour to reduce VAT. No credit is due to the Labour party there.

I hope that Labour will consider this question. What is the cost of the benefits that the right hon. Lady has just read out? It is a miserly £190 million out of the £5 billion that she filched from the pension funds.

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman talks about a "miserly" £190 million, but that is £190 million more to help with fuel bills than his Government ever gave. He voted against our reduction in VAT from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent.

We are doing more, apart from helping with fuel bills and cutting VAT. There are 1 million pensioners on an income so low that they are entitled to income support who do not claim it. My predecessor, the former Secretary of State, said that the reason why 1 million pensioners did not claim the income support to which they were entitled was that they could not be bothered and did not need the money. We do not believe that. We are determined that they should get the money to which they are entitled and we are taking action. We are setting up pilot projects to develop ways in which to get help to the poorest pensioners.

Will the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green now admit that his Government were wrong to put VAT on fuel and to try to increase the rate to 17.5 per cent.? Does he back our £50 fuel payments for the poorest pensioners? Will he welcome our further measures to get help to the poorest pensioners? Pensioners want to know where he stands; in fact, he sits saying nothing.

Our extra help for the elderly shows how this Government are meeting the people's priorities. After just six months, this Government have already taken important steps to deliver our manifesto commitment to tackle poverty and inequality. We are investing in opportunities to work for people who were written off by the previous Administration. We are taking action to get help to Britain's poorest pensioners. We are preparing the way to ensure security in retirement for tomorrow's pensioners. We are rebuilding a society in which all have a stake. That was our promise to the people of Britain and that is a promise we are keeping.

4.54 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I apologise for arriving late for the debate; I was detained on constituency business.

I became interested in the cause of the disabled as a result of having as my secretary in the House of Commons somebody who suffered from considerable disabilities. It was through her that I learned a great deal about the problems faced by disabled people. As a consequence, I had the opportunity to try to help people in my own constituency who suffered from disabilities. I have therefore taken a particular interest in the subject.

In the past few weeks, as a result of press comments and discussions within disability organisations, there has developed a real concern that promises made to people who are disabled and others who are vulnerable are simply not being kept. I found in my post this morning a letter from a constituent. He has given me permission to read out the letter, which is a copy of his letter to the Prime Minister. He writes:

"As a Labour supporter for the whole of my adult life—I am now 66 years of age—I am quite frankly disgusted by the plans to 'Crack-down' upon the disabled members of our community.

I firmly believe that you have lost sight of the basic philosophy of Labour, that of caring . . . recent announcements of introducing taxation to Disability benefits have made me decide to write to you to protest most vehemently."

The letter-writer, referring to his wife, then says:

"Now, we read that she is likely to have her pitifully small benefit taxed."

Those fears may or may not be justified, but those fears are out there because of a number of developments that have recently occurred.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that when his Government introduced incapacity benefit in place of invalidity benefit they introduced tax on that key benefit for disabled people?

Mr. Spring: I want to touch specifically on what is in the minds of people such as my constituents. I want to deal with the way in which the Government are handling the issue in light of their promises before the election. That is the issue at stake and the Under-Secretary of State, of all people, should know perfectly well that genuine anxiety is felt by many thousands of people who, as a result of the nods and winks by Labour when in opposition, now feel that they have been let down.

There is no doubt that the future of the welfare state is a matter of immense complexity in this and other industrialised countries. As a result of demographic changes, all societies will have to address the problem. All of us who live in this era of aging population have to grapple with it.

We all accept that reform of the welfare state is necessary. Before the general election, the Labour party clearly implied that that could be an easy exercise and that the great increase in spending on the welfare state arose from the level of unemployment. We all heard that from those who are now Ministers and from the then shadow Chancellor. People clearly felt, therefore, that, if unemployment came down—this was the linchpin of the whole thing—the most vulnerable and those in receipt of benefits would receive more help. That is a travesty of the

real complexity of the welfare state. That message is one of the reasons why so many of the disability organisations and so many in our society who feel vulnerable are writing letters like the one that I have just quoted.

Unemployment has indeed fallen, more so in this country than in any other, but it has not meant that people in receipt of benefit are likely, as a result of the Government's actions, automatically to receive substantially more benefit. That was a deceit perpetrated deliberately ahead of the general election to fan people's excitement and sense of anticipation about what a Labour Government would do, but people now realise that it is not happening.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): The hon. Gentleman talked about the fear and alarm felt by the disabled community, but it is Conservative Members who are fuelling the press reports. They do not know what is in the review—none of us on the Back Benches knows—but by emphasising cuts and taxation that may or may not be part of the review, the hon. Gentleman and his fellow Back Benchers are making the situation worse.

Mr. Spring: With respect, it is Labour Back Benchers who feel affronted and who are talking to the press and appearing on radio and television to condemn the actions of Labour Front Benchers. The idea that it is Conservative Members who have created this situation is absurd.

Mrs. Gorman: Is it not true that representatives of disability organisations appeared on radio and television at the weekend to express their concern, but that the Secretary of State had something better to do, even though she had arranged to appear? She should tell us what was so important that she could not face those people.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. We now know that, whenever Ministers are embarrassed, as over the formula one fiasco or the issue of benefit for single mothers, they are not willing to appear on television, despite supposedly being in favour of open government. That is precisely why there is so much anxiety among Labour Back Benchers and disability organisations.

With respect, I have to tell the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) that I have spoken to many individuals who work with disability organisations, and they certainly do not share her perception of the situation.

Mr. Hope: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) that the attendance allowance should be abolished, as stated in the No Turning Back group's pamphlet on benefits?

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) rightly takes the view that there should be a considered overall reform of the welfare state, without the huffing and puffing that we had from the Labour party while it was in opposition. Before the election, the Secretary of State made the most savage attacks on the previous Government because she felt that that would ensure votes and support. In practice, people are now turning against her.

I deal now with the consultation process. I asked the Secretary of State about meetings that she and her fellow Ministers had had with organisations representing disabled people, and she mentioned the figure of 40. However, it is not only what happens at those meetings that matters, but the nature of the consultation process itself. If the right hon. Lady is going to make substantive changes to benefits, the disability organisations are rightly demanding that they are brought fully into the loop and consulted properly. It is one thing to have superficial meetings—I am simply quoting what has been said to me—but people do not feel that, at this apparently critical stage in the Secretary of State's thinking, they are being adequately consulted.

The main problem is that the Labour party thinks that, if it disseminates a message in a certain way, the reality will slot into place. The Secretary of State make an extraordinary announcement about her new deal for lone parents. We were told that it was a considerable success and that the results were very encouraging, although 8,651 lone parents were interviewed and only 433 found work. There was no demonstrable evidence that they would not have found work anyway, but the right hon. Lady and her spin doctors put it out as a wonderful example of the welfare-to-work programme beginning to operate when in fact the success rate was only 5 per cent. If the right hon. Lady continues like this, her personal credibility and that of the Government will be undermined.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way as it gives me the opportunity, through him, to ask the Secretary of State a question that many of us tried to ask during her speech. Does she have any evidence that even one person among that 5 per cent. who found work would not have found work in any case?

Mr. Spring: Without proper control groups to make the comparisons, it is not possible to answer that question, but the spin doctoring nevertheless continued. It is to the Labour party's shame that it indulges in that practice.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Will the hon. Gentleman produce for the House the evidence that shows that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is right? There is none.

Mr. Spring: The point is that control groups are needed to measure such things accurately.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend talks about spin doctoring. Is he aware—I am sure he is—that the Secretary of State, in her infamous press release, failed to point out that, of the 8,600 or so people who were written to, almost 75 per cent. did not bother to reply? Of the 433 people who found work, the 13 in east Sheffield are in their 30s or late 30s—they had obviously wanted to stay at home until their children were of school age, then sought jobs and got them. It was the interviews on the "Today" programme—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I remind all hon. Members that interventions should be brief.

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is absolutely correct: there is no absolute evidence to prove that, as a result of the right hon. Lady's manoeuvrings in this direction, one extra job has been created.

[Mr. Spring]

That leads me on to a matter on which the right hon. Lady touched when she was summing up. At the end of the day, a growing economy is absolutely crucial as it provides jobs, and the last thing it needs is an artificial barrier to job creation. The reason that there has been such a dramatic fall in this country, most notably this year in full-time unemployment, is that, in contrast with what happens elsewhere in Europe, we do not have policies like the minimum wage and elements of the social chapter.

No matter how the welfare-to-work programme proceeds, we need a growing economy and job creation opportunities, but the reverse will occur if we introduce artificial creations such as the minimum wage and if other regulations come in via the back door of the social chapter. They will cause precisely the horrific mass unemployment that exists in continental Europe.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman admit that many of our European partners have had what we have not had until now, namely a comprehensive child care strategy? Most women on the continent take for granted standards of child care provision that women in this country have long awaited and which we are now looking to a Labour Government to deliver.

Mr. Spring: I remind the hon. Lady that unemployment in countries such as France and Germany is 12 or 13 per cent. What hope is there for young people entering the labour force when one quarter of people aged under 25 in France, one third of young people in Italy and about 40 per cent. of young people in Spain are unemployed? Such figures result directly from the imposition of artificial barriers to job creation, with which the Government intend to destroy employment.

I turn to the other regrettable element of spinning. We had an exciting announcement of £300 million-plus for after-school clubs and child care clubs for lone parents. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that Labour Members and the Minister for Welfare Reform have something to cheer about. It must be very difficult for the right hon. Gentleman to sit next to the Secretary of State and look cheerful.

Of the £300 million, £220 million was taken out of lottery funds. The whole point behind the founding of the lottery was to help art, heritage and sports. Now, the principle of additionality has been flouted. I forecast that this is the thin end of the wedge. Every time the Government want to put money into some scheme, they will find some way of raiding the lottery, to the disadvantage of all its beneficiaries, flouting the very principle on which the lottery was set up.

I will quote from the Labour party manifesto, which as an historical document will increasingly be regarded as very different from what I suspect the Secretary of State imagines. I hope that she will listen very carefully. It says:

"People are cynical about politics and distrustful of political promises. That is hardly surprising."

After the Secretary of State's performance, the way in which the Government have conducted themselves, all the nods and winks and all the promises to the most vulnerable people in our society, I hope that she will take their concerns on board. Certainly, her Back Benchers are doing so.

5.11 pm

Mr. Michael Wills (North Swindon): The debate is of great interest to my constituency, especially to the 6,000 lone parents and 22,000 pensioners in Swindon, who overwhelmingly voted Labour on 1 May because they knew that a Labour Government would provide them with the opportunities denied to them by the previous Government.

I do not know why the Conservatives tabled the motion. It seems to have no point whatever—apart from allowing a little gratuitous abuse and somehow suggesting that they are anxious about the plight of lone parents, that they support people with disabilities and are the protectors of pensioners. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that they did nothing to help any of those people during their 18 years in government.

If we want to know what the Conservatives really think about the issues for which they have suddenly discovered concern, we should look not at the motion but at what the shadow Cabinet have written and said before today. I also have some quotations, which, with the House's indulgence, I shall read.

This is the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry expressing his understanding of the situation of lone parents:

"The natural state should be the two-adult family."

What, in his considered view, does that make lone parents?

This is the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, who is no longer present, expressing in October his respect for all the hard work and love that most lone parents put into their families:

"Single parent families are more likely to be caught up in crime."

Really?

This is the shadow Foreign Secretary's considered judgment on lone parents: single mothers often prove to be inadequate parents because

"since the state is educating, housing and feeding their children, the nature of parental responsibility may seem less immediate."

Earlier in the same speech, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that the Government

"must examine all our policies to ensure that we are reinforcing rather than weakening a sense of responsibility",

so I assume that he is moving towards suggesting that the state should no longer educate, house and feed the children of single mothers.

The Conservative party made some of the neediest and most vulnerable members of our society the target of cheap political jibes, appealing to the most graceless and mean-spirited instincts of a mean-spirited and graceless Government. In 18 years, the Conservatives did nothing to help lone parents, nothing to help those with disabilities and nothing to help pensioners. On the contrary, it was central to their political philosophy to exclude such people. The difference between the Conservatives and Labour is that this Government will provide new opportunities to those who need them most, and not take them away as the Conservatives did.

Mr. Rendel: I can understand how providing people with the opportunity to work may raise their status, but will the hon. Gentleman explain how benefit cuts can do so?

Mr. Wills: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient a little longer, I will come precisely to the state of the budget.

This Government will help people and give them new hope and new opportunities not by short-term patch-and-mend measures but by a transformation of the welfare state to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of people today.

The welfare state that we inherited was created in the first half of the century for the circumstances of the first half of the century. As the House knows, it was built to help people through particular crises in their lives; recognising that they needed help when they were not able to work to provide for themselves; supplying free health care so that medical treatment could be received without plunging families into poverty from which they could not recover; providing benefit to tide families through periods when the breadwinner or breadwinners were out of work, without plunging them into debt from which they could not recover.

Vital as those measures were—everyone in the Labour party remains proud of the part that our party played in putting those measures into practice—people did not and could not envisage the problems that this country faces today. Large numbers of our citizens are excluded from the rewards of mainstream society because they lack work and are given no hope of working. Nearly one household in five with someone of working age has no one in work. That is a damning indictment of 18 years of Conservative government. For many, unemployment is not a cyclical phenomenon which they suffer along with their neighbours in the hope and expectation that sooner or later they will work again: it is an inescapable blight which sets them apart from their neighbours and offers them no hope of a better future.

Surely it is time for the welfare state to play its part in tackling those problems. The country should not take the short-term view that, somehow, we can just muddle through again. This Government will rebuild the welfare state around work, giving everyone the choice and opportunity of work. This Government will make the welfare state the opportunity state, giving everyone the opportunity to make real choices about their lives.

Choice and opportunity are principles of which the Conservative party is supposed to be in favour. The difference between the Conservatives and us is that this Government believe in choice and opportunity for everyone and in making those choices and opportunities real—real for the lone parents who the Government will help find work, which will make them on average £50 a week better off than if they had remained on income support. That is no deceit, as has been suggested. That is a fact.

Mr. Letwin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wills: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will not give way. I have had 18 years to listen to him; he should give me 10 minutes.

We are going to make choice and opportunity real for lone parents who want to find work—part time or full time—and who want not just the extra income, which is important and precious to those living on the margins of society, but the sense of being reconnected to the world outside the home. They have been prevented from finding such reconnection by the lack of affordable child care. This Government are committed to providing affordable and accessible child care for everyone.

We will spend £300 million to provide after-school club places for up to 1 million children. That is 10 times more places than there are now. We will spend £25 million to provide the new deal for those who have children under five and want to take part. When we talk about opportunity and choice, we mean to make it possible for everyone. That is the difference between us and the Opposition.

We will tackle the exclusion of people with disabilities by developing an approach that focuses on their abilities. The Government will spend £195 million to provide opportunities to work for those people. We will give them opportunities and choices. What did the Tory Government ever do to enhance opportunities and choices for disabled people? This Government will tackle the discrimination that so often denies opportunity to people with disabilities by establishing a disability rights commission. What did the Tory Government ever do to give teeth to measures to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities? They have no answer.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): We introduced the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to recognise that.

Mr. Wills: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but I am afraid that she did not hear what I said. I asked what you ever did to give teeth to measures to protect people with disabilities and your answer said it all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has used the words "you" and "your". The Deputy Speaker is not responsible for those matters. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a new Member, but I should be grateful if he would try to use normal parliamentary language.

Mr. Wills: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have to recognise that placing work at the centre of the welfare state means setting priorities. That is the inescapable and inevitable task of government. The nub of the matter is that government means making hard choices, and that is what the Government have done. Within resources, which are inevitably and always restricted, we have made work—and the opportunities and choices that flow from it—our priority.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I am grateful to you—I mean to the hon. Gentleman—for giving way. Is it not true that the present Government will never get any policies through the House which require hard choices because his hon. Friends will not allow it?

Mr. Wills: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and for making the same mistake as I did. I can only tell him to wait and see.

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the whole basis of the Tories' argument today is to ask us to break manifesto commitments? That is not surprising, because their history in government was to break promise after promise. They have forgotten how to keep manifesto commitments, but we have not.

Mr. Wills: That is right, and I agree with my hon. Friend. Taking hard decisions and making hard choices is the mark

[Mr. Wills]

of a Government who are determined to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to make the most of themselves. That means that we must make commitments that are sustainable. We will not make the mistakes made by previous Governments and make promises that we cannot keep. There is little more cruel than holding out hope only to snatch it away. We shall not do that. We shall deliver on our promises, unlike the Conservative party.

Mr. Letwin: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how he believes that failing 95 per cent. of the lone parents to whom letters were sent constitutes keeping promises to 100 per cent. of them?

Mr. Wills: I fail to understand what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. What does he mean by failing? We have been in government six months and we have already done more than the Tories did in 18 years. The word failure comes ill from the hon. Gentleman's lips.

To deliver on our promises, we have to keep public finances under rigorous control. We have to set clear priorities and ensure that public spending meets those priorities. That is what we said that we would do, and that is what we shall do. We shall ensure that our commitments to lone parents, people with disabilities and pensioners are sustainable throughout the lifetime of this Parliament and beyond.

A Government taking necessary, hard decisions need no sanctimonious, self-righteous lectures from the Opposition, who did nothing for so long. Important as work is to our reforms of the welfare state, we must recognise that some people are no longer able to work. It is bad enough that the Opposition should pretend to be the friends of lone parents and people with disabilities, but even the Conservative party should blush at pretending to be the friend of pensioners.

Mr. Gibb: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wills: I will give way when I have made my point about the mis-selling of private personal pensions.

Not only did the Tories create a situation in which so many people were so damaged by the mis-selling of private personal pensions, but they failed to do anything to put it right. The Tories abandoned the pensioners but now pretend to be concerned about them.

The Labour Government are delivering on our promises to pensioners. We shall be judged by the outcome of our reviews on how we get help to the poorest pensioners. We shall be judged by the fact that we have cut value added tax on fuel to 5 per cent. and reduced the gas levy to nothing. We shall be judged by the fact that we have helped pensioners with their winter fuel payments. We will give £50 to 1.7 million pensioners on income support and £20 to 5 million other pensioners. We are also proud that the Government acted promptly and decisively to put right the scandal of the mis-selling of private pensions.

Mr. Gibb: How does the hon. Gentleman consider it to be friendly to future pensioners to support a Government who, through tax, will take £5 billion of assets from private pension funds each and every year?

Mr. Wills: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the difference between a tax and a reform of the corporate tax system. If he would like to have the difference explained to him, I shall be happy to do so after the debate.

I have spent much of the past 20 years listening to the Tories talk about choice and opportunity, and I fail to understand why they oppose the measures that the Government are introducing to increase opportunity and choice for everybody. Are the Tories opposed to spending £300 million on implementing a national child care strategy? We do not know.

Mr. Letwin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wills: If the hon. Gentleman will answer my question, I will give way to him.

Mr. Letwin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such expenditure would be valid if it worked, but invalid if it did not? Does he further agree that the evidence of the 95 per cent. of people who did not succeed in getting a job after they received letters suggests that it did not work?

Mr. Wills: I was under the impression when I gave way that the hon. Gentleman was about to answer my question rather than to ask me one. He obviously does not know whether he welcomes £300 million being spent on child care. Perhaps he can give us an answer when we next debate the subject.

Do the Tories want to see child care facilities in every town, helping parents who would otherwise not have access to affordable child care? Do the Tories want to see measures to encourage lone parents back into work? Do the Tories support the payment of £50 to Britain's poorest pensioners to help with winter fuel bills? They do not know. That, in a nutshell, is the sum of their attitude to the neediest and most vulnerable members of our society.

Why cannot the Tories, just once, welcome what the Government are doing? After all, the Labour Government are taking these steps within the spending limits set out by the previous Government. The Tories failed to take such measures. Why cannot they welcome the fact that we are now succeeding? We are providing genuine choices and opportunities within a rigorous, prudent and therefore sustainable financial framework. The truth is that the Opposition cannot and will not welcome any of that because their motion is no more than shoddy political opportunism, the worst sort of gesture politics. They are pretending that they have answers and concerns about the neediest and most vulnerable people in our society when they did nothing for them in 18 years.

This Government offer the only sustainable and practical help for pensioners, people with disabilities and lone parents. I hope that the House will treat the motion as it deserves and vote it down.

5.29 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful for the chance to participate in this debate, because it is clear that three different points of view on welfare and, in particular, the cuts in lone parent benefits are held in the House. One view is held by the Conservative party, another by the Government and a third by the Liberal Democrats and, I understand, rather more than half of the Government's Back Benchers. It is important that that third view should be heard and I look forward to stating it.

Before I do, I must return to the speech made by the hon. Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), on whom I intervened when he was complaining that the previous

Conservative Government had reduced the status of lone parents. I agree that that is exactly what they did. I asked him in what way reducing benefits for lone parents would increase their status. He promised he would come back to the subject. I listened to the rest of his speech, but heard not a thing about it. If he would like to intervene, I would welcome the answer to that question.

Mr. Wills: I am sorry the hon. Gentleman did not understand what I was saying. I made it clear that the Government had to set clear priorities for how they would spend a finite sum of money. They have made it clear—and I support them—that their priority must be work and the choices and opportunities that flow from it. I hope that that is clear. We have to help people back into work.

The people who are already in receipt of benefits will not suffer any cash disadvantage, but will carry on just as they are. We are talking about the future and we must re-build the welfare state of the future around work. That is this Government's priority. We made it clear before and during the election, and we are now delivering on what we made clear then.

Mr. Rendel: I am sorry to say that that gets us no further. I asked the hon. Gentleman in what sense reducing benefits for lone parents increases their status. He talked about all sorts of other priorities with which I may agree, or not, but they are irrelevant to the question. Does he think that that enhances the status of lone parents or not? Is he prepared to intervene again? I am happy to give way if he wants to answer.

Mr. Wills: At risk of carrying on, I said that there will be no cuts for lone parents who are in receipt of those benefits. Before the election and just last week, I met lone parents on the most rundown estate in my constituency. The message is that they want child care more than anything else, both those who want to go into work and those who merely want some break from their existing burdens. That is the truth. That is what they want and that is what we are delivering. If the hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are getting longer than speeches. The hon. Gentleman will please resume his seat.

Mr. Rendel: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear from that waffle that the hon. Gentleman does not have an answer to my question. It is also clear to every hon. Member that reducing benefits for lone parents will reduce their status. Perhaps 250,000 lone parents will not get the lone parent premiums next year. These will be the new claimants and their status will undoubtedly be reduced in exactly the same way as happened the previous Conservative Government. I hope that Labour will take that fact on board.

I must refer briefly to the speech made by the Secretary of State: I am sorry that the right hon. Lady is not in her place to hear my response. Her speech was an inadequate answer to the worries of Labour Members, in particular, about lone parent benefit cuts. At the heart of her speech were several illogicalities, not least her failure to answer my intervention, when I asked in what sense she felt she was targeting the most needy by reducing benefits to lone parents. She claimed that she wanted to target the most needy as well as to provide work for lone parents; she also wants to target those who do not get work, yet she is reducing their benefits. That is illogical, as anyone can see—it does not take a great genius to see it—but it was her argument in defence of her policies.

Frankly, it was pathetic and inadequate—one of the weakest arguments I have heard from a Secretary of State in support of a policy that is admittedly pretty indefensible. I do not think that her speech will have convinced many of the Back Benchers who have shown their unhappiness with the way in which she has been pushing through the cuts.

Liberal Democrat Members welcome help for job seekers and we welcome the fact that lone parents who want work are being given help to get it. We welcome too the availability of more child care. The problems that women experience because of the lack of child care are well known. We also welcome any help that can be given to enhance the possibilities for child care, as long as it is high-quality child care that avoids the dangers of child abuse that we have seen all too often. We welcome all that.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): Bearing in mind the fact that the Liberal Democrats opposed the windfall levy that has raised much of the money that can now be put into welfare improvements, how can the hon. Gentleman justify demands for even more expenditure?

Mr. Rendel: I am not justifying demands for more expenditure. The whole point is that, at present, the benefit cuts have not been made—they are in the Budget. There have been huge savings in benefit payments this year because of the unexpected fall in unemployment. The money is there if we want to spend it in that way.

The Secretary of State missed the point, as did the hon. Member for North Swindon. The point is not what will happen to the women who are able to get work thanks to the policies that the Government are trying to implement and which we welcome, but what will happen to the others. There will always be a number of lone parents who, for good reasons, do not take up work—either they do not want to because they want to look after their children, or they cannot because they do not have the relevant skills or live somewhere that makes it difficult to get work.

The Secretary of State said that she is worried that 50 per cent. of married mothers go out to work but only 25 per cent. of lone parents work. She said she wanted to raise that 25 per cent. to 50 per cent., on the assumption that lone mothers and fathers would want to work in the same proportion as married mothers. That is not necessarily the case. There is a good argument for saying that lone parents may believe that it is even more important for them to stay at home with their children since they are the lone parent and it is more important for their children to have someone at home the whole time.

Even if work is as attractive to lone parents as it is to married mothers, given the Secretary of State's figures, 50 per cent. will still choose to stay at home and look after their children and it is those lone parents who will be bitterly affected by the Government's policies if they are allowed to go ahead.

All the Secretary of State's arguments and those of the hon. Member for North Swindon about the importance of prioritising and getting people back to work miss the point

[Mr. Rendel]

about those who do not go back. They have failed to answer that point and they will need to do so before 10 December if they are to get their Back Benchers back on board on this issue.

The Secretary of State seemed to be using the old argument that attack is the best means of defence; that the best strategy is to attack the previous Tory Government for their mistakes—which some Conservatives have been good enough to admit, to some extent at least—but in so doing, the right hon. Lady failed to answer the pertinent points that my hon. Friends and I, as well as many Labour Back Benchers, have been making about the failures of her present policies.

The motion seems to be in three parts. The first concentrates on pensions and welfare reform. We all accept that that is a long-term business—that is true of pensions by their very nature—so it is important to have consensus on how pensions reform, in particular, should be handled.

I welcome the opportunity that all hon. Members have been given to join in the review. It is much more important to get it right now than to speed it through quickly and perhaps make mistakes. I do not accept the Tory view that we should rush it through as quickly as possible. We need to find an agreement that will give stability to pensions reform.

The third part of the motion concerns disability benefits. Some worrying rumours have been circulating—even if some of them originate with Conservative Members, as was said earlier. The rumours suggest that the cuts in disability benefits may be much greater even than those for lone parents. If the Government cannot reassure us about their real plans in the debate today, which they have not so far done, I am sure that many people with disabilities will remain worried.

In the Government's amendment, the only mention of people with disabilities is a passing reference to trying to help them get back into work. I would welcome any such help, but if that is all the Government intend to talk about it seems that they are not prepared to give the reassurances for people with disabilities that are being sought.

It is ironic that the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) and his hon. Friends should express a new-found compassion for the disabled. It struck me as being like cannibals suddenly deciding that they are in favour of vegetarianism. The Conservative motion uses the word "inconceivable". It seems pretty inconceivable that the Tories have had a Damascene conversion to caring for the needs of the disabled, which certainly did not concern them when they were in power. I hope that the Government will take the opportunity to reassure people that disability benefits are safe in Labour hands.

The second part of the Conservative motion concerns lone-parent benefits. It is odd that the Conservatives do not congratulate the Government on their U-turn, which picks up the very policies that the previous Government wanted to implement. The shadow Secretary of State has told us with commendable honesty that he would have implemented those policies had his party remained in power. The Labour Government are implementing Tory policies.

The sad fact about the Tory attack is that they forced the Government to defend the U-turn rather than the policy itself. The excuse offered by the Secretary of State and others for the U-turn is that they are providing help to get lone parents back into work, but Government figures show that in practice they do not expect any more lone parents to be back in work next year than this year. Presumably, then, they are not expecting their policies to be all that successful.

Lone parents are being sacrificed to save Labour's reputation for keeping its promises; but the Government will not even succeed in that, because, to keep the promise that they will stick rigidly to Tory spending plans, they have had to break the promise that they would revoke the benefit cuts. Lone parents are being sacrificed for nothing.

There is no need for the Government to break their promise to reverse the cuts because there have been considerable cuts in spending on benefits this year as a result of the unexpectedly large fall in unemployment and money is available within the benefits budget. It is true that the Government could not stick rigidly to every part of the Tory spending plans, but they could certainly stick to the overall budget without implementing the cuts.

The Government are playing the welfare-to-work line hard and saying what an excellent policy it is. Benefit cuts for lone parents are in themselves a disincentive to getting work: partly because lone parents will not gain so much by getting work once the cuts have been made; partly because those who receive the premiums have to take an additional risk if they accept a job now, because if they lose the job and go back on benefits they will have lost their premiums. The cuts make it more unlikely that lone parents will go back to work: the precise opposite of the whole basis of the welfare-to-work policy.

Mr. Letwin: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is about to say that, according to the Government's own recent production, "The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System", 26 per cent. of those interviewed mentioned the issue of jobs being temporary, and 23 per cent. mentioned worries about reclaiming benefit after a short period of work, as reasons for not taking work.

Mr. Rendel: I was not about to cite those statistics, but I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has.

It is clear from Government statistics, as was clearly explained in the Standing Committee on the Social Security Bill, that lone parents—not all, but the majority—are among the poorest members of our community; most of them are below the poverty line. Some may go back to work and thereby become better off, but many will not; even the Secretary of State has accepted that probably 50 per cent. will not. All those very poor people will be made even poorer by the Labour Government. Not all that many people who voted Labour in May thought that they were voting to make poor people even poorer.

In November 1996, the Secretary of State, then in opposition, said:

"Lone Parent Premium recognises that lone parents face additional costs in bringing up their children—they do not have a partner's time or income to help with children".

That is right. They are already extremely poor.

It seems to me that the Labour Government are falling into the age-old Tory trap of thinking that the way to get poor people to work is to make them even poorer while the way to get rich people to work is to make them richer. I do not believe that both assertions can be true at the same time.

The right hon. Lady continued:

"The way to get lone mothers out of poverty and cut spending on benefits for them is not by cutting the amount on which they have to live year by year and plunging them into further poverty."

She then said that the proposals of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) would make

"hundreds of thousands of the poorest children worse off."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 500-1.]

Elsewhere, the right hon. Lady said:

"Since one parent benefit is not taxed, it helped to bridge the gap between welfare and work. Its abolition will make working lone mothers worse off and will discourage work amongst this group".

Again the Secretary of State's own words prove the fallacies in her current policies.

Mr. Webb: I reassure my hon. Friend that it is not just the Secretary of State who holds such views. Is he aware that the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), said before the election that the abolition of one-parent benefit would be directly contrary to a rational welfare-to-work strategy?

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am sure that he agrees that, quite apart from the two people we have mentioned, many others on the Government Front Bench and Labour Back Benches have made similar statements in the past.

In their amendment, the Government congratulate themselves on their welfare reform. I should like to mention another aspect of their reforms—their refusal to allow the backdating of benefit claims for more than one month. The Conservative Government accepted that there should be no backdating beyond three months, but the Labour Government have gone further and done something that is even harsher than what the Conservatives introduced.

It is not a question of the Labour Government fulfilling promises to stick to Tory budgets or spending plans—they are going further and making life even harder for those who are least well off. Their policy will hit the worst-off members of our community. It seems that the Labour party—new Labour, the new Tory convert—is shouting, "Whatever you can do that's cruel, we can do something even crueller." I do not believe that that is what it was elected to do.

The Labour Government believe that there should be no backdating beyond one month and that there is no excuse for late claims, not even when a claimant has good cause—such as being widowed, by which they may be extremely traumatised. Such good causes will be swept away by new Labour in an apparent bid to outdo, not just maintain the same strategies as, its Tory teachers. It is a tragedy that in the playground game that is being fought out over who can be toughest, those in need are suffering every day the Government continue in office.

I urge Labour party members, not just those in the House but those outside it, to think about why they joined the Labour party. It was not, I suggest, to introduce Conservative spending plans and Conservative social policy. Of that I am sure. I ask those in the Government who still have the courage of their convictions and who share our disgust at the Government's handling of social security to vote with the Liberal Democrats against the Government's benefit cuts.

5.52 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I am very interested in what the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said, but I do not need to take lessons from the Liberal party, which voted against the windfall levy and therefore would have put a stop to the new deal programme. It takes some brass neck for Conservative Opposition spokespersons to attack new Labour's strategies to tackle the reform of the welfare state after the disaster that they left after 18 years of Tory mismanagement and lack of imagination.

Before I outline why we need a new direction and vision for welfare reform, we should remind ourselves—it is important to continue to do so during the debate—what the Conservatives contributed to the welfare system when they were in government. While the Conservatives were in government, taxpayers picked up the bill for mass dependency on benefit, persistent unemployment, huge subsidies for low pay and widespread fraud. It was truly a nation on benefit.

Under the Conservatives, overall benefit expenditure rose by £40 billion in real terms. The proportion of the Department of Social Security budget spent on means-tested benefits more than doubled from 17 per cent. to 36 per cent. The number of people dependent on such benefits doubled from one in 12 of the population to one in six. The proportion of total public spending accounted for by the DSS went up from one fifth to one third.

What was there to show for all the increases in social security expenditure? Did more people move from welfare into work? No. One fifth of all households had no one earning a wage. Was there a reduction in benefit fraud? No. Up to £2 billion was being lost every year through housing benefit fraud alone, while expenditure on housing benefit doubled in five years. Were there any increases in the basic rate of pay among the low-paid? No. Under the Conservatives, low pay cost the taxpayer almost £4 billion annually in benefits to top up income—the equivalent of 2p on the basic rate of income tax.

Did Conservative policies lift more people out of poverty? No. The bottom 10th of the population were 13 per cent. worse off in absolute terms and the proportion of households living in poverty more than trebled from one in 14 to one in four. As the climate of insecurity and social failure moved on apace, so Britain's crime industry had its boom years under the Conservatives.

What was the great pensions achievement of the Conservative years? Pensions mis-selling soared to new heights, which damaged living standards—and it was left to the new Labour Government to rectify a problem that they should never have inherited. Let us be very clear: the Tories' record increase in social security spending was not an explosion of generosity: it was purely the cost of social failure.

Under the Conservatives, secure employment was undermined; traditional industries were savaged; the unemployed were blamed and lone parents were made the scapegoats; there was under-investment in young

[Caroline Flint]

people; and people were removed from the unemployment register and put on disability benefits, thereby consigning them to a workless life. I remind the House that I have direct experience of the previous Government's policies and how they affected people working for Remploy, the Government's sheltered employment scheme for disabled people. I know only too well that compulsory competitive tendering had a huge effect on the employment of people with disabilities in that sector, so forgive me if I decline to take a tutorial in compassion from Conservative Members.

I shall now consider some principles on which we should all agree. First, parents are financially responsible for their children. That principle has been recognised whenever the House has discussed child support legislation. It would have even wider support if the operation of the Child Support Agency was seen to be fair and efficient. I am pleased that my hon. Friends have pledged to tackle that problem through a widespread review.

Secondly, the best form of welfare, and the one preferred by the great majority of people, is work. That principle has only been undermined by the inability of the Conservative party to reform the tax and benefits system to remove poverty traps and to ensure that work pays. Finally, the welfare system must help people through hard times and, where possible, help them support themselves independently once more. It should help people to contribute to and prosper in their retirement, so reaping the benefit of a lifetime in work. Let us not forget that our benefit system was created to help people through short-term hardship. It was only the Conservatives' lack of vision that consigned people to a lifetime of dependency.

Mr. Gibb: How does the hon. Lady envisage the abolition of tax credits for dividends paid to pension funds, which will extract £5 billion a year from our nation's private sector pension funds, helping people to enjoy their retirement?

Caroline Flint: I believe that that fiscal reform helps to reform the corporate tax system. We are setting out to ensure that the many people with private and personal pensions are protected by safeguards that guarantee that their pensions are in the hands of those who will invest them wisely. That will sit nicely alongside a number of reviews that will take the pension arrangements for everyone into the 21st century.

I am proud that new Labour is beginning to prioritise work over welfare and opportunity over waste. I am proud that we will give effect to our principles in the face of enormous social change. This Government will face up to the growing number of women who need and want to work, to the changing nature of family life and to the consequences of family breakdown. There are few jobs for life, and the tax and benefits system must meet the challenge of changing work patterns and frequent movements from job to job.

I have heard Opposition Members suggest that the Government should be embarrassed that we opposed Conservative benefit cuts in opposition, but are accepting them now we are in government. That taunt is nothing but hypocrisy of the highest order. As the previous Government offered nothing to lone parents—no job opportunities, no help, no new deal—but just blamed them for society's problems, it is quite right that they should now stand charged by Labour as offering nothing but increased child poverty.

If the Conservative Government had offered active support for lone parents, if they had offered a national minimum wage, if they had offered a new deal financed from a windfall levy, if they had offered a national child care strategy, they may have deserved Labour support, but Britain's lone parents and their children have had to wait too long for a Labour Government who will begin to support them in overcoming the obstacles to work and help them to do better for their families.

New Labour never said that social security cuts would be restored. In the past few days I have made it my business to check all the daily briefs that I received when I was a candidate, as well as our policy handbook and guide, and none of them contained that commitment. It was not contained in the manifesto on which our candidates fought and won the general election. Our pledge was to stay within spending limits rather than raise income tax and to begin a thorough reform of the welfare state.

I should remind hon. Members on both sides of the House who believe that we should have restored the cuts that a long line of people who come to my surgeries saw their living standards cut during the Tory years and would like help today if the public purse were deep enough. What we offered the public was to use the country's taxes better. We promised lone parents new pathways to work, a national child care strategy, better training and a proactive employment service. There have been many comments today—

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Caroline Flint: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is rising to say something.

There have been many comments today about our pilot schemes and how succesful or otherwise they have been. As one who has been working hard on the new deal this summer, I know that we are fighting against a backlog of cynicism and mistrust because our employment services have not been used effectively over the past 18 years. It is therefore no wonder that there may be a slow move forward, but it is important that the people who have come forward have gained something from the service. I am confident that they will spread the word to other people who have yet to come forward.

Mr. Letwin: As the hon. Lady develops her interesting line of argument, will she explain how the imposition of a national minimum wage, which will exclude from work some of the lone parents of whom she talks by pricing them out of it, will assist them?

Caroline Flint: There is no evidence that a national minimum wage, which will be set at a reasonable rate by the Low Pay Commission, will put people out of work. Conservatives argued that equal pay legislation would lead to women not taking up jobs, but that did not come to pass. As has been recognised by employers, the national minimum wage will raise the floor on wages so that

employers can be seen to offer a decent wage for a decent job. During the general election campaign, many employers, from both small and medium businesses, told me that they wanted to offer a decent wage, but were being undercut by other employers who thought that, if they provided poverty pay so that the Government could bail them out with family credit, that would be a nice little earner. We have moved on from that discussion.

Mr. Letwin: In the light of that interesting answer, will the hon. Lady explain the Deputy Prime Minister's views on the matter?

Caroline Flint: The Deputy Prime Minister supports my policy and I am sure that he will be able to answer any question that the hon. Gentleman may like to put. I am here to represent Back Benchers today—I might like to represent the Front Bench in the near future.

I believe strongly that the new Government deserve support and praise for their Budget to reform tax and benefits, their policy to reduce taxation for those on the lowest incomes and the proposed national minimum wage. Those measures will make a difference.

Some hon. Members have suggested that some of the jobs on offer to lone parents are not very attractive. Many people, particularly when they return to the job market after a long break, do not move into jobs that are the best paid, the most satisfactory or the most in keeping with their skills or experience. Many of my constituents do jobs that few in this House or, dare I say it, in the Press Gallery have experienced. They work for the sake of their families. In work, even lone parents will be, on average, £50 a week better off. Once in work, their chances of moving to better paid or more satisfying jobs, to find work with more suitable hours or to have training, will improve dramatically.

Mr. Webb: Will the hon. Lady confirm that the £50 figure that has been supplied to her is based on a sample of lone parents who are already working, not those who are not working? By definition, it was worth those lone parents' while working; if that were not true, they would not have had those jobs in the first place. As a group, they have, on average, lower child care costs and higher maintenance costs than other lone parents. Can the hon. Lady confirm that a lone parent who is currently unwaged would not, on average, receive £50 a week?

Caroline Flint: That is why we need a national minimum wage. It would seem strange to promote a policy that suggests that someone should not be better off in work than on benefit.

Others have argued that in lone parent families it is detrimental to the child's welfare for the only parent to move into work, but the evidence is clear: when asked, lone parents place child care at the top of their list of demands. They do so because they know that, with work, comes a better standard of living than would ever be provided on benefits, now or in the future. The feeling of self-worth that comes with work not only benefits the mother, but provides a role model for the child.

As we move into the next century, today's and tomorrow's lone parents have better prospects of a decent quality of life than they would ever have had under a Tory Government. In four years' time, this Government will stand judged by their record of support for lone parents, by the impact of the new deal and by the revolution that we shall see in the working of our social security system. I have every faith that the new Labour Government will pass that test.

6.6 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I am looking forward to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) joining the Government Front Bench, as is her wish. I believe that there will be a vacancy there shortly.

The Prime Minister has said:

"A strong society cannot be built on soft choices. It means fundamental reform of our welfare state, of the deal between citizen and society."

The Secretary of State's speech gave no sign of any such fundamental reform. It was an inadequate speech, designed to save her from the claws of many of her Back Benchers, but it failed to achieve even that. The Government will be unable to pass through the House any significant welfare reform because of the views of their Back Benchers.

The Government's welfare policy and welfare reforms have become all spin and hype and no substance. One such example involves the Taylor review of the merger—the integration—of tax and benefits. When that review was announced back in June, the press lauded it. *The Times* of 19 June stated:

"The commission, established under Martin Taylor by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, to look at reforming tax and benefits, may well examine the integration of tax and NIC."

The Sunday Times of 18 May stated:

"The aim will be to save billions in administration costs, cut down on people simultaneously paying tax with one hand and receiving benefits in the other . . . Tony Blair has agreed that Brown should 'consider all options' for reform, including ultimately merging the separate tax and benefit operations into a new streamlined system."

The *Financial Times* of 20 May stated:

"Mr. Taylor's appointment was welcomed by business, with tax experts predicting that the Barclays chief could recommend radical reform, including full-scale merger of the tax and benefit systems.

Mr. Taylor did little to dampen expectations".

Are the Government proposing the full-scale merger of the tax and benefit systems? Perhaps the Secretary of State or the Minister of State could respond to that point at the end of the debate.

On 20 May the *Financial Times* stated:

"As head of the government's taskforce, his job"—

Mr. Taylor's—

"appears 'almost infinite in scope'".

In reality, the review will be minuscule in scope. The truth is that the merging of the tax and benefits systems is an extremely difficult proposition and already signs are emerging that the Government are back-tracking on those over-hyped optimistic hopes about what would emerge from the Taylor review.

The 1986 social security reforms introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), did a great deal to smooth the passage from benefits into tax and removed almost all the marginal withdrawal rates in excess of 100 per cent. However, to go further than that and to attempt to integrate the tax and benefits systems is a huge task and

[Mr. Nick Gibb]

the Chancellor was wrong to announce the review in the way that he did. Patrick Minford says that to have a smooth transition from benefit into tax, one needs a personal allowance of about £10,000. Such a personal allowance would require a rise in income tax of about 10p in the pound, enormously increasing marginal tax rates in this country.

Earlier this year, Chris Kelly, the head of policy at the Department of Social Security, told the Select Committee on Social Security:

"it is quite important to realise that the fact there are two systems is not an accident. It is because it reflects the fact that they are pursuing different objectives to some extent".

Even Chris Kelly accepts that the two systems are totally incompatible: the benefits system requires detailed information about individuals' expenditure and needs, but the tax system requires little information—only details of income. The benefits system is measured on a weekly basis, whereas the tax system is assessed annually. The benefits system looks at families as a whole, whereas the tax system looks at individuals' income. How can the two systems be merged?

In the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) asked Chris Kelly:

"Is the option of a full integration"—

of the tax and benefits systems—

"being considered seriously by the Taylor Committee?"

The answer from the head of the DSS policy group was

"A complete integration, no."

Contrast that answer with all the hype surrounding the announcement of the Taylor review back in May. The Government have announced review after review, but no real policy initiatives.

Mr. Letwin: In the course of his speech, has my hon. Friend noticed that the Minister of State—until leaving the Chamber—was saying "Hear, hear" from a sedentary position and appearing to agree whole-heartedly with my hon. Friend's views?

Mr. Gibb: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. It is true that there are members of the Government who would like to see a fundamental review of the tax and benefits system and radical reforms emanating from the Government, but the fact is that the Government are beginning to recognise that they will not get any radical reforms through the House because of Labour Back Benchers.

The report that came out with the green Budget last week, "The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System", contained 44 pages of nothing new. All the report does is repeat the usual mantras of stability, flexible labour markets, education and welfare to work—all of which are important points, but we have heard them before. Only on page 43 of the report are Taylor and his review even mentioned. It is all hype and no reality. Even last Tuesday, the Chancellor was still hyping the report, saying:

"We have concluded that, to help people move from benefits to wages, nothing less than a comprehensive tax and benefit reform and the modernisation of the welfare state are now required."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 776.]

That is not what Chris Kelly thinks; nor is it the impression given by the documents.

There was hope in some quarters that the Government might be able to achieve some of the harder, more difficult, reforms that Conservative Governments had been unable to implement; but the reality is that nothing like that will happen because the Government cannot and will not be able to get their policy through the House.

If the Government cave in on the lone parent premium, or if they delay its abolition by a few months, it will be clear to the House and to the country that the Government are incapable of tackling the problems that they say they are intent on tackling, simply because their Back Benchers will not let them. They will be a lame duck Government in respect of welfare reform and the Secretary of State will be a lame duck Minister. They will trumpet and hype success, but the reality will be failure and inaction—failure in their new deal for lone parents.

Mr. Letwin: Would my hon. Friend care to join me in a speculative inquiry into whether being a lame duck is better or worse than being a drowning duck?

Mr. Gibb: I shall leave hon. Members to draw their own conclusions on that question.

Policies on the lone parent premium and the new deal have failed, with only one in 20 people responding to the letters. The Government have failed in their over-hyped policy to integrate tax and benefits and their proposed working families tax credit. After seven months in office, the Government have achieved nothing in welfare reform—it is all hype and no policy. With Labour Back Benchers beginning to emerge, Rip Van Winkle-like, from their deep slumber, it is highly unlikely that the Government will achieve anything in future.

6.15 pm

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): I shall be brief, so that other hon. Members can contribute to the debate.

When I saw that the Opposition had decided on a debate on welfare reform, pensions and disability, I asked myself what possible reason there might be for the Conservative party doing that. I thought that it might be so that Conservative Members could come to the House and apologise for the mess in which they left the country. Perhaps they wanted to apologise for the doubling of the number of those on means-tested benefits from one in 12 to one in six. Perhaps they wanted to apologise for the fact that now one in five households are workless. Perhaps they wanted to apologise for the fact that inequality has increased faster in this country than in any other major industrialised country. Perhaps they wanted to apologise for their failure to reform a complicated and slow system of benefits that encourages dependency, not work, and that traps people—

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jacqui Smith: No. I will not take an intervention from the hon. Lady, because she has only just turned up and I am short of time.

I thought that perhaps Conservative Members wanted to apologise for their fundamental failure to get to grips with the pension system that they implemented during

their 18 years in government, but that left current and future pensioners insecure. Perhaps they intended to come and apologise for imposing value added tax on fuel and thereby making many pensioners fear that they could not afford to pay their bills.

Perhaps they intended to apologise for having significantly failed to introduce comprehensive disability rights legislation and for having assumed consistently throughout their period in government that those with disabilities could not and did not want to work. Perhaps they intended to apologise for the fact that there are now 1 million lone parents supporting 2 million children on income support; and for the fact that the Conservative Government stigmatised those lone parents and stranded them on benefits that can never be the long-term alternative to the higher incomes that those lone parents want. However, as we have discovered today, the Opposition do not intend to apologise for any of the mess in which they left the country.

When thinking about the problems to be debated, I went back to my casework and looked at the examples that have come up in my constituency over the past seven months. I was looking for some idea of the problems that people face and the solutions that the Government can implement. The first point I recognised was that no problem is solely about benefits—we cannot think of anybody as being simply a benefits claimant. All the difficulties faced by those on benefits stem from a variety of causes and it is crucial that the Government adopt a multi-departmental approach to tackling those difficulties.

That is why I welcome the introduction of the social exclusion unit and the way in which it will work through several Departments to solve problems.

One such problem relates to young unemployed people in my constituency. There is the young unemployed man who cannot get a job because he lacks the reading and writing skills necessary for a job. He is also trapped in inadequate housing on housing benefit. I appreciate what the Government have already done in terms of the new deal, which has been enthusiastically received by the Employment Service in Worcestershire, which in turn is grateful for the opportunity to put people back to work instead of having to act as benefits police—as the service did under the former Government.

I also welcome the education White Paper, because it will tackle educational under-achievement. Welcome, too, is the release of capital receipts which will begin to solve the difficulties with housing encountered by so many people.

One unemployed man who came to see me said that he could not afford to take a job for £3 an hour because he would lose too much benefit to make that worth doing. The only way to solve that is to get rid of the benefit and tax traps by introducing a minimum wage and—dare I suggest it?—by looking to introduce a 10p starting rate of tax, so as to get away from the punitive marginal rates of tax that such people face.

Mr. Webb *rose—*

Jacqui Smith: No, I am short of time.

Then there is the lone parent who wants to work but who cannot because the CSA has unsuccessfully chased up the absent parent for support. This lone parent cannot receive the child care that she needs or get the training that she wants. But the Government have clearly shown their commitment to helping such lone parents, through their review of the Child Support Agency and through the extra money that they have put into child care and training.

It is obvious that there is a great deal of work to be done still, and in a variety of Departments. It is, however, politically opportunistic of the Opposition to suggest all of a sudden that they have the answers and that they are compassionate. As we have seen today, they have no answers; they simply want to make cheap party political points at the expense of the unemployed, the lone parents, the pensioners and the disabled in my constituency. It is the current Government who are providing the answers and whom I trust to give these people hope for the future.

6.21 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): The essence of this debate can be rapidly summed up. There are many Conservatives who welcomed the radicalism with which we believed the Government were entering on these matters, and who whole-heartedly accepted the good intent behind much that the Government are trying to do. Probably all of us welcome the idea of people moving back into work—of people moving off welfare—and the idea of finding suitable long-term pension arrangements. These are all common aims in our parties.

The question we are debating today, however, is whether the programme that the Government have so far brought before the public shows the least sign of achieving any of these admirable aims; or whether, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) suggested, it is all a mess and a muddle.

We have heard much from Labour today about the problems that they attribute to the previous Government, but little in defence of the progress that they ought to believe has so far been made by this Government. There are essentially two strands in the present Government's efforts: one relates to non-contributory and income-related benefits, the other to pensions.

In relation to the first class, there has been a devastatingly accurate critique of the Government's efforts to move lone parents back into work—efforts on which the whole of the rest of their arguments depend. That critique was not made by an opportunistic Conservative Member; it was not made with any political intent. It was made out of deep conviction and real knowledge by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on the basis of her real understanding of the problems that her constituents face in moving back to work.

It is no answer to the hon. Lady's critique to talk about out-of-school child care, because, as she pointed out devastatingly enough, it is often the period outside school terms that causes the problem. It is no answer to talk about the amount of child care on offer because, as she pointed out devastatingly enough, in many of our inner cities the costs of child care far exceed the money on offer. It is no surprise to Conservative Members to find that the evidence so far available to the British public about how well the lone parent welfare-to-work system is working shows that it is not working. Ninety-five per cent. of those to whom letters were written have not found a job, and there is not a shred of evidence that the 5 per cent. who have would not have found one in any case.

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

I should like to turn briefly to pensions, where a great opportunity has surely been sadly missed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) introduced, shortly before the election, proposals that would have led to the long-term funding of the basic state pension.

In place of that, after several months of this Government, we have so far had a set of 65 questions about a so-called stakeholder pension, none of whose details have been developed. Nor is there the least sign of how those stakeholder pensions will be developed in a way that exceeds the expectations that people legitimately hold of the private sector pension schemes which already provide people in Britain with £750 billion-worth of private pensions.

In short, there is no funding of the state pension, and no alternate system sketched in sufficient detail to be worthy of the name "system". What there has been in its place is a raid on private sector pensions and a pushing of vast numbers of people back into the unfunded SERPS scheme, which the Government now tell us they intend to keep.

So whether it concerns the move from welfare to work and lone parents, or income-related and non-contributory benefits, or pensions, the Government's sole achievement has been to move a large proportion of the population back into unfunded state pensions, thereby wholly missing the opportunity to save this country from a future liability that it will not be able to bear. Wonderful though the Government's ambitions may be, the reality of their programme to date has been mess and muddle, nothing more.

6.25 pm

Mr. Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I have never heard so much rubbish in all my life as I have listened to for the past three hours from those hypocrites opposite me—

Mr. Burns: Withdraw!

Mr. King: I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that is not unparliamentary language. Indeed, I am only quoting a previous Conservative Prime Minister, who referred to you as "organised hypocrisy". That is what we have witnessed this afternoon again. It is what we witnessed time and again when you were in power during the past 18 years. You did nothing for disabled people or for lone parents; you certainly did nothing for pensioners. Over the past six months, however, the nation has been asked to believe in a Damascene conversion of your party: you are now the friends of the pensioner and of the lone parent—

Hon. Members: You?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

Mr. King: I do apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for not addressing you directly. I was of course referring to Conservative Members. I shall try not to fall into that trap again.

Let us look at what we inherited from the Conservatives. We said from the start that we would operate within the constrictions of the Budget bequeathed to us by the Conservatives for the first two years—a Budget that included £395 million worth of social security cuts, which we also undertook to see through. The difference between us and the Tories is that we are putting in place a host of positive measures to help the groups of people who will be affected and to bring about a responsible and responsive welfare state that assists people back into work. That was, after all, the whole point of the welfare state in the first place.

Our positive strategy comprises help and advice for people searching for jobs. It will also help those seeking work to receive training, if necessary, to prepare them for the first step back into employment.

We are putting in place a proper child care strategy that will enable the £300 million for lone parents—

Mr. Letwin: If the hon. Gentleman was not asleep during my speech, perhaps he would like to answer the question: does he deny the critique offered by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who has suggested that it is not a proper child care strategy but one that will fail?

Mr. King: I do apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I fell asleep while Opposition Members were speaking. They certainly tried the patience of all of us this afternoon, but I tried to stay awake, and yes I do agree with my hon. Friend on this side, thank you very much. *[Interruption.]* I agree on this side, that we are going to make these proposals work. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but we have been in government for seven months. The proposals are still very much in their infancy—they do not come into full play until next year—and already Opposition Members are undermining, or trying to undermine, a positive strategy to help people who are trapped in poverty by their cynical manoeuvring and scaremongering today. It is scandalous for a responsible Opposition to behave so irresponsibly.

I will go back to—

Mr. Webb: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: No; I am sorry. We are running out of time.

We are actually going to assist lone parents with child care after school. A million places will be available, not just during term time, but during the holiday period, when those parents need that sort of assistance. The system will be flexible. At the moment, there are slightly more than 3,000 such schemes. We shall provide 30,000 such schemes, to give lone parents a true choice: a choice of participating in the job market, a choice of leading fulfilling lives in which they can hold their head up and provide for their children instead of being driven into poverty by the Conservatives' failed policies. It is disingenuous of Conservative Members to speak about our failed policies after only seven months, when they had 18 years in which they totally failed the groups that I am referring to.

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) heralded the fact that we have the best funded system of private pensions in Europe. Well, we ended up with that marvellously funded system of private pensions because the Conservatives failed state pensioners by reducing their benefit by £20 a week,

and those people were driven to seek privately funded pensions—and, sadly, the Conservatives even let them down then.

6.31 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The debate has focused primarily on lone parents and pensions. People with disabilities have also been mentioned, and, as the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman on disability, I shall focus my comments on disability.

Before I do so, I remind the Secretary of State and the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), that my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) asked the Secretary of State a range of specific questions, to most of which we have not received answers.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will ensure that we receive specific answers to those questions. They are not posed because only we are interested in the answers. People outside the House are also interested.

Let me refresh the Secretary of State's memory. She would not answer the question when she was asked why she was implementing a policy regarding lone parents that she does not agree with and is on the record as saying that she does not agree with. She would not give a categorical answer to the question about the professionalism and the training of those who will be trained in child care. We should like to know exactly what the age group will be and what training those people will undergo.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green posed four specific questions about disability. He asked whether those who have been awarded disability living allowance for life will be able to assume that that means just what it says—for life. In the review of disability benefits, will the Minister put at rest the minds of those people who currently receive those benefits, by telling them that the Government do not intend to tax benefits that are currently not taxed?

Will the Minister give information about the 40 organisations that the Secretary of State has claimed from the Dispatch Box that she has consulted? If I understood her reply to the House today, she was referring to organisations that she has consulted about welfare-to-work measures, when the specific question that she was asked—a very similar question to the question asked to the Prime Minister last Wednesday—was not about who had been consulted about welfare-to-work measures, but about who had been consulted about the review of disability benefits. That is the question which we want answered.

Before I continue, it may be pertinent to declare three non-remunerated interests. I serve on the council of the National Autistic Society, I am national vice-president of the Alzheimer's Disease Society and I have a dependent relative in receipt of disability living allowance for life.

The Labour party manifesto has been waved about a lot during the debate, especially from the Treasury Bench. Labour Back Benchers have referred to it, and I want to quote a few passages, because if this is to be our bible—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I see that I have a captive audience. If you are sitting quietly, then I will begin.

On page 5, in the section at the start of the manifesto, which bears the signature of the Prime Minister, he says of the contract with the people:

"There will be no increase in the basic or top rates of . . . tax."

Will the Minister confirm tonight that that means just what it says, and that the tax of people in receipt of disability benefits will not be increased because non-taxed benefits become taxed?

The Prime Minister also says:

"I pledge to Britain a government which shares their hopes, which understands their fears"

in reference to vulnerable people. I should like to share with Ministers tonight some of the hopes and fears expressed in correspondence that I have received from throughout the country from people who are in receipt of disability benefits.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I will in a second. I want to make progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) quoted from a letter that he had received. I shall quote briefly from some of the letters that I have received in the past week or two.

A retired teacher in Mid Glamorgan says:

"I . . . refer to the stopping of the Disability Living Allowance, this money is a lifeline to disabled persons such as myself. I really believe that if this Bill is passed it will cause vast problems for disabled people".

From my constituency, a person who retired last year writes:

"There can be no doubt that the peace of mind of millions of disabled people will have been seriously threatened by the government's proposals.

"I have . . . been a member of the Labour party for over fourteen years. I have to say that I feel a sense of betrayal by the party over this issue, as do, I am sure, many other disabled and chronically sick people."

I received a copy of a letter sent to the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with a little handwritten note to me attached, which says:

"Will you please read this letter. I have written to express my hurt and sense of betrayal".

The letter concludes:

"I choose to use my benefits to employ a private cleaning firm to blitz my Home every few weeks and to make a relative an allowance to wash my hair, cut my nails etc. My Husband resigned a highly responsible job and took less hours and pay to be more available to me and I have a very supportive Daughter. I will not have strangers attending to my personal needs. My body may not be of much use but my brain still functions and above all I still have my pride."

I spent most of this morning dealing with a constituency case. A constituent from Honiton in Devon had just had the higher component of disability living allowance removed; it included the mobility component. That means that he expects that this week someone will collect the car that he uses to get about, because the payment of that benefit pays for his car.

Caroline Flint: That is not the Government's fault. We all have such cases.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady may mouth all she likes. I am determined to fight this on behalf of my

[Mrs. Browning]

constituent, because the removal of disability living allowance and the mobility component is something which the Government—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): The hon. Lady has no idea.

Mrs. Browning: I have every idea, and I say to the hon. Gentleman, as a carer for someone with this benefit, I will fight it, fight it and fight it on behalf of people who are vulnerable and who depend on that benefit. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady may say that I did not fight it, but I assure her that I did. Anyone who looks at my track record on what I have said and fought for in the House will see that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We can have only one speaker at a time.

Mrs. Browning: Those benefits are there now. Labour Members should take a careful look at the benefits that were introduced and secured up until 1 May. Now, we are receiving letter after letter from worried, frightened people—*[Interruption.]* I invite the Minister to put the record straight tonight. The Secretary of State refused to give assurances today, as did the Prime Minister during Question Time last Wednesday. If what I am saying is wrong, if it is all based on rumour, tonight is the Government's opportunity to say clearly that disability living allowance for life means just that; that such benefits will not be means-tested or taxed; and that people can go to sleep tonight feeling much more comfortable than they do now.

Mr. Gorrie: The hon. Lady has raised the tone of the debate considerably during the last minute or two. Does she agree that the Opposition made a mistake in framing their motion by criticising the Government for reneging on their policies? Surely the thrust of the Opposition's argument should be that, from their point of view, the Labour Government are adopting Tory policies. If the Opposition had adopted the advice of the Bible and taken joy in a sinner that repenteth, they might have attracted more interest in the debate among Conservative Back Benchers.

Mrs. Browning: We will support Labour policies such as the move to enable more people with disabilities to get back into work. However, the Government are promising to do that while also threatening to remove the mobility component of the DLA—

Mr. Andy King: The hon. Lady is scaremongering.

Mrs. Browning: If I am scaremongering, when I sit down in four minutes' time the Minister will have the opportunity to say categorically that what I have said is wrong and that the Government will not do it. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head—I hope that his hon. Friend the Minister will not disappoint him tonight.

Mr. Alan Howarth: What evidence does the hon. Lady have?

Mrs. Browning: My answer is to quote from correspondence I have received from organisations that have been involved in the so-called consultation on disability benefits. The Disability Benefits Consortium represents the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People; Disability Alliance; Disablement Income Group; and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation. The consortium writes:

"Disability organisations are concerned about the lack of clarity and openness about consultation and decision-making processes around these reviews. On disability benefits, there will not be any Green Paper or formal consultation before key decisions are likely to be made. A series of seminars to discuss options on 'managing' expenditure on disability benefits have been arranged by some disability organisations at the request of Baroness Hollis. It is important to note that the disability organisations attending these seminars do not regard them in any way as part of a formal consultation process."

The Royal National Institute for the Blind wrote to me only today saying:

"RNIB have never before sent out a briefing to MPs containing this level of detail. This reflects the seriousness with which we regard the threat to benefits which provide a vital lifeline to those who are often amongst your poorest constituents, and those who seldom make their feelings known to their Member of Parliament."

The benefit integrity project involves people—we would welcome information on their training and experience—knocking on the doors of those who currently receive the higher componentof disability living allowance and mobility allowance. RADAR writes—

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): This is unbelievable.

Mrs. Browning: It certainly is unbelievable that so many organisations are so concerned that they feel they have to write to Members of Parliament.

RADAR, an organisation well known to many hon. Members, writes:

"Organisations which had met the Department in May"—

to talk about the benefit integrity project—

"believed they would be discussing findings from the . . . review."

Instead, they were informed that the project was already under way. The organisations that went to the Department included Action for Blind People, Disability Alliance, Mencap, RADAR and the RNIB. Those organisations went to the Department believing that they were part of a consultation, only to find that the decision had already been made and their views were not required, but that they could have an input into some sort of management.

To cap it all, the Lord Chancellor's Department is considering proposals to abolish legal aid for personal injury claims—another move by the Government which will clearly have an effect on people with disabilities and will cause them a great deal of distress.

Having heard from those organisations and having read out a small sample of letters from, I remind the Government, the people—not the people's banquet or the people's lottery, but the real people who have very real needs—I will conclude with some final words from the Labour manifesto. It claims:

"Britain will be better with new Labour."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] And the band played, "Believe it if you like." The manifesto said:

"New Labour is the political arm of none other than the British people as a whole. Our values are the same: the equal worth of all, with no one cast aside; fairness and justice within strong communities."

There is nothing fair or just about the way that this Government treat the most vulnerable people in our society.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Alan Howarth): This has been a valuable debate, albeit all too short. I especially welcome the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King). The commitment of my hon. Friends to social justice and to an intelligent and humane modernisation of the welfare state contrasts with the absence of commitment to that project and the absence of ideas that have been apparent on the Conservative Benches.

Is it really surprising if I recall that the Rowntree inquiry into the distribution of income and wealth said that between 1979 and 1992, the poorest 20 to 30 per cent. of families failed to share in the growth of prosperity in the nation? Between 1975 and 1992, the hourly wages of the lowest paid fell. Society was increasingly polarised between work-rich and work-poor households. Society was polarised in housing tenure so that by the end of the life of the Conservative Government, 75 per cent. of people in local authority or housing association housing were among the poorest 20 per cent. of the population. That failure to enable the most disadvantaged in our society to share in the growth in the nation's wealth was a central dereliction.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley reminded us, the figures for households below average income show that whereas the top 10 per cent. of income earners increased their wealth by two thirds, the bottom 10 per cent. saw their income fall by 13 per cent. Under the Conservative Government, the rich got richer while the poor got poorer.

No one could seriously argue that it is not appropriate for a new Government taking office after 18 years in opposition to ask searching questions about the patterns of spending and administration that they have inherited. During the past 18 years, the previous Government denied that the state had a constructive and responsible role to play in welfare.

In the last declining years of the Conservative Administration, welfare policy was driven by a devastating triple combination of emergency surgery to the economy, a desperate attempt to create fiscal headroom to make it possible to reduce taxes for those already comfortably off, in a futile attempt to win an election, and a wholesale dismantling of agencies of the state, again not driven by an intelligent or humane analysis, but hypnotised by a mantra that said, "Public bad; private good."

Ministers in the previous Administration were apt to characterise the welfare state's clients as feckless, but surely it was those Ministers who, holding high office in an elected Government, yet repudiating the responsibility to create an enabling state, were feckless, which had the vast and destructive consequence of humiliating and demoralising some of society's most vulnerable members.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman has only just come into the Chamber. I will not give way to him.

Conservative Members put their faith, or perhaps found a comfortable retreat, in the trickle-down theory of wealth. The theory did not work. In the centenary year of Aneurin Bevan's birth, it has never been more important for the welfare state truly to meet the aims that it should have. The new deal for unemployed people is among our major undertakings in the reform and modernisation of the welfare state. I will not detail the new deal's arrangements because they are well known, but I shall draw to the House's attention certain characteristics of the new deal.

The Conservative party preens itself on the falls in unemployment in recent years and, of course, we all welcome those. Perhaps it is a matter of relative indifference that they occurred not by design but by accident. A previous Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer avowed that unemployment was a price worth paying, and it began to fall only because the previous Government were hurled out of the exchange rate mechanism.

If Conservative Members think that there are grounds for complacency, that we do not need the new deal and that it will do simply to allow economic and social events to take their course, they ignore the fact that unemployment is still 50 per cent. higher than it was in 1979. It is 50 per cent. higher among young people than among other people. Male unemployment is two thirds higher than it was when the Conservative party came into office, and long-term unemployment is more than two thirds higher. Unemployment among members of ethnic minorities is particularly shaming, running at twice the rate of other communities—or even more.

Whatever the phase of the economic cycle and however strong the economic recovery, too many people and communities are never floated off the rocks. It is only right and responsible, both on the ground of humanity and in terms of the economy—enabling us to have the benefit of the contribution that those people could make to the economy and saving the economic and social costs of exclusion—that we should make this big undertaking through the new deal, which is qualitatively and quantitatively different, and better than anything that the previous Government ever did.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has made available £3.5 billion from the windfall levy, a redistribution of windfall gains to people who have been the victims of economic change. It is eminently justified. With those resources, we shall be able to provide better, more sustained and more effective help to people who are most at risk in our society than has ever been given before.

Two features of the new deal are particularly important and encouraging. One is the principle that everyone should be served by a personal adviser, a member of the Employment Service staff. Under the previous Government, the service was required to be bureaucratic, formulaic and procedure driven. Its staff were not allowed to relate as individual human beings to clients or to give the imaginative and practical help that unemployed people need. There has been an immense welcome among the service's staff for our proposals. There has been an enormous release of energy in the service and among those with whom it develops the partnerships of the new deal.

That principle of partnership is the second feature to which I draw the House's attention. The Employment Service has enormous strengths. It is the only organisation

[Mr. Howarth]

with the reach and presence throughout the country to be able to deliver the new deal, but the service needs to work in partnership with other organisations—with local authorities, training and enterprise councils, voluntary organisations and employers' organisations—whose strengths complement those of the service.

That is happening. We are not being prescriptive from the centre about the nature of the partnerships that should be formed locally, but we are insisting on that principle of partnership. There will be far-reaching consequences from the application of those two principles: case working and partnership.

Labour Members are proud of the welfare state, but we acknowledge that if there has been a besetting inadequacy, it has been that the person in poverty—the unemployed or disabled person—has been required to do what is convenient to the administration, rather than the administration serving the welfare state's client.

The typical experience is that the person in need has to embark on a melancholy trudge around different agencies at different addresses, with different rules, different accountabilities, different jargon and different procedures. It has been a bleak and perplexing experience. If we can achieve a better integration of services—a more holistic approach to the activity of the welfare state and to the service of people who should be its beneficiaries—we will have learnt much and developed in important respects.

Mrs. May: The Minister has said much about the new deal, about which we also heard from the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women. Is he going to answer the questions that were posed by my hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) relating to disability benefits? In doing so, perhaps the Minister could explain how it will help people if the Government pay disability benefits to local authorities and not to individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Lady and too many other Conservative Members have been guilty of recycling and putting into more emphatic currency a series of rumours that they know are distressing to disabled people. I do not for one second doubt the strong personal commitment to disabled people's interests of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). She and I have, from time to time, fought shoulder to shoulder in certain causes on behalf of disabled people.

As I have said, any Government who come into office after 18 years in opposition and find a system that is such a muddle and a hotch-potch, and which so grievously fails to support the people whom we all wish it to support, are not only entitled, but have a duty, to ask searching questions.

The comprehensive spending reviews that are being conducted throughout government are designed to ensure that the Labour Government achieve the purposes that they have set themselves: to modernise Britain and to create a more just society. Hon. Members can be assured that those will be our criteria. Those factors will be paramount in any decision that is eventually taken.

As and when there are propositions for reform of the benefits system or of other aspects of the welfare state, we will consider what sort of consultation on which to embark. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton can be assured that we are not going to do the sort of terrible things that are being rumoured and which she has put into renewed circulation.

Mrs. Browning *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I have very little time. I am not prepared to have my speech hijacked by Conservative Members who want me to dance to their tune by answering a series of questions that they want to ask for political advantage. I will not play that game.

Our policy goes well beyond what the previous Administration achieved in establishing proper civil rights for disabled people. Our manifesto commitment is to comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. We shall fulfil that commitment.

Why are the Conservatives sitting there? They have no idea what they are there to do. They have suffered their worst electoral defeat ever, but they are heading further and further towards the wilder shores of xenophobia, isolationist nationalism and social disintegration in the name of the free market. Apparently, that is to be known as Conservative populism. I hardly think that it is popular.

The British people like their leaders to appeal to their better nature and to their more responsible selves. Have the Tories not learnt that they do not have the remotest chance of governing unless they place themselves somewhere near the centre of the political spectrum, connect with the mainstream of national life and remember the deep desire of the British people for fairness and that we should be one nation?

The affectation and opportunism that we have seen from the Conservatives will not persuade any unemployed person, any pensioner, any disabled person or any lone parent that the Tories care or have rethought their policies and would act differently if they came to office.

The self-indulgent pursuit of dogma ends up hurting innocent people. It ill becomes the Conservatives to wail for the plight of the welfare state when they all but destroyed it. The new Labour Government will re-create it as a modern welfare state, fit for a just and thriving society. I ask my hon. Friends to reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 131, Noes 336.

Division No. 101] **[7.1 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Butterfill, John
Amess, David	Cash, William
Arbuthnot, James	Chope, Christopher
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Baldry, Tony	Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Bercow, John	Collins, Tim
Beresford, Sir Paul	Cormack, Sir Patrick
Blunt, Crispin	Cran, James
Body, Sir Richard	Curry, Rt Hon David
Boswell, Tim	Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*	Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia	Day, Stephen
Brazier, Julian	Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter	Duncan, Alan
Browning, Mrs Angela	Duncan Smith, Iain
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*	Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Burns, Simon	

Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Whittingdale and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burden, Richard
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin

Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McFall and
Mr. Graham Allen.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government for the progress that has already been made on reforming the welfare state to tackle social exclusion and welfare dependency; backs the Government's strategy of offering hope, opportunity and a better standard of living for people through its welfare to work programmes for lone parents, disabled people and those with long-standing illness, young unemployed people and the long-term unemployed, and the National Childcare Strategy, in contrast to the previous Government's approach of writing millions of people off to a life dependent on benefit; welcomes the Government's determination to ensure security in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners through the pensions review and the action the Government has already taken to get help to Britain's pensioners, particularly the poorest pensioners, by cutting VAT on fuel and through the £20 winter fuel payment to pensioner households and the £50 winter fuel payment to pensioner households on Income Support; and congratulates the Government for keeping its promises and delivering its manifesto commitments to the British people.

Burdens on Business

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I beg to move,

That this House regrets the damage to business and jobs represented by the actions and inactions of this Government; condemns the broken promises to the coal industry, the lack of clarity over ministerial duties, the persistent tax raids on business and the threats posed by new legislation; and urges the President of the Board of Trade to set out a clear energy, competition and business policy that is in the interests of British companies.

Labour is bad for business. So far, the Government have overtaxed and over-regulated business. They now threaten it with much damaging legislation. The Department of Trade and Industry, under the President of the Board of Trade, meddles, muddles and prevaricates on every issue. What a pleasure it is to see the right hon. Lady for once in her place. I have waited many a long week for the opportunity to debate, at last, something with her.

While the DTI meddles, the Treasury goes stealthily about its business, taking money away from the successful and the hard-working.

I love that work of fiction, the Labour party manifesto. I remind the House of what it said about taxation:

"New Labour will establish a new trust on tax with the British people."

I am delighted that Labour used the words "new trust", because lots of trusts have been set up by Labour Members and Ministers. Some of them, we are told, do not avoid taxes. They are in Jersey and Guernsey for the sake of the sea air.

The manifesto continues—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not stray from the motion before us.

Mr. Redwood: Perish the thought. I wish to talk about taxation as one of the principal burdens on business.

The Labour manifesto says:

"The principles that will underpin our tax policy are clear: to encourage employment . . . to promote savings and investment".

It goes on to say that new Labour is not about high taxes.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): While the right hon. Gentleman is referring to manifestos, I ask him to cast his mind back to his own manifesto when he ran for the Tory party leadership. The words "trade and industry" did not appear in his manifesto. Why should we take him seriously tonight?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman should listen to my powerful case about the way in which the Government are letting down business. He might like to remember that, before I came to the House, I chaired an industrial company and was a director of a merchant bank. I had substantial commercial and industrial interests in those days, which gave me considerable experience. When I became a Minister, I gave them all up.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I note that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the tax policy in the Labour party manifesto. Does he agree with the Labour party's proposed cut in corporation tax? Will he vote against it?

Mr. Redwood: As I shall demonstrate, the Labour party is not proposing to reduce the corporation tax burden on companies in the next four years; it is proposing a swingeing increase in corporation tax during this Parliament. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has not done his homework on the Budget arithmetic, as he walked straight into that one in a rather unfortunate way. I suggest that he sends it back to the spin doctor for rewriting.

The glorious summer of Conservative economic success that Labour inherited is quickly being made winter by the Government. The business trees are bring stripped of their leaves and buds in the hurricane of measures coming before us. The Chancellor plunders and blunders on in the name of converging with high-unemployment continental Europe. The Government should listen. My hon. Friends know that this is true. The outgoing Conservative Government forecast total taxes this year of £282,100 million. Labour told us that there was no need to change Conservative tax and spending plans, apart from introducing the windfall tax. I am sure that Labour Members said that in debates that took place during the general election.

Last week, in the Budget forecast made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we were told that we would pay £10,100 million more this year in taxation than that set out in the Conservative plans. A massive back-door smash-and-grab raid has been carried out in just seven months, and much of the ensuing burden will fall on the business community.

Worse is to come. Next year, the country will be expected to pay £12,500 million more than it would have paid under the outgoing Conservative plans for that year. Over the next four years, business will be required to pay five years' worth of corporation tax. That is an increase of almost £2,000 million a year. Meanwhile, business will also be paying the pensions tax, the utilities tax, the telephone tax and the renewable energy tax while bracing itself for more taxes on the business motorist, on lorry transport, on sand and gravel extraction, on oil production and on much else besides.

At this point in the economic cycle, with a lot of money around and with job shortages in the most prosperous parts of the country, the Government should be encouraging savings and investment. Savings reduce the spending and inflation pressures on individuals, while investment would expand our capacity to make the goods that people want. After all, that was the promise included in the Labour party's manifesto.

Instead, the Government are penalising both savings and investment. Pension savings are taxed and tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans are to be abolished. Industrial businesses are to see their cash flows reduced by the avaricious Treasury, which will cut the moneys that they have available to spend on new equipment.

[Mr. Redwood]

Meanwhile, there have been five interest rate rises from the party that said that it would keep interest rates as low as possible. The art of the possible is not a good one for the new Labour Government. It is no wonder that the interest rate rises were needed when the Chancellor of the Exchequer was so busy taxing savings. The right hon. Gentleman had to mop up the money in another way.

As a result, exporters face an uphill struggle. It is difficult exporting anything at current exchange rates. Industry is locked in a vice of higher interest rates and a higher value of sterling. It appears that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), thinks that it is a good idea to yawn at this point. The hon. Gentleman should talk to British businesses, which are suffering as a result of the measures to which I have referred. He might learn a great deal if he talked to some real business men instead of being locked into his Department worrying about the next spin doctor attack.

Last Friday, I visited an exporter at Milton Keynes. He told me that, to stay in foreign markets, 70 per cent. of the components that he had to use were imported. Two years ago, 90 per cent. of his components were British.

I visited a textile plant recently. I was told that it was operating at half-capacity for want of overseas orders. The Government do not care and they do not know what to do. They merely press on with their high interest rates and a high-value sterling policy.

We have already read that United States investors may pull the plug on our electricity industry following the utilities tax and the regulatory threats that the President of the Board of Trade is making. Labour Members will learn that one company's grant is another company's tax increase and that taxing the successful is not the best way to produce growth in the economy and to increase employment.

Most businesses are suffering, but a favoured few do a little better from the Government. For example, BP has been granted a new 1,200 MW gas power station without any explanation. When did Labour drop its policy of saying, "No new gas power stations"? Rolls-Royce in Derby has been quickly granted £100 million of launch aid. I am delighted that the constituency of the President of the Board of Trade is to be looked after, but may we know what representations the right hon. Lady made and whether other companies will receive equal treatment?

Formula one, with 8,000 jobs at risk, is qualifying for help. It has policy reversed in its favour while the coal industry, with 50,000 jobs at risk, has policy changed against its interests. May we know what has happened to the six-point plan of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)—when he was in opposition—to save the industry?

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade did not take the decision to award Rolls-Royce not £100 million in launch aid, but £200 million. I have a Rolls-Royce plant in my constituency, and I know for a fact that my right hon. Friend had nothing to do with the decision to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Redwood: I did not allege that the right hon. Lady took the decision. I know that she would not do that. I said that I wanted to know what representations she would have made as a constituency Member, and whether other companies would receive the same treatment and opportunity as the company concerned. I welcome the success of that Derby business, but we in the House must ensure that things are fairly and properly done, and the Government have not been following fair and proper process in all too many cases.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government seem to be extremely sensitive on this issue? When I tabled a question to ask why the grant was given, the President of the Board of Trade replied that she had not been involved in the grant. That did not answer the question. Was not the right hon. Lady over-defensive before an allegation was even made?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. As Ministers are so secretive about all their doings, it is only natural that they become jumpy when we ask questions. If they were more open, they would avoid many more problems. The more secretive they are, the more suspicions build up and the more questions we shall table.

Those who want to know why we are worried about process could well study the question of formula one. We are told that the £1 million given by Mr. Ecclestone to Labour was unconnected with Mr. Ecclestone seeing the Prime Minister. We are told that that was not why the Prime Minister personally intervened to break a manifesto promise to save some jobs.

I contrast that position with that of the coal industry, which I think has not given £1 million to Labour. Its representatives have found it extremely difficult to see the Prime Minister. We now see Labour breaking its pre-election promises on better treatment for the coal industry and destroying jobs.

Perhaps the President of the Board of Trade would like to explain why two industries are treated in such a way. Let us have a system whereby anyone with a reasonable grievance may get to see the responsible Minister or Prime Minister, whoever may be dealing with the matter, without any suggestion of any impropriety occurring. We need a fair and open system. I had to intervene on the Minister without Portfolio in a television programme, to enable representatives of sports other than formula one to see the Prime Minister, who had not been able to see him on the formula one issue.

We are fortunate in having a Department of Trade and Industry memorandum in circulation, which speaks volumes about the Government's way of handling the coal industry issue and many others, which I am sure are the subject of similar memorandums. The memorandum does not tell us anything about what the President of the Board of Trade could do to save the coal industry. Instead, it tells us how the right hon. Lady could handle the presentation of the impending disaster under her policy.

The memorandum takes as given the depressing idea that the entire coal industry will be shut down within the next 10 years. It then goes on to propose how the media might be persuaded that that is a good idea. To do that would take more than an army of the finest spin consultants in the land. The Government will discover the painful way that there are some things that even spinning cannot make palatable.

The memorandum tells the President of the Board of Trade:

"There is an expectation that deep mined coal will effectively end within ten years unless the government intervenes to protect it by changing its environmental and energy policies."

I look forward to hearing the right hon. Lady's remarks on that view of herself and her Department.

Instead of discussing how policies might be changed to help the industry, the memorandum then discusses how the existing bad policies can be presented to the public and press as inevitable. The idea is ventured that a low-profile reaction could work. It is proposed that the argument be left to the generators and mining companies. We are told:

"We have also found these arguments on commercial negotiations between companies useful when declining bids for ministerial interviews, so preventing the 'we asked the minister to appear but he declined' statement."

That is not the only way in which Ministers have refused interviews or have refused to debate this and other subjects.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Is it not the case that under the previous Government, the coal industry was emasculated, decimated and destroyed? As Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Gentleman did nothing to defend Welsh jobs. Is it not a disgrace that he has the audacity to come to the House and to make such suggestions?

Mr. Redwood: That is another failure by the spin doctors; the hon. Gentleman should do his homework. He would then discover that I fought hard to allow the miners and the employees of the Tower colliery to buy their pit. I, like them, thought that they could make a success of it. I am pleased to say that, through their efforts, that is exactly what they did. I confess that I intervened in the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure that they had that opportunity, and I am proud of having done so. It is a lot more than the President of the Board of Trade has done for the industry since she has been in her post.

Fortunately, the newspapers are much wiser than the DTI gives them credit for being. They have seen that the Government have options and have some responsibility. It is a pity that the BBC played into the hands of the DTI's cynical media manipulation. It turned down the coal story for the "Today" programme when I first offered it last Monday. It then failed to ask the President of the Board of Trade a single question on this most important of issues when she was interviewed at an exhibition for the "The World at One" later in the week.

All that the President of the Board of Trade has managed to do while the coal controversy has raged is to go to a caravan exhibition and to mislead the public about my views. Instead of telling us what she would do for the coal industry—she has been as quiet as the grave on that—she claimed in the interview that I was hostile to caravans and the caravan industry. I insist today that she apologises to the House for misleading people in that way. There is no quotation, no comment and no shred of evidence to show that I am hostile to caravans and the caravan industry. I wish to put that firmly on the record.

There is, however, plenty of evidence to show that I think that the President of the Board of Trade has spent a little too much time in her caravan this summer; that was the point of my criticism. I do not begrudge her a good holiday—I had one myself—but I think that she should have spent more time in her office sorting out the problems of business that the Government are creating and producing an energy policy with more chance of working.

From the wonderful memorandum, it is clear that the DTI strongly believed that, if it briefed a few journalists, they would write "what we say". If only. That breathtaking cynicism was compounded one page further on by the comment:

"Since the government could be portrayed as driving the nails in the coal industry's coffin, these points deliberately do not highlight the government's environmental targets for Kyoto."

Of course they do not, because the famous hard choices that the Prime Minister has said we have to make have been ducked. The Government have not resolved the question whether it is more important to stop burning coal for environmental reasons or to encourage the burning of coal for energy policy and mining reasons. Today, the President of the Board of Trade must not be allowed out of the House without explaining how she will resolve that dilemma and without setting out an energy policy.

While the right hon. Lady is about it, will she now complete the review of electricity prices urgently? Does she know that the coal industry's case is that it can generate more power at a lower cost than the new gas stations if she comes to the right conclusion in her review? Why will she not tell us what her policy is on those new gas power stations? Is the BP station to be the only big one permitted, or will she license more from the 27 applications sitting on her desk? If so, how many more mines will have to close? When does she expect to stop importing electricity from France? Every extra megawatt imported means more British jobs lost.

The President of the Board of Trade has plenty of options. Instead of spending her days thinking about how to duck interviews and debates, she should start doing some real work on the issues facing the miners.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Would my right hon. Friend be surprised to know that one of the largest users of electricity in this country cites one of the reasons for increases in the market price of electricity as being that generators are treating the windfall tax as a business cost and recovering it through their prices?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes an extremely powerful point, and I am grateful to him. The windfall tax is, indeed, a cost that gets passed on, and it is another reason why the Government's energy policy is in such a mess.

The President of the Board of Trade also owes the House an explanation of why she misled us on more than one occasion concerning the shareholding of her ministerial colleagues. On 4 July, the right hon. Lady told us that the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, Lord Simon, had undertaken not to trade his holdings in BP before January 1998. Subsequently, we were told that Lord Simon planned to sell them this summer. On 4 July, she told us—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that the President of the Board of Trade deliberately withheld information from the House?

Mr. Redwood: I am going on to make my case and to offer two possible explanations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman must assure me that there is no suggestion that there was deliberate withholding of information by the right hon. Lady.

Mr. Redwood: I need your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that the right hon. Lady answered questions wrongly. Either she did that because she was misinformed or she did it because she wished to mislead us—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman must withdraw his remark. The right hon. Lady is not guilty of misleading the House, as far as I know. The right hon. Gentleman must not make that suggestion.

Mr. Redwood: I accept your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought, however, that I had asked a perfectly civil question. I think that the right hon. Lady owes us an explanation of why she told us certain things and we then discovered that something else happened. It is a convention of the House—

Mr. Hanson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you tell the House what the shareholding of Lord Simon has to do with burdens on business?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that.

Mr. Redwood: If the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) checks the motion, he will see that it is widely enough couched to include the important matter of how Ministers take decisions and which decisions they are allowed to take. We have had great difficulty in finding out from the President of the Board of Trade and her right hon. and hon. Friends what they are and are not allowed to do. We should like some simple, straight answers to our questions.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): What about the right hon. Gentleman's wife?

Mr. Redwood: I am happy to take on the hon. Gentleman. Does he want to intervene? He asked about my wife; I shall tell him. My wife works for British Airways. I told everyone that when I first entered a Department of State. I said that I wanted nothing to do with anything concerning British Airways because of that, although the rules at the time did not require that degree of caution. Wives and husbands were not mentioned in the rules at the time. I told people in advance; I am asking for the same courtesy from these Ministers.

Why cannot Ministers tell us in advance what their interests are and what they can and cannot do? Why are they so touchy and so secretive? Of course, people will be suspicious until the President of the Board of Trade stands at the Dispatch Box and tells us what Ministers can and cannot do and how they have protected themselves from any allegation of a conflict of interest. This is a serious matter, and the right hon. Lady should tell us now why her answers did not work out as she thought they would and how she came either to be misinformed or to misinform the House.

The Government are no better at working out competition policy than at working out their energy policy. The President of the Board of Trade has proposed a radical change. Now that she is told of the problems of this policy, she is trying to wash her hands of it. The new Competition Bill will leave open the question whether the pub-brewer tie is legal or whether pubs will have to close. It will leave unanswered the question whether retail price maintenance is to go, damaging or closing many a community pharmacy. It leaves it unclear whether recommended prices for books and newspapers are acceptable. Many big and small businesses are faced with large legal bills as they check that out, and they are then faced with a couple of years or more of uncertainty. The President of the Board of Trade has decided, on reflection, not to answer, but to palm the problem off to her new quango, the Competition Authority. Labour is bad for business.

The Newspaper Society said:

"The Society endorses the concern which has been widely expressed by the business community in general about the 'chilling effect' of the prohibition approach to competition law. The Article 86 prohibition will have the combined effect of deterring legitimate business activities."

In other words, the society thinks that it is very bad news. The Community Pharmacy Group said that the Competition Bill

"poses a threat to the long term survival of community pharmacies".

Many hon. Members represent such pharmacies and want them to continue, not to be threatened by legislation.

The Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association said that if the beer tie is banned—and there is uncertainty about whether that is the intention—it

"would close thousands of pubs and destroy tens of thousands of jobs".

Tonight, we need to know more about the Government's intention on company taxation and tax reliefs. The Chancellor stated clearly before he gained office:

"A Labour Chancellor will not permit tax reliefs to millionaires in offshore tax havens."

We need to know the truth—my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has tabled some questions today to get at the truth—of the Guernsey trust and how the Paymaster General will benefit from it. Why was it not declared earlier? Will the President of the Board of Trade tell us whether it is now Government policy to encourage Jersey and Guernsey trusts, or whether it is still their policy to take measures against them in a future Budget, to prevent people taking advantage of them?

We have no worries about people using Jersey and Guernsey trusts for sensible tax management, and we made no moves against those devices when in office. However, we do have worries about Ministers saying in their personal lives that such devices are fine, but signing up to the Chancellor's view in public that they are not. It is time that this humbug was sorted out and we should be told how the tension will be resolved.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Why have Ministers of the Crown and other right hon. and hon. Members routinely declared in the Register of Members'

Interests things such as pubs, woodland, farms and other things to which they have title, which they own or from which they benefit, yet the Paymaster General does not declare the Orion trust? I find that extraordinarily strange.

Mr. Redwood: It is a question that I hope the Government will be answering, because it is important to get at the seeming tension between some members of the Government's attitude in private and the stated public position, which does not seem to have been reversed so far, that Jersey and Guernsey trusts are not a good idea because of the tax losses that can, but do not always, occur to UK residents or UK companies.

The President of the Board of Trade still enjoys a blind trust arrangement, while all her Cabinet colleagues wound them up when they joined the Government—how wise they were. I see nothing wrong with a blind trust in principle for a Back Bencher or a political party, but it is difficult to see why a Minister should need one. The President has all the officials in the Department of Trade and Industry to give her advice on specific and general Government matters and she, like the rest of us, has a parliamentary allowance for her constituency affairs.

Has she read "Questions of Procedure for Ministers"? Does she agree that there are dangers for a Minister in a blind trust arrangement, when the Minister is in such a sensitive Department? I believe that her husband knows who the donors are; how can she be sure that she does not find out inadvertently who they are? Would it not be in her own interest and for her own protection for the trust to be wound up?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me speak, please; I do not speak that often. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) seems to be getting into the realms of conflict of interest, which has nothing to do with the motion.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You have just made a ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the extent that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was able to make a statement, I think that I might be able to intervene and ask a question. A Mr. David Steene gave £20,000 to the leadership campaign of the Leader of the Opposition. Mr. David Steene was the managing director of a company called J and J Securities, which is a subsidiary of the City Mortgage Corporation, which—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should know better. We are definitely straying from the motion and getting into personalities, which I do not want to do. We must return to the motion, and that goes for both sides of the House.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful again for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) does not seem to have accepted the distinction that I am making between the rules that apply to Ministers who are, rightly, subject to tighter rules than others and who are governed by "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and its replacement, and the rules that apply to others. We are interested in making sure that the rules are not only obeyed but seen to be obeyed. I do not know why Labour Members are so sensitive when we ask questions about that. Assuming that all is well, the Government have only to say so and all will be fine.

I am interested in the views of Henry Drucker, a senior Labour fund raiser in 1995, who has recently written of the relationship between business and Government. He said:

"One has to wonder why people give to a blind trust when they could give—as Ecclestone did—to the party."

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With respect, it is rather curious that I should be blocked for raising a matter that is relevant to competition policy and loan interest on mortgages charged by a London shark who gives to the Tory party, while the right hon. Gentleman is allowed to continue talking about something that has absolutely nothing to do with the debate in any way, shape or form. It seems to me that I am in order and he is out of order, yet—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I said that the hon. Gentleman was out of order; I also told the right hon. Gentleman that he was out of order and must return to the motion.

Mr. Redwood: I am very happy to do that. The hon. Gentleman seems unaware of the crucial difference between a Leader-elect of the Opposition and a Minister.

The President of the Board of Trade has one important new duty. She would perhaps say that it is to help British business, but I fear that it might not be—she sits on the "Abolish the Pound" committee with the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe. I wonder how easy it has been for the right hon. Lady to complete her U-turn on that important matter. In 1980, she said:

"none of the arguments for staying in the EEC can be sustained."

Much more recently, in 1990, she described as pathetic the idea that we would lose all influence if we were outside the Common Market. Now she wishes to abolish the pound.

I hope that she will tonight explain to the business community why it should commit its moneys to this project when the Chancellor's manifesto for it is so flimsy, and how she has been able to show such flexibility of view in moving from outright hostility to the Common Market, let alone the single market and the single currency, to being in favour of it in principle and working closely with her colleagues on that committee, but rather secretively so far, to abolish this currency of ours. I hope that she will spare us some time over the next few months to debate the issue.

I am told that the right hon. Lady would welcome a public debate on whether we should abolish the pound, and I tonight offer my services to debate against her in any reasonable place and at any reasonable time. I am sure that any radio or television station would be interested, and I should be happy to join her. I look forward to her tabling a suitable motion. I make this offer because I have heard that she commented, in another context, that she would value such a debate, which is why I am sure she will find the time. Business might be better informed if she and I could have a sensible debate. She

[Mr. Redwood]

could have the pleasure of setting out why she wishes to abolish the pound, and I could set out the reasons why at this stage, at this exchange rate and on current terms, it would be damaging to business.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On the euro and the single currency, does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we lose control of our currency, we lose control of our economy, and if we lose control of our economy, we lose control of our country? Bearing in mind the fact that our interests in the United Kingdom are not always those of the rest of Europe, would not we be surrendering any right or ability to influence policy in respect of the UK's interests?

Mr. Redwood: The principal objection that our party shares is that we cannot have a successful single currency until all economies are performing as if they were one. We Conservatives do not foresee such circumstances. My hon. Friend is right. All the time that the economies are not performing in line or as one, we need separate economic policies in order to steer them in the right direction, in the national interest.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, given that our economy performed under Conservative management so much better than France and Germany's—a trend that is carrying on for a bit even under this Government, before their problems catch up with them—it would be very foolish to rush into a premature currency union. We would lose the right to set our own interest rates, we would lose the ability to influence our own exchange rate and we would lose all the other things that are necessary to secure the prosperity of the British people.

Mr. Miller: Like the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Redwood: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman and his party would want to apologise for that. My party has apologised for it. The Labour party recommended the ERM, supported it, never criticised it and never said that we should come out of it. Will the Labour party now join us in apologising to the British people over that issue?

Mr. Miller: While we are on monetary union, was it the right hon. Gentleman who said in 1995 that monetary union would "break Europe asunder"? Is that still his view, and is it the united view of the Conservative party?

Mr. Redwood: I said that monetary union could break the economies of western Europe if people entered it on the wrong terms and the wrong basis. I still believe that that is true. Yes, my right hon. and hon. Friends agree with me. If we have a bungled monetary union, when the economies are not working together, which is what is on offer at the moment, it will be very damaging to economies entering it.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Before the Minister leaves the point—

Mr. Redwood: "The Minister"—I am grateful. I give way.

Mr. Prentice: Is the right hon. Gentleman against the euro in principle? Is there a constitutional bar to joining a single currency, or is he just being pragmatic? In year 10, if he were in a position to influence events, might he recommend that Britain ditched the pound?

Mr. Redwood: I am against, for this and the next Parliament, the substantial sacrifice of sovereignty that the single currency entails, because we do not see economic benefits flowing from it and the conditions are not right. We would not therefore recommend to the British people the sacrifice of sovereignty that it entails.

Mr. Prentice *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is disappointed because I have given a good answer, which he cannot exploit.

The DTI and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are locked in mortal battle for power and influence over regional policy. When the coal strategy went wrong, the Prime Minister called on the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning and the Minister for the Environment to find an answer. Where, I wonder, was the President of the Board of Trade and why was the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, who is notably absent from this debate, overruled and given new bosses? When jobs were at risk in the motor industry, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Public Health decided to sort it out in their inimitable fashion.

There remains a row over who should control regional grants. The President of the Board of Trade is in dispute with her colleagues in Scotland and Wales over how to run grants to inward investors. We are being told both that she is in overall charge of the policy and that Wales and Scotland retain their freedom of manoeuvre. Both those propositions cannot be right. It is part of new Labour spin that we have one proposition on one day and a different one the next day, to keep the media interested. Meanwhile, as the row goes on, the United Kingdom is the loser. I predict that, over the next year, inward investment will decline as a result of the muddle that the Government are creating.

At the DTI, the season of mists has moved on to the winter of dark fogs. We cannot be told which Ministers are on duty over a holiday period or when Ministers are taking a break. Worse still, we cannot be told which specific issues which Ministers can and cannot handle. The British people elected this Government because some of them thought that they would be open and honest in their dealings and because the Labour party said that it had no need to raise taxes apart from the utilities tax. The British people have been sorely cheated. They have already been taxed an extra £10 billion.

As for openness, the long delay in telling us about a Minister's £2 million-worth of shares in BP was just the beginning. A BP gas station was given a licence ahead of 27 others, without proper explanation and against previous party policy. A grant of £200 million was given to Rolls-Royce in the constituency of the President of the Board of Trade, when scope for it in the budget was not clear. There was a U-turn on formula one without other sports with an interest being consulted. The Minister for

Competition and Consumer Affairs was taken off inquiries on Travel Trade, ICI and P and O because of shareholdings and prejudices that he revealed.

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Nigel Griffiths) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Redwood: If the hon. Gentleman would like to tell me why he was taken off those inquiries, I should be delighted to give him the Floor.

Despite the taxpayer paying for more than 500 political advisers at a cost of £2.6 million, the President of the Board of Trade is still operating a blind trust in order to give her more staff.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend has been remiss in not mentioning the minimum wage. Last week, I went to hear a Minister tell lawyers about the minimum wage, only to find that a civil servant had been sent. Does not such Government unwillingness to get up in public occur all the time these days?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. I reassure him that my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) will be referring to the minimum wage, so that we cover that vital issue as well.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Far be it from me to stop my right hon. Friend when he is in full and spectacular flow, but does he think that, in failing to secure general exemptions from the national minimum wage, the Minister without Portfolio has been utterly humiliated by the President of the Board of Trade, to the detriment of British industry and commerce?

Mr. Redwood: That seems to be the current position, but I warn my hon. Friend that the Minister without Portfolio has considerable guile. The President of the Board of Trade should watch out for a counter-attack. The hon. Gentleman has ways of influencing members of the Government.

Every one of the matters that I have mentioned has had to be dragged out of the Government. We have been misled, and there have been misrepresentations. We still do not know which Ministers handle which matters. The Government are as open as a locked safe, with the combination known to only a few who have privileged access. They make a mockery of democracy and the House. They prove that Labour is bad for business.

7.57 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the speedy action taken by Her Majesty's Government to foster an environment in which business can flourish, with macro-economic stability, low rates of corporation tax, a clear new competition policy, and a review of utility regulation; contrasts this with the boom and bust policies of the previous administration which led to the collapse of thousands of firms and unemployment for millions; and welcomes Her Majesty's Government's partnership with business to improve UK competitiveness.

The title of this debate—although one would not have thought so from the speech of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—is "Burdens on Business". Of course, the biggest of burden on British business was lifted on 1 May.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wokingham on his recent success in being named Front Bench questioner of the year—and against such stiff competition. I agree with the judges: I think that he is doing a magnificent job—for us, that is. He is not, of course, doing it quite unaided: the Conservative party's record in government is a big help. The reputation that it has cherished and built up over the decades—the claim to be the only party with which British business can work to advance Britain's interests—is vanishing before our very eyes. The right hon. Gentleman is making a unique and, from my point of view, hugely valuable contribution. It is not all due to his approach or his manners—although they help. It is the way in which he repudiates, even scorns, the experience and opinions of much of British business—and even of my predecessors in office from his own party.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham has repudiated the need for reform of competition law, which was so much common ground as to be uncontroversial before he came along and which has been widely demanded by British business. He has rejected as unnecessary and damaging the new approach to spectrum management, which was also previously uncontroversial, supported by the vast bulk of those consulted and included in the very manifesto on which he and others fought the general election.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to repudiate that policy?

Mr. Bercow: I am sure that the right hon. Lady, with her long experience in the House, recognises that it is her duty to answer questions rather than to ask them. She refers to the views of business and claims to respect those views. Will she therefore ensure that small businesses are exempted from the minimum wage out of deference to the judgment of the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business—yes or no?

Mrs. Beckett: No. We have made it clear from the beginning that the minimum wage will apply across British business, and that remains the case. I see that the hon. Gentleman has adopted from the right hon. Member for Wokingham the policy of asking questions to which the answers are already plain.

We have all noticed the visible yearning of the right hon. Member for Wokingham to see our relationship with our European partners based not on a mutual respect which is healthy, but on a knee-jerk opposition which is actively hostile.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the right hon. Lady give way on that point?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall come back to the subject, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I make some progress.

The problem of the right hon. Member for Wokingham is that in almost every way he is living in the past. His behaviour towards my team—here and in the other place—has been spiteful as well as silly, but its underlying purpose seems to be to demonstrate, as the Conservative party repeatedly tried to do before the election, that

[Mrs. Beckett]

somehow Labour cannot govern and that Labour Front Benchers just cannot be Ministers. Forget it—it is too late, it is over; we are the Government, and most people still think that we are doing a better job.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham still rejects any action by the Government as automatically being a burden on business—even when business is calling for such action—just as his party did before the last election. He normally churns out the same stuff about the burdens of the social chapter or the minimum wage, but today he was so intent on personal unpleasantness that he forgot about them. He repeats one of the Conservatives' biggest mistakes—openly to put the interests of their party before the interests of their country.

For example, the right hon. Member for Wokingham put out a press release during the week of the motor show calling on me to announce forthwith the award of a substantial grant to Ford to build a new car here. The project was so much in its infancy that no decision of any kind had been made—not even an application by Ford to seek support. Lest we think the right hon. Gentleman merely incompetent rather than crassly irresponsible, he suggested that the grant should be higher because of the policies of this Government. Whose interests were served by such second guessing of negotiations and by such a raising of the stakes? Not Britain's.

In fact, the right hon. Member for Wokingham takes the tactic further. Just as he and his colleagues put party before country, so his behaviour and statements clearly put his own leadership bid before the interests of his party. His motto seems to be, "Never mind the quality, feel the width". So one day he condemns my hon Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry for pursuing the interests of industry to the detriment of those of the environment. The next day the right hon. Gentleman condemns my hon Friend for putting the interests of the environment ahead of those of industry.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham is a kind of political catherine wheel, frantically hurling off sparks in all directions. It is fast, it is noisy and it contributes nothing but a little light entertainment.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: And we are going to ban them.

Mrs. Beckett: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful sedentary intervention.

Mr. Redwood: Comparing me to a catherine wheel is the nicest thing that the right hon. Lady has said about me all day. However, she has missed the point of my press releases. The point is simple: there is a possible conflict between environmental imperatives and the needs of British industry. I have not told her how the balance should be struck, but I am asking her again today to tell the nation how it will be struck. The specific issue is whether more coal or more gas power stations will be used regularly. That is a good test of whether the Government are greener or more industrial.

Mrs. Beckett: I shall come to the issue of energy policy in a few moments. If the right hon. Gentleman feels then that I have not answered his question adequately, he may return to it. I do not disagree with absolutely every word in the Opposition motion. It urges a clear energy, competition and business policy, which I agree that we need. Such a policy certainly was not part of our inheritance from the previous Government. Baroness Thatcher, the former Prime Minister, told us that manufacturing did not matter.

Mr. Bercow: Rubbish.

Mrs. Beckett: That is not rubbish and I have heard many Conservative Members regret the former Prime Minister's statement, including one whom I will not name but he knows who he is. Under the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), we were supposed to get intervention before breakfast, tea and dinner. Under my predecessor, we never knew what to expect and we do not know now. Such a clear policy was not apparently in the Conservative manifesto, because the right hon. Member for Wokingham says that it was not much good. We can agree on that. A clear policy apparently does not involve more competitive markets—the right hon. Gentleman opposes change—and it certainly does not involve the United Kingdom being at the heart of Europe.

The motion accuses me—as the right hon. Gentleman repeatedly does—of inaction. On what basis? First, he cited the delay in announcing a decision on the P and O merger. It might have suited him to have an earlier announcement, without co-operation from and agreement with the European Union as the other regulatory authority, but it would not have been in the interests of the company or of the work force. In fact, Lord Sterling, the company chairman, said that the decision was "worth waiting for".

Today, the right hon. Member for Wokingham calls my work on the issue "sloppy", because I did not cap freight prices. However, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission found no competition issues in freight, so I could not have acted unless I stopped the whole merger. Is that what the right hon. Gentleman wants? He is always bragging about his experience as a competition Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, so why did he not know that I could not act? Is he sloppy, or just incompetent?

The right hon. Member for Wokingham attacked me for doing nothing to prepare industry for the millennium bug, when in fact we continued the programme that we inherited from his Government. As it happens, we were already planning to step up that programme and announced the move forward to Action 2000, chaired by Don Cruickshank, as soon as we were able to publish that information. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set up a Cabinet committee, which I shall chair, to pursue the issue.

Mr. Ian Bruce: We all acknowledge the difficulties of tackling the millennium bug in the time available, but will the right hon. Lady acknowledge that the Government have slipped on the targets that were set for the civil service? Why has she appointed Don Cruickshank to that post when the Government ignored him when he wrote to them about the Wireless Telegraphy Bill and said that it should protect the consumer?

Mrs. Beckett: That has nothing to do with Action 2000. It is an interesting point and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt pursue it in Committee, but it has no relevance to the point that I was making.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham complains constantly—he did so again tonight—about my parliamentary record. He attacked me for not speaking in the debate on the Wireless Telegraphy Bill, but it is commonplace for other Ministers to handle more minor legislation without a Cabinet colleague. The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), the former Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, did so last year, and the right hon. Member for Wokingham did so himself as a Minister of State.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham keeps saying, somewhat stridently, that he has had the chance to question me only three times in four months and has had no opportunity to debate. Diddums! It is called being in opposition. Did the right hon. Gentleman not notice when in government that parliamentary questions happen only once a month? The rules have not been changed to penalise him. Incidentally, a shorter time has elapsed between the two most recent Trade and Industry Question Times in this Parliament than in a similar period in 1992. As for debates, between May and November this year there were no general industry debates in Government time, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly said—nor were there in the same period in May to November 1992.

The right hon. Gentleman has sought to make much of my unavoidable absence at our recent Question Time, claiming that I went to Australia to avoid his questioning. I did enjoy it. As he knows perfectly well, because I gave him advance notice, I went in fulfilment of an engagement made by my Conservative predecessor to promote British business—the culmination of a year's worth of activity—to open jointly with the Premier of Victoria the biggest trade fair that Britain has ever staged in Australia. More than 400 United Kingdom companies competed to take part and 90 did so, many of them small and medium-sized enterprises. No one regrets more than I the unforeseen clash with my duties in this House, which I have never neglected, but to suggest that I should let all those companies down smacks more of the right hon. Gentleman's conceit than of common sense. Incidentally, that visit was one of three major overseas visits that I have undertaken since May.

The right hon. Gentleman also alleges that I do not answer questions and letters. Up to the end of July, he had asked 46 questions about the personal finances, behaviour and duties of Ministers, compared with 28 about the entire area of science, industrial, and energy policy. Up to today, he has just about managed to even the score. Yet all those questions and his extensive correspondence—six letters about the personal finances of my noble Friend Lord Simon, eight letters about the financial consequences of personal tragedy in the family of my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs—have been answered, albeit not to his satisfaction.

You know the feeling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Sooner or later, every hon. Member has one of those correspondents who writes or telephones every second or third day. They always say you have not answered their questions, no matter how hard you try. They always say that they are going to take it up with higher authority or they take it to the press. We all get them. You just do not expect it to be the shadow Secretary of State.

Most recently, the right hon. Gentleman accused me of inaction about coal. The Conservative party's only energy policy was to close half Britain's coalfields and leave the other half to wither on the vine, having removed all the levers of Government policy. The Conservatives left the coal industry freewheeling downhill like a car without brakes or steering and now they stand at the side of the road shouting to us to stop the runaway vehicle. We found an energy playing field massively tilted against coal and in seven short months we have levelled that playing field, tilted by the Conservative Government over more than seven years.

Inaction and broken promises were the hallmark of the Administration we replaced. Nearly 10 years were spent discussing the reform of competition law. They even got as far as a draft Bill, which we would not have opposed, but they just never got around to doing it. Some may applaud and some oppose my decisions on merger policy, but no one but the right hon. Gentleman has ever suggested that they are not clear. In fact, a recent article in *The Daily Telegraph* said:

"competition she said, and competition she meant".

The Opposition prepared the legislation on spectrum pricing, but they never found time for that, either. Users and industry believe almost universally that our proposals, far from being a burden on business, will make for sensible spectrum management.

In the two years during which I shadowed this Department, no major piece of legislation came to this House. This Government have overseen the introduction of eight bills in seven months, including the Wireless Telegraphy Bill, the Competition Bill and the Fossil Fuel Levy Bill. We are also backing four private Members' Bills—the Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Bill, the Fireworks Bill, the Public Interest Disclosure Bill and the Weights and Measures (Beer and Cider) Bill—and we have just published the National Minimum Wage Bill. We have published a report from the business and Government export forum and we have already taken the steps called for by exporters to recast trade support policy.

We are undertaking consultation on a fair payments Bill at the request of small businesses and in the new year we shall be publishing a White Paper on fairness at work and a Green Paper for consultation on utility regulation.

We are preparing proposals to give the Post Office commercial freedom and we are working in partnership with business under the umbrella of Competitiveness UK to prepare a White Paper on competitiveness next year.

We are forcing the pace on getting issues of competitiveness and employability on to the agenda of the European Union and again seeking to ensure the participation of and a voice for business representatives from across the EU.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): The right hon. Lady mentioned that the Government are preparing a paper on the Post Office. Can she tell the House what her hon. Friend the Minister of State failed to tell the Select Committee on Trade and Industry recently— whether the Post Office will have the capacity, as a normal company would, to give its stockholders dividends rather than being subject to a negative external financing limit?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend the Minister of State tells me that he was not asked that, but in any case I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall be happy to discuss those issues with him at length when our proposals for the Post Office are published.

[Mrs. Beckett]

Moreover, all that activity—not inactivity—has its underlying themes. Strong markets, modern companies, looking to the future—those are the themes that bind all the activities of my Department to the pursuit of competitiveness, and against which we shall measure the worth and relevance of our activities.

First, on strong markets, I am absolutely clear that a strong competition policy is fundamental to competitiveness. That is why one of this Government's earliest actions was to find parliamentary time for a Competition Bill, which will replace an outdated regime with a modern, effective system. A competition law that creates a more transparent and consistent regime will be a big improvement on the slow-moving and ineffective structures that we have today and will benefit all firms, large and small. Our review of regulation for the utilities is driven by the same desire to see more transparency and consistency in regulation.

The second pillar is modern companies. Only modern companies can address modern challenges. We need modern companies succeeding in new markets with new products—companies that innovate and compete on our strengths in design, science and ideas. It is not a sustainable strategy to compete on price alone. In the increasingly global marketplace, firms need to compete on quality in all its dimensions.

Our third theme is the need to look to the future. What we as the Government do today will make a real difference to the industries and citizens of the future. It is clear that we must embrace the industries of the future and, in particular, we must deal with the specific needs of smaller firms—hence our proposals to enhance the work of business links and drive them, too, towards higher quality: hence our decision to take forward the work of the foresight groups.

Outside my own Department, the Government as a whole are attacking those issues on which business has sought action for so long—and under our predecessors sought in vain—such as the pursuit of economic and policy stability and of policies to set the right framework for the long term, an attack on skill shortages and on the neglect of infrastructure, and action to tackle tax avoidance, to simplify and to cut corporation tax and to offer temporary capital allowances to small business. Those are just a few among the 10 tax cuts that this Government have made. *[Interruption.]* No doubt the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) is about to welcome them.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): No, I am not. I am rising to invite the President of the Board of Trade to tell us a little more about the foresight action programme. She said that the Government are taking the matter forward, but she made no proposal regarding the grave concern of the Society of British Aerospace Companies that the investment under past Conservative Governments, which has led to the £5 billion of inward income into this country arising out of exports, will dry up because Government investment is not being made available. What is the right hon. Lady doing on the foresight action programme in regard to the aerospace industry?

Mrs. Beckett: That does not arise from the foresight action programme. The Government have not yet made any announcement on proposals from the aerospace industry.

Mr. Redwood: I enjoyed the right hon. Lady's point about correspondence. I have a little advice for her: if she does not want so many letters, all that she has to do is to answer a few questions—then we shall not need to ask so many. I have a question now. The right hon. Lady has tried to present the case that the Government are cutting taxes on business. The Conservative forecast is that the measures announced so far will cost British business £25 billion extra over the lifetime of this Parliament. Does the right hon. Lady agree? What impact will that have on jobs, investment and new ideas?

Mrs. Beckett: I have not had a chance to study the precise figure cited by the right hon. Gentleman, but if it were true it would be the first time ever. I have had long experience of shadowing the Treasury team: previous figures promulgated by the Conservative party were never accurate and I see no reason to suppose that they ever will be.

We have made 10 tax cuts, none of which the Conservative party has either recognised or welcomed. We may take some steps about which the business community may have reservations—all Governments do—but we shall always listen and strive to ease those concerns if we can.

Before the general election, our extensive consultation revealed a business desire for economic and policy stability, for investment in skills and infrastructure, for a constructive attitude to Europe, and for a partnership in which Government and business each play their separate but complementary role to advance the interests of our country. That is what business wants from Government, and all the right hon. Gentleman's sound and fury cannot disguise the fact that that is what they are getting.

In government, the Conservative party displayed to the full their arrogance, incompetence and dishonesty. In opposition, they seem to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. That is what put them where they are today and that is what will keep them there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I call Mr. David Ruffley.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I had not stood up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman is not prepared, I call Mr. John Bercow.

8.21 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me when I was not expecting it.

I richly enjoyed the invective of the President of the Board of Trade, but in all candour it was downmarket drivel. I very much hope that, after due practice and several rehearsals, she will be capable of producing something better for the consumption of the House.

She slavishly adhered to a prepared text and gave not the slightest indication that she had seen or read it in advance, let alone written a word of it.

I want to focus on what I shall call the triple torture of British industry and commerce, but first I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), as he seems extremely eager to intervene.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend listens to speeches much more attentively than I do, but I thought that we heard a list of what business wanted. Did not the Secretary of State say that a high pound was one of the complaints of business? Or has she not been listening to business at all?

Mr. Bercow: There was not the slightest evidence that she had listened to the representations of business on the subject. The most curious feature of her oration was when she listed with glowing pride a series of measures that she and the Government had introduced. She did that to justify the claim that she was working for British business. If she had been so courteous as to take my intervention, I would have asked her whether she thinks that size of Government and quantity of legislation are equivalent to quality of administration.

What makes the President of the Board of Trade think that having many laws, issuing many guidelines and making many speeches about commercial and industrial policy is what small or large business wants? It wants a climate in which it can thrive and prosper, but the Department is delivering no such thing.

I want to focus on the triple torture of British industry and commerce: the minimum wage; the European employment chapter, to which the Government have naively signed up; and the strikers' charter. I shall deal, as Iain Macleod would have said, briefly but with relish, with each of the three.

First, I want to deal with the national minimum wage. I use the word national advisedly. The Government published the Bill last Thursday, and the glimmer of hope that had existed in the House and among the business community—that good sense might have prevailed over dogma—was extinguished.

We all know about the deep and alarming split within the Government. The President of the Board of Trade—a left-wing firebrand and adherent of old-fashioned socialist ideology, steeped in the religion of bashing business—wanted a national minimum wage with no exemptions by region, by sector, or for small companies. The Minister without Portfolio took a different view. Far be it from me to accuse him of having objections based on principle. The word principle has not yet featured in his lexicon. He objected simply because good sense had occurred to him.

The Minister without Portfolio recognised that, without widespread exemptions, an horrific toll of unemployment would result. No doubt he had observed that in his region—the north-east—on the basis of a 50 per cent. restoration of differentials, a national minimum wage would eliminate 78,316 jobs. No doubt he charitably pointed out to the President of the Board of Trade that, on the same basis, in her region—the east midlands—88,037 jobs would be lost.

The Minister without Portfolio sought, in kindly fashion, to steer the President of the Board of Trade away from the path of madness to a course of sanity. She rebuffed and spurned him and neglected his entreaties, choosing instead to proceed with the outstandingly foolish policy of a national minimum wage.

In her brief, scripted speech, the President of the Board of Trade appeared unconscious of her self-contradiction. She told us with great pride that the Government listened to business. Immediately, and entirely logically, I inquired whether she recognised the views of small business organisations on the national minimum wage and would defer to their wish for general exemptions for small companies. With equal pride, she immediately said no. The great listener to business ignores business's views if they happen in any way to diverge from her stated intention and the dogma that informs it.

The national minimum wage will be a calamity. I do not expect the President of the Board of Trade to accept that from me or from my right hon. Friend the shadow President of the Board of Trade, and I understand that she is sore and writhing from the wounds inflicted by my right hon. Friend—although I urge her to respond with marginally greater grace in future—but I challenge her to accept it from other sources, including the Confederation of British Industry.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that yesterday Stan Mendham of the Federation of Small Businesses said that the FSB now accepted the principle of the minimum wage and was anxious to work with the Government? He has not mentioned that.

Mr. Bercow: I am interested to hear that. I have had discussions with the Federation of Small Businesses and its position remains absolutely clear: it is against a national minimum wage, but now that it is to be introduced it will seek to minimise its impact. That is simply good business sense. The federation would rather that the minimum wage had never come on the agenda in the first place.

The CBI reckons that a national minimum wage could cost British business £4.5 billion, the Institute of Directors has dismissed it as a crazy notion and the Employment Policy Institute, no less, a left-of-centre organisation, condemned the policy, saying that small firms would come under severe pressure to survive if the plan went ahead unamended. That is the reality of the matter—as distinct from the distorted interpretation of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran).

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is it not the case that small firms are not universally payers of low wages and the ladder upon which very many unskilled and young people get their first opportunity of a job? It is those groups, which the Labour party makes such a fuss about helping, that will be damaged by the minimum wage policy.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. The President of the Board of Trade is proposing to kick the ladder away from those who might have had the chance to get their feet upon its first rungs. That is disgraceful. It is an exploitation of her position in favour of the strong and to the detriment of the weak. She is culpable and she will be held responsible in due course.

It is regrettable that the head of the Low Pay Commission, Professor George Bain, has said that he believes that jobs will be lost, but wonders whether it is

[Mr. Bercow]

rather a good thing that those jobs will be lost. It is all very well for him, in his ivory tower, unconcerned by the impact on him—for there will be none—to say that other people's jobs can safely be destroyed; he will not bear the burden and he will not pick up the bill.

In May 1996, under the previous Government, the Department of Trade and Industry published an estimate of 1 million job losses on the strength of the half restoration of differentials. Curiously, the President of the Board of Trade has been struck down by silence. Very rarely is she reticent—on this occasion she has been. The Department of Trade and Industry has had since 1 May to issue its own prognosis of the effect of a national minimum wage, but it has studiously avoided doing so. If the right hon. Lady disagrees with our prediction, we would be fascinated to hear hers.

The truth is that a national minimum wage will not create jobs, but destroy them. It will not improve competitiveness, but erode it. It will not strengthen our economy, but weaken it. Why do not the Government say what they think the effect will be upon jobs? Is it again a case of, "Can't say, won't say"? Of one fact we are certain; British industry and commerce will have to pay for the ideological folly of this Administration.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, at its most recent conference, the Federation of Small Businesses voted in favour of a sensibly negotiated minimum wage? Is the hon. Gentleman also aware, as I am from speaking to small businesses, that many would welcome a minimum wage because that would stop their being undercut by rogue firms that seek to pay poverty wages? Those small firms want to employ well-trained work forces and pay them a decent wage.

Mr. Bercow: I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman would not secure a post as a researcher in this place because his research is deficient. The simple fact is that the Federation of Small Businesses is opposed to a statutory minimum wage. If the hon. Gentleman is not aware of that important fact, frankly it is high time that he became so.

I should like to move on from the subject of the national minimum wage about which one can tell that Labour Members are deeply embarrassed—witness the departure from the Chamber of the Minister of State. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to see that he has returned.

I should like now to focus on the subject of the European employment chapter. Under that chapter, we shall move in the direction of a common European employment policy. We are now told under that chapter that it is a matter of common concern which employment policies member states in the European Union pursue. It is said that they must respect that fact in the formulation of policies.

Qualified majority voting will lead to the production of guidelines for employment policies to be pursued by member states. In case the President of the Board of Trade is in any doubt about the potency of that arrangement, she ought to be aware that we are told that those guidelines shall direct employment policy. Note the use of the word "shall", not "might", "could", "would" or "should". The great and the good, the motley collection of the European Parliament, the Economic and Monetary Affairs and Industrial Policy Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the Employment and Social Affairs Committee will favour us with their wisdom on the policies to be pursued throughout the Community.

If the right hon. Lady is so naive as to suppose that for ever and a day those will be entirely matters of voluntary persuasion by the European Union, frankly she needs to think again. She must recognise that over the years the tendency of the Community has been to pursue policies initially by an attempt at persuasion and, ultimately, by a resort to coercion. That is the track record. If the President of the Board of Trade thinks that different principles will apply in this case, she ought to explain what they are and why the situation will not be a re-run of past disasters and betrayals.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is making a cogent case about the dangers of the employment chapter to which the Government have signed up by virtue of the Amsterdam treaty. Would he care to turn his attention even wider, to the question of structural funds? Is it not the case that far from securing influence in the councils of the European Union, Her Majesty's Government are likely to lose grade 1 status for the highlands and islands of Scotland and for Northern Ireland as recipients of structural funds? Furthermore, while we are being disadvantaged, more and more British taxpayers' money is being dispersed to other parts of the European Union. In other words, their employment is being aided whereas ours is being gravely disadvantaged.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. What is more, that trend will be exacerbated if the policies of this Administration are pursued. If we go into a single European currency and if, as a consequence of so doing, unemployment in parts of Europe increases, so will our contribution to the cohesion funds. We will not be the beneficiaries of those increased payments. Transfer payments to other member states in the European Union will be enormous, and the British taxpayer will pick up the bill.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Could the hon. Gentleman possibly remind us who signed the Single European Act and what consequences it had for the British economy? Were there any provisions in it for the regulation of employment in Europe?

Mr. Bercow: Unfortunately the hon. Gentleman is getting rather confused about different treaties. He is entirely correct that the Conservative Administration signed the Single European Act. Its principal provisions, as I would have hoped the hon. Gentleman is conscious, were to do with completion of the single market. For that purpose, we accepted some qualified majority voting. The employment chapter to which I am referring is a feature of the treaty of Amsterdam. If the hon. Gentleman is able to propel his mind forward 11 years, that would greatly aid our debate.

Dr. Whitehead *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again, for the simple reason that I know that other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, and I am about to make my final point about the strikers' charter.

There is a pernicious provision that the Government are about to set in train of which the country should be aware and which all right-minded people should condemn: the provision for the recognition of trade unions. What is intended by the Government will be deeply damaging to British business. They say in their proposals that 50 per cent. of the relevant work force, although that is not defined, will suffice for the recognition of trade unions and their entitlement to be granted the status of official bargaining agents on behalf of the work force. That can spread like a contagion right across British industry and commerce.

I do not suggest that it is the intention to return to the dark days of the winter of discontent of the late 1970s, but that could be the outcome. We could return to those grim days, when the streets went unswept, the sick went untended and the dead went unburied. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for uninformed right hon. and hon. Members on the Labour Benches to sneer. Their responsibility is to provide a foolproof guarantee that that will not be the outcome of the legislation that the President of the Board of Trade is to introduce to the House. Unless and until they are able to provide that categorical assurance, a policy of silence, not sneering, would be more appropriate.

Mr. Borrow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I shall not give way as I am coming to a conclusion—I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be greatly reassured by that.

What the Government have in mind is greater trade union power—power that did not exist even in the days when Michael Foot was Employment Secretary. As a result, we are faced with an enormous threat of industrial unrest. If that is what the Government intend, they should admit it; if they do not wish it, they have a responsibility to take steps to avert it.

I shall now observe a self-denying ordinance as I am anxious to hear my hon. Friends' speeches. I am also waiting to learn whether one Labour Member can provide half an answer to some of the questions posed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) in his opening speech.

8.40 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): This is an extremely important debate. Anyone who has listened to the Opposition contributions, especially to that of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), will have been left with the clear impression that the Conservatives are seeking to rerun the past. Listening to their contributions so far, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the only arguments that they have advanced are the stale, old ones that we heard during the election campaign, which the Conservatives lost.

The Conservatives lost the election for many reasons, but one of them was because business lost confidence in them owing to the actions that they took during their 18 years in power. Unless the contributions from Conservative Members improve during the rest of the debate, I do not expect that they will regain that confidence.

It was a pity that of the 45 minutes or so that the right hon. Member for Wokingham spoke, 30 minutes was spent on a personal diatribe. We heard such earth-shattering revelations as the fact that he was worried about why my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade had not agreed to support the Ford motor company, when that company had not even asked for any such support. The other earth-shattering revelation that seemed, for 30 minutes, to form the basis of the right hon. Gentleman's speech involved him wondering why my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade had spent some of her holiday in her caravan. The businesses in my constituency are not worried about that and I suspect that they will not be impressed by what we have heard from the Conservative Benches.

If the arguments advanced in this debate were about Government policy, how relevant that was and how it would affect business, that would be perfectly legitimate; it would be right and proper. But a reference to Europe had to be dragged out of the right hon. Member for Wokingham by one of his hon. Friends mentioning the exchange rate mechanism. In view of that, Labour Members are entitled to be suspicious about why, in a speech of 45 minutes, the right hon. Gentleman never mentioned the biggest burden imposed on industry in 1992, when the previous Government's policy ignominiously and incompetently collapsed.

We may argue about the effect of that collapse on industry and I am prepared to debate that legitimate point. But if we are talking about Government credibility, is it not strange that the right hon. Gentleman, speaking on behalf of Conservative Members, never mentioned the total and fundamental collapse of his Government's policy in 1992? What are we to read into that? Is he ashamed of it? The party has apologised for joining the ERM, but is he ashamed of it? He never mentioned the subject, which had to be dragged out of him by one of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): May I suggest to you that, rather than being a huge problem, it was the greatest boon to industry when the United Kingdom left the ERM?

Mr. Stevenson: So, what you are saying is that another ignominious collapse of Government policy is good for British policy. Is that what you are arguing?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Both hon. Members are referring to me. I am not responsible for these matters.

Mr. Stevenson: I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is interventions of that nature that mean that we sometimes slip up over parliamentary protocol—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I make a general point to the House? The conventions exist precisely so that we do not lose our tempers and get carried away.

Mr. Stevenson: I am extremely grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The ignominious policy of the previous Government, which we now seem to be being urged to repeat—we shall not—came after two of the worst recessions that this country has ever witnessed.

There was no reference in the speech of the right hon. Member for Wokingham to the other burden on business inflicted by 18 years of the previous Government's rule: their complete and utter isolation in Europe. Time after time, businesses in my constituency asked me why the

[Mr. Stevenson]

then Government did not put forward what they wanted to hear in a positive fashion and why the Government were, instead, left completely isolated. Business representatives asked me, "Don't the Government know that they are not working in our interests, but against them?" That argument fell on stony ground with the previous Government. For 18 years that massive burden was imposed on industry.

I accept that the previous Government did not have a policy of imposing burdens on the coal industry; their policy was to destroy it. They did not need to put unnecessary burdens on the coal industry because they wanted to see it destroyed; they certainly achieved that very effectively in my constituency. Future generations in this country will scarcely believe that any Government could have embarked on such a policy.

Another important area of business involves small and medium businesses. My experience—and I suspect that it is shared by many Members of the House—is that small and medium businesses have given a clear message. They are worried about the business rate that was imposed by the previous Government. In my constituency it went up 30 per cent. in less than three years. Businesses are worried about late payment, about investment and about a chronic lack of skills, which I think was referred to by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). They are also worried about the burden of regulation. I shall briefly refer to each of those issues.

The uniform business rate was imposed by the previous Government because they were not prepared, in any way, shape or form, to trust local authorities. They thought that Whitehall knew best the consequences that have been suffered by businesses in my area and elsewhere.

Mrs. Gorman: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that the reason the previous Government introduced the uniform business rate was that Labour councils all over the country were doubling or trebling business rates year by year and using them as a milch cow to fund the introduction of their extravagant general policies?

Mr. Stevenson: I am prepared to debate that point with the hon. Lady at any time she chooses, but I would say now that her general comment would not stand up to scrutiny. What she describes was certainly not the case in my local authority area—I have had the figures checked. Increases in business rates have far outstripped increases in general rates.

Mr. Borrow: Does my hon. Friend agree that, had the previous Tory Government not neglected the quinquennial revaluation of business properties, the disparity between different regions of the United Kingdom would not have grown to the extent that, in 1990, many of the points raised about high business rates became true? It was the Conservative Government's failure to address the problem through revaluation and the fact that comments made by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) stopped the revaluation in 1979 that created many of the problems.

Mr. Stevenson: My hon. Friend is obviously correct, and I am grateful for that intervention.

Late payment is another burden on businesses. They say that they are not getting paid quick enough and that something needs to be done about the problem. Why did the previous Government do nothing? If they were so interested in lifting the burdens on businesses, especially small businesses, why did they ignore the problem for 18 years?

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The hon. Gentleman asks a question and I may be able to provide an answer. I was at the Association of British Chambers of Commerce at the time and I well recall that, in 1988, the then Secretary of State for Employment conducted a consultation on statutory interest on late payments. Industry, for which I spoke, said that it did not want it, just as industry is now saying that it is the wrong way to proceed.

Mr. Stevenson: That is more a comment on the effectiveness of the previous Government's consultation processes than a statement of the truth of the matter. All hon. Members, with the possible exception of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), would accept without much equivocation that late payment is a real problem for small businesses. Why did the previous Government not act? Why did they ignore the problem throughout their period in office? The Labour Government will act to lift that burden from small businesses.

Skills are extremely important to businesses, especially small businesses. It would be useful for Conservative Members to look at the 1995 report from the European Union Court of Auditors. It makes interesting reading: it contains an entire section on training programmes for small and medium businesses and one section refers particularly the previous Government. Why did the court refer to the previous Government? The report states clearly that less than 1 per cent. of the programmes available to support training for small and medium businesses in the United Kingdom had been implemented by the previous Government—less than 1 per cent. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire is an expert on research, but some of us Labour Members have done our research as well, and the figures are damning.

European Union objective 4 funding relates to submissions for retraining those who need new skills to re-enter the job market. That is an essential activity, but in 1995–96 there was not a single bid from the previous Government—not one. When I questioned that in European Standing Committee B, I was told by the Conservative Minister that there was no need for such retraining programmes—a staggering reply. When we talk about burdens on business we should consider the previous Government's record—lamentable, not by accident but by design. The Conservative Government did not believe in public intervention in training and retraining and certainly did not believe that such intervention should come from the European Union.

Deregulation is fine in respect of burdensome regulations that are unnecessary, out of date or counterproductive. There is general consensus that we want to see such regulations out of the way, so we support the Select Committee on Deregulation that was set up by the right hon. Member for Henley in 1994. However, there are two problems with that Committee: first, although it abolished between 800 and 900 regulations, between 1994 and the time they left office the previous Government introduced 10,000 regulations. That cannot have fulfilled the objectives of the exercise. It is no good Conservative

Members shaking their heads—it is true; the figures derive from answers to parliamentary questions. Secondly, as I understand it, the Committee does not contain representatives from small and medium businesses—what a lamentable omission from such an important activity.

Conservative contributions to the debate have tried to rerun the stale, lost arguments that were put forward during the general election. We have heard nothing positive from the Conservatives, whereas the Labour agenda is about skills, investment, economic stability, sustainable growth and a Government who, in complete contrast to the Conservatives, are determined to work in partnership with business.

8.56 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I came to the debate with feelings of curiosity and disbelief. I was curious because Conservative Members did not take the opportunity to apologise to the House for the damage that their policies caused to business and jobs when they were in office; and I experienced a sense of disbelief when I saw that they had failed to recognise the verdict of the voters who, having suffered the consequences of their policies, threw them out of office and inflicted the heaviest defeat on the Conservative party since 1906. What does it take before they get the message? What we heard instead was 45 minutes of auto-rant, which is hardly entertaining and certainly not interesting.

Just look at the record left us by the Tory party. In the 1990s under the Tories the national debt more than doubled. It took 300 years to accumulate a national debt of £160 billion. It took the Tories five years to more than double it, to £350 billion. Under the Tories, public sector debt per income taxpayer rose from less than £7,000 to more than £13,000. An independent report by Coopers and Lybrand, a well respected firm, stated that high borrowing and the rundown of state assets had left the public sector technically bankrupt. In 1989, the public sector had a net worth of £243 billion; by 1995, the Tories had reduced it to £36 billion. If they had stayed in office, it would now be zero.

Despite selling off public assets and screwing down public investment, the Tories failed to reduce public-sector borrowing. Let us look at their record on taxation: 22 tax rises since 1992, the biggest ever peacetime increase. The Library has calculated that the average family would need a cut in income tax of over 6p in the pound just to get back to where they were in 1992 at the time of the general election.

Of course, the Tory average family is not average at all. The definition of a family used in Conservative statistics is a family with two children under the age of 11, a male earner on full-time average wages and a non-working wife. That applies to fewer than 2 per cent. of all families. What about all the rest?

Under the Conservatives, the poorest became worse off than ever, and the gap between rich and poor widened. Consider the record on unemployment. The Conservative motion this evening mentions damage to jobs, but unemployment under the Tories rose from 1.26 million in 1979 to more than 2 million in the last Parliament. Consider, too, the damage Conservative policies have done to business and industry. In the year before the Tories left office, investment in manufacturing was lower in real terms than in 1970, a quarter of a century before. Investment in the UK was the fourth lowest in the EU as a percentage of GDP. When they left office, inflation was the third highest in the EU, and short-term interest rates were the second highest—only Greece's were higher.

So on public debt, taxation, poverty and unemployment, investment, inflation and interest rates the Tories' record is one of failure. No wonder the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) adopted the slogan, "No change, no chance". No wonder, either, that the public took his sound advice and voted his party out of office.

Only now do we hear the hint of an apology—not in the House but in an interview reported in the *Sunday Times* this weekend. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) in her place; I do not like to speak ill of the absent. She reportedly told the Federation of Small Businesses:

"Mea culpa, we did not get it right in all areas".

That prompts the question—how many areas were there left to get it wrong in? Admitting that the Conservative Government did not respond to the needs of small firms, she went on to say:

"We did not listen but perhaps we did not always receive the right message".

The killer point came next:

"There will be little policy coming from the Conservative Party in these initial stages, as is understandable, because we got it wrong."

I am still waiting to hear a formal apology—

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman paints an appalling picture of the alleged state in which we left the economy. What does he make of the fact that 40 per cent. of all Japanese investment overseas is placed in Britain; that German motor car manufacturers have moved here because of our better labour relations and stable currency; and that even the French are moving their high-tech industries across the channel—

Mr. Chidgey: Yes, I have got the message. I had always thought the hon. Lady was a Eurosceptic, yet now she seems to welcome the benefits of our membership of the EU. She might care to ponder why United Kingdom finance is never seen to be invested in this country—it is always being invested elsewhere.

Given the damning Conservative record of destruction to businesses and jobs, the lack of a policy from the party of the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham will not be missed, in the House or anywhere else. Now we have an opportunity to repair the damage and reverse the broken promises—

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chidgey: I think the hon. Gentleman has already entertained the House enough for one night with a lengthy speech and several interventions. I am sure that other hon. Members would welcome the chance to make short speeches in the little time that is left.

There is certainly an urgent need to lighten the load on business and to shift taxation away from employment. We need to simplify bureaucracy and encourage the growth of small to medium firms by promoting competition.

As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) said, there is an urgent need to tackle the growing skills shortage. If we do not do so, there will be

[Mr. Chidgey]

inflationary pressure on wages and the drives for greater efficiency and for greater productivity will be held back. The skills shortage can be tackled only by investment in education and training.

Above all, there is an urgent need to provide proper support for business, to prepare it for the conversion of information technology for the year 2000.

I shall now discuss taxation. We need to simplify taxation by standardising employers' national insurance contributions. We need to consider switching taxes from employment to the consumption of finite resources of fossil fuels. I urge the Government to examine again the idea of raising the threshold for VAT for small and medium enterprises.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the long-overdue Competition Bill. It is time to tackle the anti-competitive practices that are still rife in the economy. We should look again at the recent mergers of international accountants, reducing competition by decreasing their number from seven major firms to five, and the apparently planned merger of two of the major clearing banks, which will reduce competition by decreasing their number from five to three.

Mr. Lansley: I understand the hon. Gentleman to be suggesting that there should be a large-scale energy tax—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Chidgey: There is so much coughing from the Front Bench that I cannot hear.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting a large-scale energy tax. How would such an energy tax be implemented without undermining the competitiveness of many industries for which energy is an important input cost?

Mr. Chidgey: I take the point. I have tried not to go into too much detail because I appreciate that time is short. We believe that tax should be switched from the good things—employment—to the things that consume our finite energy resources. The latter form of tax is commonly called the carbon tax. The whole thrust of that taxation policy is that it is a neutral tax. When national insurance contributions are cut, taxation is switched from employment to the use of finite energy resources. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I must press on, because otherwise we shall not hear the valuable contribution from the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) later.

This week, it was reported that electricians had ignored the recommendations of their union and rejected a 30 per cent. increase over three years, because there is an incredible shortage of skilled technicians in the construction industry, which provides a bargaining tool. We must overcome the skills shortage if we are not to create wage instability.

Employers in my constituency tell me that they are worried, not about the minimum wage, but about the shortage of skilled labour. Key workers are being poached by rivals offering higher wages, fuelling the wages spiral, increasing costs and reducing competitiveness. That is a legacy of decades of under-investment in education and training. It is time to stop the rot. We cannot meet this country's skills needs unless we broaden the base of those entering higher education and training.

The increase in student numbers can come only from the families who, for too long, have been excluded from higher education and vocational training. The Government are sending out the wrong message by introducing tuition fees for students. Already there are signs that university applications for the next academic year are dropping dramatically.

It is time to break down the barriers of training for those seeking to improve their skills and for those whose low skills have led to long-term unemployment. Welfare to work can become a reality only if it does not deny access to quality skills training because the individual is deemed to be no longer available for work. We must break the treadmill that means that a person cannot sign up for decent skills training because, if they do so, they lose their unemployment benefit because they are not available for work. The aim must be for that person to gain the skills that will get them out of unemployment and into decent work, which will enable them to contribute to society by earning wages and by paying income tax.

All—not just some—young people should have the right to education and vocational training. If we are to bridge the skills gap, if we are to turn the country round by creating a highly skilled work force that adds value to our economy, we cannot ignore the seedcorn of our young people. That is why the Liberal Democrats are committed to everyone under the age of 18 having the right to two days a week education or quality vocational training.

I want finally to discuss the millennium bug. It is now crystal clear that, as the millennium approaches, solving the problem of the computer time bomb will be expensive and will cause severe disruption to many firms. A survey of more than 1,000 firms about to be published by PA Consultants shows that 50 per cent. do not even have a millennium programme in place. About half the manpower that industry and commerce will need to deal with the problem will have to come from specialist consultants—but there are not enough information technology consultants to go around. At the very least, firms face a huge hike in the cost of IT support. Small firms face a disaster; even the largest face huge problems.

It is estimated that companies representing one third of our gross domestic product will not complete the conversion on time, so 29 per cent. of our GDP is at risk. The Government must start to take the problem seriously. Smooth words from spin doctors are not enough while the head of Action 2000 can afford to spend only one day a week at his desk.

While it is clear that the Opposition motion serves only to highlight their lamentable performance in Government and to confirm how thoroughly they deserved to be thrown out of office, the new Government have yet to convince us that they are taking the actions and pursuing the policies that are vital to this country's recovery. They have been given a mandate based on promise and expectation; the country has the right to demand that they deliver.

9.11 pm

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I want to respond to the right hon. Member for Wokingham—Mr. Deadwood, as he is known—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Davies: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down. Will he please refer to hon. Members in the correct way?

Mr. Davies: I want to respond to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). I will not make any jokes about him, other than to say that he seemed to think of himself as old king coal, Arthur's friend. After 18 years of Conservative rule under which the coal industry was destroyed, it was a bit rich to hear the shadow Minister standing on his hind legs talking as though he was the champion of coal. He suddenly asserted that gas was more expensive than coal—a basic insight which, apparently, he did not have when he was a Minister in the previous Government.

The right hon. Gentleman spent half his time making various smears about Ministers, responding to the simple fact that his wife worked for British Airways when he was a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry and British Airways was doing all sorts of things. However, those are not the issues in the debate.

The debate is about the simple fact that the economic legacy of the previous Administration is an appalling mess. We are falling down the skills league. We inherited £410 billion of debt, escalating at an enormous rate and costing us almost £30 billion a year in interest charges. Interest rates and inflation rates went through the hurly burly of boom and bust, hitting 16, 17 and 18 per cent. We had multi-million unemployment, more repossessions than during the highland clearances and two recessions that stripped the heart out of manufacturing. At the same time, small businesses went bust at an unprecedented rate. The legacy was one of hopelessness.

It was a great victory for Britain when the new Labour Government were elected. If the shambles of the Conservative party were running Britain, what sort of future would we have? We would have a myopic approach to a new Europe—a Canute-type Conservatism in which the Opposition dismiss the prospect of monetary union, which is inevitable.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham asked us to join him in apologising to Britain's people for the farce over the exchange rate mechanism. We will not join the Opposition in any apology for the despicable mess that was their legacy.

The official Opposition profess the economics of isolationism, of little England and of chip shop England in an emergent Europe. That is not the future for this country. The Opposition cannot even decide among themselves. The views of the old and new Opposition Front-Bench team diverge massively on the convergence criteria. Contrast that—because that is what the motion is about—with the new Labour Government, who heralded a new era of macro-stability with that bold and courageous move by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Lansley: In the light of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, how does he explain the Government's own figures, which suggest that growth of 3.5 per cent. in 1997 is to be turned into growth of about 2.5 per cent. next year and 1.75 per cent. the year after? It is hardly a new era.

Mr. Davies: We have been in government for only seven months and already we are seeing the first blossoms of economic success, with employment growing. The single move by the Chancellor to delegate responsibility for setting interest rates to the Bank of England reduced overnight the cost of borrowing on gilts by 0.29 per cent. In the first year, that will save the taxpayer £50 million and, as those bonds mature, the saving will be about £750 million per year to the taxpayer. That is just one move.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I will give way later.

We have the lowest corporation tax in Europe: the second major reduction was announced last week. It is good for business and for Britain.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I am provoking a lot of Conservative Members now. I have to take one intervention.

Mr. Letwin: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the cash flow effects of the Government's change in corporation tax? Does he deny the analysis that the change will cost the whole of British industry about £2 billion?

Mr. Davies: As always, the Government have the long-term interest of business in mind. I am of course aware of the position in relation to cash flow management in the next few years, but, in sharp contrast with the previous Government, we are looking towards the long term.

We have embarked on the new deal, funded by a one-off levy. Business likes that. In Croydon, a major economic engine for south London, we are already persuading the business community to take on the idea of the new deal, which gives new people new opportunities for new business success. Much play was made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) about small business.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Who is Buckingham?

Mr. Davies: It is that chap over there. My hon. Friend probably does not know him. He is not very famous.

Small business can take on the long-term unemployed at a reduction of £75 a week for the over-25s, or £60 a week for the under-25s. That is a major reduction in labour costs. It enables small business to make one-off, critical mass growth, and a breakthrough in terms of size and prosperity. That is why the proposal has been welcomed so widely.

The advent of regional development agencies is cherished by the business community. Only the other evening, I was having dinner with senior members of the Confederation of British Industry in London. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I know that Conservative Members were not invited, but that is a sign of the times. Those CBI

[Mr. Davies]

representatives welcomed the new, planned, coherent approach to economic development on a regional basis, and the Labour party's initiatives.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Did the hon. Gentleman have an opportunity, during that dinner with senior members of the CBI, to discuss their outright opposition to the minimum wage?

Mr. Davies: No, I did not. We were too busy talking about the need for British business to prepare for economic and monetary union, which the Conservatives completely overlooked. It was pointed out to me at that dinner that having the old Tories still in power, arguing among themselves, would have been a hopeless catastrophe for businesses trying to prepare for the emerging Europe. The minimum wage did not feature in the discussions, partly because it is not a serious issue for the main players in the CBI. The idea of the minimum wage is to encourage skilling, added value and productivity. In a modern economy, our ambition is not to become the new China.

Moving on to more serious points than those raised by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), the new Labour Government have inherited an economy characterised by millions of people on the dole, unable to pay tax, and the rest paying higher taxes simply to keep people on the dole.

Now there is a new opportunities culture. We are giving thousands and thousands of people a new opportunity to add value to the economy, to contribute and to become stakeholders. That new deal, that welfare to work, that investment in macro-economic stability, with help for small and medium-sized enterprises and all economic stakeholders in a planned and strategic way marks the rebirth of a new Britain for a new millennium. The name of the game is partnership. We are the friend of business, and prosperity is on the way.

9.21 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): The motion refers to action and inaction on the part of Ministers. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) gave a distinguished explanation of the Government's damaging actions on wider union powers, a statutory minimum wage and the social chapter. I should like to draw attention to the inaction of Ministers on the important subject of business rates.

I am disappointed that the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry is not here, because she was very vocal before and during the election campaign in her alleged support for small business. Not a week went by at any of the main London business forums without a visit from her, talking about how she would reduce the burden on small businesses. She spent a lot of time talking a great game. That has been proved to be full of hollow words.

Let us examine the pledge on business rates that the Labour party has broken. We all know why business rates are important. They comprise a large proportion of the turnover and profit of many small businesses in my part of Suffolk as elsewhere. That is why the Labour manifesto said:

"we will make no change to the present system . . . without full consultation with business."

A press release on 25 July said that Labour would take a look at Government finance and business rates,

"consulting with business fully about returning the business rate to local control."

I have news for Labour Members. Local chambers of trade in my part of East Anglia have not had one piece of paper from the Government on the reform of business rates and how the burden of business rates may be reduced. You have said that you would consult, but you have patently failed to do so. In failing to consult, Labour has broken yet another pledge.

Let us examine the burden that local businesses face. It is clear that small businesses face a disproportionate burden as a result of business rates. The Government have said that they will do something about it, but are failing to do so. The Conservatives had a concrete proposal to give businesses a tax-free allowance for the first £1,000 of rateable value. That was in our manifesto. We had concrete proposals that the Government have not even attempted to follow. You have not consulted when you said that you would.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It ought to be possible for hon. Members to remember for a little while what I said.

Mr. Ruffley: The Government have singularly failed to live up to their manifesto pledges since 1 May.

Many small businesses in my part of Suffolk are particularly concerned about the Government's commitment to remove the universal council tax cap in due course. Their manifesto says absolutely nothing about a capping mechanism in respect of business rates.

In the absence of any details on that important subject from any Ministers in any Department, particularly the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry, there is a great deal of speculation, which is worrying the small business community, particularly in the provinces. In particular, it is worried about the gossip and the spin that is being applied by Government advisers to the effect that the local business rate, if returned to council control, would be linked to domestic council tax levels.

That is what Ministers' advisers are putting around. That is not a great comfort to local businesses, because they know that, if local businesses are tied to local council tax levels, there is only one way in which business rates can go—up. A report, which I am sure is right, shows that an increase of up to 10 per cent. in domestic council tax is winging its way to council tax payers in the next financial year.

Mr. Borrow: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many businesses foresee a return to a closer relationship and partnership with local government, but would welcome a link between a local business rate and the council tax, so that any increase for council tax payers is matched by the increase for business rate payers rather than divorcing one from the other, as that would risk local government increasing the council tax by a different percentage from that applied to the business rate? Or is he saying that a central, nationalised business rate should remain?

Mr. Ruffley: I wish that such erudition on the subject of local government finance was shown by Government

Front Benchers. They say nothing on this subject, which is precisely why local business men complain to me about an absence of consultation and understanding.

The whole basis on which local council tax business rate setting is returned to local authorities, and the linking of it to the domestic council tax, will inevitably shift the gearing downwards. As we all know, at present a 5 per cent. increase in council tax will have an upward impact of only 1 per cent. on local authority budgets. At the moment, that provides a disincentive for local politicians to jack up rates. The change that the Government propose would reduce the gearing, making it very much more attractive to raise local finance—not just the domestic council tax, but local business rate tax. That is what the Government's manifesto proposals mean.

Mr. Loughton: I was entirely confused by what the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) said. He missed one fundamental point. One reason why businesses would not, perhaps, welcome a return to the link with local rates is that business men do not get a vote. Businesses have no power or authority over local authorities, whereas local voters do. That is the fundamental difference.

Mr. Ruffley: I thank my hon. Friend for that valuable and important contribution.

The logic of the Government's proposals is bad for business. The inaction of Ministers and Departments is a disgrace. They have made promises and failed to keep them. The Government's inaction is something which local businesses will not take lightly.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ruffley: As I am bringing my remarks to an end, I shall not give way.

The motion goes to the core of Ministers' inaction, which is damaging jobs and business and leading especially to uncertainty in the small business sector.

9.29 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): We have had a useful debate. What a contrast is to be drawn between the contributions of my hon. Friends and those of the two Labour Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), in an eloquent speech, highlighted the fallacy of the case for the minimum wage. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) reminded the Government of their complete inactivity on the business rate.

The contributions of Labour Members reflected old Labour in all its manifestations. We heard from the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) and for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies).

In seven lean months, the Government's business policy has become clear. There are favours for their friends—for example, special treatment for formula one and a huge new gas-fired power plant for BP while for the rest there are higher taxes. There is more regulation for everyone. In business, the Government are partisan, expensive and burdensome. I shall focus especially on the burdens that are being imposed by the Government.

Before I refer to the burdens, what has happened to deregulation? The Conservative Government produced about 30 deregulation orders a year. I checked, and in the past seven months the Labour Government have produced only one such order. They have made it easier to deduct trade union subscriptions from employees' pay without written authorisation.

What has happened to the deregulation task force? The answer is that it has been renamed. It is now the better regulation task force. Even so, it seems to have sunk without trace in the Cabinet Office bureaucracy. It has become the Humphrey of Government quangos. We have not heard from it and we have seen no proposals from it. That gives the lie to the Labour party's promises before the general election that it would continue with the process of deregulation.

New burdens are being imposed. British business faces a wave of new legislation. There will be an increase in rules, bureaucracy and costs on a scale not seen since the mid-1970s. The President of the Board of Trade boasted about the weight of legislation that she would inflict on business. The right hon. Lady took responsibility for 10 Bills this evening, including the Wireless Telegraphy Bill, the Fossil Fuel Levy Bill and a Competition Bill, proposing draconian new powers of search and entry and retrospective fines of up to 10 per cent. turnover. These proposals have been opposed in detail by all major employers' operations.

There is the National Minimum Wage Bill, which will increase the cost of labour for not only low-paying businesses but all businesses. That is why employers' organisations such as the Engineering Employers Federation oppose it. That is not because member companies pay badly but because of the impact that the Bill will have on differential pay rates. The Bill will interfere with the freedom of employers to reward performance and skills. It will also price younger people out of jobs.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: I shall not give way, because there is very little time.

A week ago, the Prime Minister prayed in aid the minimum wage in the United States of America. In the USA, however, small firms are exempted. Firms with a turnover of less than $500,000 are exempted. Seasonal workers are exempted. A catalogue of other workers are also exempted. After the National Minimum Wage Bill, there will be further legislation on compulsory union recognition, on the right to statutory interests and on strikers' rights, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham reminded us.

The biggest and heaviest burden of all comes in the form of the social chapter. It is proposed that we should have European works councils which are expensive, bureaucratic and unnecessary. They are welcomed by one trade union leader, who said:

> "It is tempting to see European works councils as a threat to trade union organisation. But that would be a recipe for inactivity. Our objective should be to do what the German trade unions do and take over these works councils in multinational companies."

That was Mr. Dromey just two years ago.

[Mr. Fallon]

That directive is followed by the parental leave directive. The Department of Trade and Industry estimates the cost of the directive at £200 million a year for British business. That is a burden on business. There is also the part-time and temporary workers directive which gives new statutory and contractual rights to part-time workers. There is the sex discrimination and—

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to disturb the peroration by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). Have you been informed, Madam Speaker, that the President of the Board of Trade will not be here? My hon. Friend is presenting a damning indictment of the right hon. Lady's speech, yet she is not here to hear it; nor is—

Madam Speaker: Order. The Government have collective responsibility. The Minister of State is present on the Front Bench waiting to respond.

Mr. Fallon: Further measures are proposed on sex discrimination and sexual harassment which not only run directly counter to the principle of United Kingdom civil law that people bringing a claim must prove their case, but flatly contradict Labour's Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: No, because I do not have time.

Another proposal is for national works councils. Firms with as few as 50 employees will now face the same statutory obligations as the multinationals because proposals introduced under the social chapter will be subject to qualified majority voting. We read that, when the idea was first mooted last June, Downing street said:

"We are not in favour of new regulation in this area."

By November, we read that the Prime Minister

"has been urging European Union leaders to refrain from using the social chapter to pass new laws that could inflict more red tape on business."

That is what happens if one gives away vetoes. This country ends up begging its fellow European leaders not to legislate against it.

We put that point to the Prime Minister at Question Time, but he did not answer it. Happily, the question was then put to the President of the Board of Trade, not in the House, but by Mr. John Humphrys in "On The Record" on Sunday 9 November. He pushed the right hon. Lady on the point that if she wanted exemptions for small firms from the national works council directive, she would not be able to secure them. Mr. Humphrys said:

"You will resist but you can't actually stop it happening."

The right hon. Lady answered with what may be a summary of her industrial policy. She said:

"Well, er, we shall see how things go."

The Government do not have an answer.

The Government do, however, pay attention to some industries. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) explained, formula one gets attention. The Prime Minister and his children attend Silverstone, Bernie puts in a million and somehow, there is immediate access to Ministers. There are fewer jobs in formula one than there are in the coalfields, but the miners have not yet been to No. 10. The miners' leaders have not yet been to see the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, but they have been to see us. The reason is that Ministers have broken their promises on preventing gas-fired generation.

Ministers are happy to preside over the disintegration of the coal industry—indeed, they have accelerated closures with the additional money they have taken out of the power industry. They have £250 million from National Power, £200 million from PowerGen and £100 million from Eastern Electricity, precisely the companies which are negotiating with the coalfields and precisely the companies which are buying coal from our collieries. Coal is not in safe hands.

Where has the President of the Board of Trade been over the past few weeks? We read that coal policy is now in the hands of the Deputy Prime Minister, a Minister with responsibility for the environment, a Minister with responsibility for the regions or the Minister without Portfolio—everywhere except in the hands of the President of the Board of Trade. She does not have a coal policy, but we know where she was last week. She was opening the caravan show at Earl's Court. Caravans are quite a metaphor for this Government—they are slow moving, they sway from side to side and they block the way ahead.

What about the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, who is the Minister with responsibility for coal? Where was he last week when all the meetings were taking place in Downing street? He has not even attended this debate. I can tell my hon. Friends that we tracked him down last week. The headlines read, "Battle Acts to Stop Bad Hair Days". He was promising not help for the coalfields but

"a government-funded study of problems with products used in hairdressing".

He said that his proposals

"represent a genuine package of positive steps that will help to engender confidence in this important sector of the economy".

He is the Minister for blow waves.

I have to tell Ministers that we have rumbled their business policy—it is formula one, it is caravans, it is hairdressing. We have been raising the issues that matter to British business—competition policy, costs, the minimum wage and the new wave of 10 Bills of which the President of the Board of Trade boasts and which will impose new costs right across the British business sector.

The Labour party claimed to favour stability when it consulted business before the election, but it now boasts about introducing 10 new Bills, thus creating a wave of uncertainty and instability right across industry. The Government claim to have cut business taxes; instead, they have increased them in every sector. By introducing the windfall tax and increasing corporation tax and taxes on the technology industries, they have increased the burden on British business.

Finally, and most outrageous of all, the Government claim, laughably, to be business's friend, but their policies have already been rejected in detail by business. The national minimum wage is opposed by employers' organisations, the windfall tax has been opposed, and the proposals for statutory recognition have been opposed. It is nonsense to say that Labour supports British business. In the past seven months, it has done everything possible to undermine the inheritance that we bequeathed them.

9.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has been out of politics for five years, and his speech showed it. He is the same old Tory with the same old story. He has nothing new to say, so he simply attacks. He attacks the right of home workers to be paid 50p an hour. He supports the principle and concept of low pay, but opposes the right of workers whose children fall ill to take time off to visit them in hospital. He opposes the right of 2 million low-paid workers to have paid holidays for the first time in their life. He is opposed to employers and employees sitting down in works councils to discuss matters of interest and agreement—despite the fact that, when the Tory Government opted out, employers opted in.

What else does the hon. Member for Sevenoaks oppose? He opposes fairness at work and the right of individuals to be treated fairly by their employers. He is still opposed to people being protected from being forced to work 60, 70 or 80 hours a week, despite the fact that, in government, the Tories lost a European Court decision, which said that they were acting illegally in preventing people from being protected from working unsocial hours. That is the sum total of what the Tories have learnt—or not—since 2 May.

What about the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), the mouthpiece of Jonathan Aitken? He learned his trade—no more, no less—supporting or promoting Jonathan Aitken. He spent 45 minutes in the House denying other hon. Members the opportunity to speak positively on how we need to take the United Kingdom economy forward. When it came down to it, the hon. Gentleman had only one simple thing to say: he believes in poverty pay. His simple premise is no pay or low pay. At the end of 45 minutes of diatribe, he showed himself for all he is: a person who defends the few against the many in the workplace who have been undermined by low pay for the past 30 years.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: Sit down.

What an apologist the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) is for a Tory Government who, for 18 years, hammered small business rates. He came to the debate to attack a Labour Government, despite that—

Mr. Bruce *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: Wait a minute.

All that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds had to do was to apologise for 18 years of Tory government, during which the Conservatives undermined small businesses.

Only yesterday, in *The Sunday Times*, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) apologised—or attempted to—for how the Tories treated small businesses during 18 years of government. It is too late to apologise. Tens of thousands of businesses have gone out of business, and gone with them are valuable jobs in local communities. The hon. Lady said that the Government have done nothing for business and taxation. We have been in power for about 220 days. The Tories were in power for 18 years—during which there were 22 tax rises, two recessions and 3 million people unemployed. That was their record.

What have we done in the first seven months? We abolished advance corporation tax, reduced VAT on fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent., reduced VAT for approved insulation schemes, cut corporation tax from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent., cut small companies corporation tax by 2 per cent.—

Mr. Bruce *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Is the Minister giving way?

Mr. McCartney: No.

Madam Speaker: That being the case, the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) should resume his seat.

Mr. McCartney: We introduced a 10p increase in capital allowances for small firms, reduced vehicle excise duty for low-emission lorries, reduced the gas levy, increased tax allowances for film production and simplified gilt interest. Goodness, I am tired out—and that is only in the first seven months of a Labour Government.

What did we find when we came to power on 2 May? We found the social and economic effects of two recessions and record bankruptcies. We found that 250,000 companies had been forced to the wall since 1979 and a business had gone bust every three minutes of every working day since 1992. The Conservative party was not a party of business; it was a party of funny business. The Tories fiddled while the economy burned. They protected Asil Nadir when tens of thousands of small businesses went to the wall because of their economic incompetence.

In one in five working-age households in Britain, no one works. What was the Tories' answer? They fiddled the figures. A generation of young people and older workers were abandoned to the dole queue and social exclusion. The Tories created a sweatshop capital of Europe instead of an enterprise capital of Europe. They introduced a hire-and-fire culture: if someone was not willing to work for £1 or £1.20 an hour, there was always somebody else among the 3 million on the dole queue who would. Low pay or no pay was the Tories' cry. They created fat-cattery and took extra jobs themselves. Part-time Members of Parliament had two, three, four, five and even six directorships—because they claimed that they could not live on a Member of Parliament's salary—but they forced a million people in Britain to live on less than £2.50 an hour. Those are the double standards and hypocrisy of the Opposition.

The Tories raised interest rates to record levels. There was a recession in the construction industry and record low investment. Under the Tories, we had a record low share of world trade. They put up taxes for small businesses and increased regulation when they promised to cut it. Then they refused to help small and medium-sized enterprises that were crippled by late payments. The former Deputy Prime Minister boasted that that was how to do business. He said that he became a multi-millionaire by screwing small businesses into the ground. His attitude was, "I succeeded—to hell with them." That is what the Tories did in 18 years, and then

[Mr. McCartney]

they left us £350 billion of debt—£6,000 for every citizen in the United Kingdom. The Tories were not economists: they were spivs and Arthur Daleys.

On 2 May, we took power and set about modernising this country. We are committed to strong, open and fair markets; economic and social renewal; partnership replacing conflict; and modern companies building a new country and a new Europe. Those are the consequences of the first seven months of a Labour Government. This Government believe in partnership and a valued role for employees and their trade unions. We are committed to the aims, roles and shared values of business. We support improved company cultures; performance and skill enhancement; the development of personal potential; the retention of skills and talent; the development of new skills and talent; investing in the work force; investing in research and development; the provision of minimum standards in the workplace; and training adaptable workers for flexible working environments. That is the difference between us and the Tories. What a contrast.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the former Secretary of State for Wales, is the wannabe of British politics. He said, "I wannabe the leader of the Tory party," but when he first tried, he got 27 per cent. of the vote of the parliamentary party. He lost, but he tried again. He got 16 per cent. of the vote. After his performance tonight, I doubt that he would even get off the starting line. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman does not want to be reminded of the shambles for which he and his colleagues were responsible over the past 18 years. The Labour Government have tried to start the process of change.

What does the Tory party find obnoxious about a Government policy which, in partnership with industry, will ensure positive effects in the labour market? We shall reject negative proposals that will hinder employment. We shall expand the mobility of the labour market by investing in skills. The problem under the Tories was that they refused to invest in skills. As a consequence, as the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) pointed out, this country suffers from a skill shortage. This Government will invest in skills and opportunity.

This Government introduced a £3.5 billion Budget that will be the biggest investment in skills and opportunity that this country has ever seen. Some 250,000 people will be taken off the dole and given an opportunity, and £200 million will be invested in giving single parents employment opportunities. The Tories simply sneer. They do not give a damn. They are unconcerned about the future of young people in Britain. The Tories sneer at investment of £3.5 billion, but employers do not sneer. Record numbers of employers are joining the new deal to ensure, when it is introduced in January next year, that it will be the most successful job creation programme in this country's history.

Why do the Opposition oppose employers sitting down with their employees and this Government, to work out new policies to sustain small and medium-sized enterprises? Why are the Opposition so opposed to partnership? They believe simply in conflict, when this country needs a sense of stability and economic commitment—for people to be able to find work throughout their working lives and to do the jobs on offer. Why is it that the Conservatives just cannot find the capacity—

Mr. Bercow: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask for your guidance. Is it in order for a Minister at the Dispatch Box who has referred to an hon. Member to refuse to take an intervention from that Member?

Madam Speaker: It is possible for any hon. Member to do that. The Member who has the Floor has discretion as to whether to give way. The Minister seems to be in full flow, and he is not going to give way.

Mr. McCartney: In the past 10 years, Conservative Members have always thought that they could put me off by shouting at me, even when they were on Government Benches. Some day, they will learn their lesson. There is no possibility of Opposition Members putting me off, on any subject at any time, and they should learn that. Nor will I ever give way to right hon. and hon. Members who preach double standards and hypocrisy in this House. The hon. Member for Buckingham had three quarters of an hour to put his case, and he failed abysmally. I will not give way to him, when Labour Members who should have been able to speak were not allowed to. In fact, this is a first. I have never known an Opposition to filibuster their own motion as much as Conservative Members have done, but they did.

The former Secretary of State for Wales—I have to keep saying former Secretary of State, because I just love it—has become the No. 1 stalker of Ministers. He can be seen early in the morning at the back of the Department of Trade and Industry, scraping around in the bins looking for something that will get him a quick headline. I am getting a little concerned for him as the winter weather comes on. May I suggest this to him? Do not hang around the back, but come in the front. We shall give him a cup of tea and, as we have always done since day one of this Government, we shall answer every question that he puts to us.

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that the Minister would not want to mislead the House. I have just checked the record of the Doorkeeper, and my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) spoke for 20 minutes. Clearly, the Minister cannot count that far. If he thinks that 20 minutes is 45, he should not be in that office.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) spoke for 20 minutes. I have it here. I also know how many points of order the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) has raised—too many.

Mr. McCartney: To return to the issues at stake, Opposition Members spent a great deal of time on their favourite subject—attacking Europe. As we reach the close of the debate, perhaps I can help them. We are considering a new directive, protecting endangered species living out of their natural habitats. What could be more relevant to Conservative Members who, on 1 May, were driven out of Scotland and out of Wales, and were recently driven out of Winchester? To make things a little easier for themselves, they drove themselves out of Leominster.

The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks, said that the Conservatives were the party of business. I can remember the Morris Minor—the Austin Morris. Last week, the Tories created a new model, the Temple-Morris. No matter how hard one tries to steer it, it just will not turn right, and neither will we.

We reject the Opposition motion. We ask hon. Members to vote for modernisation, renewal and partnership. Let us rebuild this country and give young people job opportunities. Let us get the long-term unemployed off the dole. Let us work in partnership with business to invest in training and education, research and development. Let us give Britain a major voice in Europe.

What people need in Europe is a Labour Government committed to employability, getting unemployment down and improving social justice, so that everyone has an opportunity to participate. We won the general election on the basis that we were the party of the many and the Tories were the party of the few. Today's debate showed that in spades. We remain the party of the many, and they remain the party of the few.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North–East Hampshire) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 326.

Division No. 102] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gillib, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sa[illegible]eed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*

Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. David Jamieson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the speedy action taken by Her Majesty's Government to foster an environment in which business can flourish, with macro-economic stability, low rates of corporation tax, a clear new competition policy, and a review of utility regulation; contrasts this with the boom and bust policies of the previous administration which led to the collapse of thousands of firms and unemployment for millions; and welcomes Her Majesty's Government's partnership with business to improve UK competitiveness.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 108 (Welsh Grand Committee (Sittings)),

That the Welsh Grand Committee shall meet at Westminster on Tuesday 16th December at half-past Ten o'clock to take questions under Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider the matter of government expenditure in Wales in 1998-99 under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)).—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Question agreed to.

Education (Hackney)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members please move away from the Bar as there is an hon. Member who wishes to speak.

Mr. Sedgemore: I should like to begin this debate by congratulating children and teachers in Hackney on their sustained and steady improvement in achievement in the 1990s. Whereas in 1990 only 14 per cent. of pupils obtained more than five GCSE grades A to C, in 1996 that figure had risen to 31 per cent. This year, the improvement in the grades was one of the best in the country. Better still, *The Observer* showed in a comprehensive survey that two Hackney schools, Clapton school and Haggerston school, were in the top 10 schools when value added was measured. I say well done to everyone concerned.

There is no contradiction between praise for those achievements and a recognition that the Office for Standards in Education report earlier this year was right to say that there were too many schools in Hackney that were performing badly—after all, one badly performing school is one too many. The Ofsted report was also right to say that the administration of education in Hackney was in a state of turmoil that could only be characterised as chaos. It was also right to report that things had become much more chaotic since the Liberal Democrats and Tories had taken control of the council, 18 months earlier. The blame lies with Councillor Kevin Daws, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, and Councillor Joe Lobenstein, the leader of the Tories. Those two councillors are living proof of George Villiers's aphorism:

"The world is made up for the most part of fools and knaves."

Faced with that situation, I have no hesitation in saying that the only course open to the Government was to intervene directly, despite their limited legal powers, to help Hackney's schoolchildren. The Government's intervention was welcomed by teachers, parents and school governors. It is the considered view of most people—myself included—that the Minister for School Standards, who will reply to the debate, handled the intervention with great skill and sensitivity. I was present when he met head teachers in Hackney and can therefore pay tribute to his understanding, knowledge and professionalism. We were all impressed.

The improvement team that was sent in came up with some good suggestions. One of its members, Pat Collarbone, the former head teacher of Haggerston school for girls, is known to me, and I have the greatest respect for her ability. The team produced an education structure that valued the work of teachers and recognised that providing a service for education cannot be carried out in the same way as providing a service for refuse collection—there is a qualitative difference.

However, the alarm bells rang in Hackney, Whitehall and Westminster when Tony Elliston, Hackney council's chief executive, announced on the radio that he was

[Mr. Sedgemore]

prepared to go to war with the Government over the future of Hackney's education services. Tony Elliston is an unelected bureaucrat, yet here he was entering the political arena and declaring war on the most popular Government in history, without consulting the council's education committee or the full council.

In acting as a politician and usurping the role of elected politicians, he made a mockery of the notion of the public service ethos; he was also clearly in breach of the express and/or implied terms of his contract and in breach of the Widdecombe rules, which forbid senior local government officers to enter the political arena publicly. He let the people of Hackney down and lost their confidence. In his startling broadcast, he sounded like a man who had just had electro-shock therapy that had gone wrong—as though his brain was about to explode.

Ministers were right to respond by insisting that, whatever the chief executive thought, the council should employ a new director of education on the salary recommended by the improvement team. However, that still leaves open two questions: why did the chief executive allow chaos to develop in the education department and why was he unwilling to put it right? Why did the first, second and third-tier officers leave the education department during Elliston's reign of chaos? Was it only because he became obsessed with vacuous sociological jargon that was described by the National Union of Teachers' representative, Mark Lushington, as

"the toxic waste of American management theory circa 1975"

which

"reads like a menu for a Harvester restaurant"

and which was viewed by head teachers as plain idiotic?

Or was it because Tony Elliston, Hackney's chief executive, is a public school bully masquerading as an East End barrow boy who has nowhere to go but Hackney because he has exposed himself as unemployable elsewhere? He seems to believe that he can bully and threaten people into accepting his crude solutions to problems. Chief executives from other boroughs have told me that he has not tried to adapt his new management structure to Hackney's needs. I have written to him about Hackney's education services, but all I get in reply is that sinful pride which Alexander Pope characterised as

"the never failing vice of fools".

It is my considered view that bullies and fools such as Mr. Elliston have to be faced down. Just as the bully boy in the playground has to be excluded if he does not mend his ways, so the bully boy in charge of Hackney council should, if he does not change his ways, be excluded from public life.

It is deeply regrettable that when talking about education the chief executive should have demonstrated a vulgar streak which debased and demeaned our borough and brought it into hatred, ridicule and contempt. You probably will not believe this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but last week I was browsing in the Library through a magazine called "PR Week", of which I have a copy with me. Speaking of what he described as "maverick teachers" in Hackney, Tony Elliston, at a meeting of the Institute of Public Relations, said:

"Hackney is always in the shit. It's just a question of how deep it is".

Speaking, furthermore, about Ms Lorraine Langham, an executive director of the council, he said:

"Lorraine's approach to the media is that you can't polish a turd."

Where else in Britain is there a chief executive who refers to his council staff as shit? Does his executive director really use the schoolboy language of bodily functions when she speaks to the chief executive? And how does any of this help our schoolchildren who get only one chance in life? Perhaps Liberal Democrat leader Councillor Daws and Tory leader Joe Lobenstein, who support the chief executive in his filth, can tell us.

When the chaos was at its height in Hackney's education department I went to see one of the officers, Mohamed Mehmet. By then, the director of education, Gus John, had been driven out of his post, all the second-tier officers had gone, and Mohamed, who was about to leave, was the last of the third tier officers. It was like being on a beachhead where the battle plan had gone wrong. All around was desolation, and as the bright Byronic sun of the beachhead disappeared behind the clouds, the wind withered in the stagnant air, the waves died, the tides returned to their graves, and darkness became the universe. A whole department had been destroyed, morale had been sapped and Mohamed was getting out before he took the hit for everything that was wrong.

The new management structure prepared for Hackney by the chief executive is based on the dumbing down of intelligence, professionalism and specialist expertise. It was rejected by head teachers, governors, the National Union of Teachers and Labour councillors. Amazingly, for the first time in history the head teachers and the NUT found themselves on the same side of an industrial dispute—between the chief executive and the Government.

The great virtue of the work of the improvement team was that, for the first time in the history of Hackney education, everyone was consulted and everyone agreed—except for the chief executive and a couple of political parties motivated by malice.

I ask the Minister of State to make it clear in the immediate future that the work of the improvement team has his full confidence, and that it should not be deflected from its task of doing the best that it can for the future of Hackney's children. Everything that the local education authority does must be geared to that end, and that end only. Any help and resources that the Government can give to meeting that goal will be much appreciated. More resources really are needed.

Unfortunately, some of the administrative and political problems will not be overcome until the local elections in May 1998, when Labour will be returned to power. Political stability combined with common sense will then return. I suspect that, come May 1998, the advice of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will be sought on the proper method of getting rid of a recalcitrant chief executive.

For too long, too many people have played politics with the lives of Hackney's schoolchildren. It now behoves us all to raise our expectations and our performance in relation to their needs.

10.24 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) and especially with his closing remark that for too long people have played politics with Hackney schoolchildren. However, the main thing that I want to do in the few minutes available to me is to emphasise the amount of positive work going on in Hackney schools and the fact that very many teachers and very many children are still achieving, still doing their best in difficult circumstances.

When I first read in the newspaper that a hit squad was coming into Hackney schools, I was a little worried, because although those of us who are familiar with the position now know that the hit squad was coming to address problems at the centre, the press coverage at the time gave the sad impression that all schools in Hackney were failing. That was very unfortunate. One of the problems that we have in Hackney is a flight of parents once their children reach the age of 11 because of the poor reputation—undeserved, I believe—of secondary schools in Hackney.

Like many parents, I have difficulty with the policy of naming and shaming because, ultimately, we are naming and shaming not the school but the children. Not so long ago, I visited Morningside school in Hackney. Teachers told me that, the day after Morningside was plastered all over *The Evening Standard* as one of the worst schools in the country, the atmosphere in the school was like a morgue. We must have a care with policy, because the people who bear the burden of the stigma are the children in the schools.

The hit squad is at work now, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch is right to say that it has the support of teachers, councillors and parents in playing its part to improve education in Hackney. However, in a borough like Hackney, with the fourth highest unemployment in the country, with the one of the highest numbers of single parents in the country and with some of the worst housing in the country, education and achievement can never be satisfactorily addressed unless issues of poverty are also addressed and unless a policy of redistributing wealth is also considered.

I am not a class determinist when it comes to education; I do not believe that working-class children cannot achieve because they are working-class. I come from a working-class immigrant background and went to Cambridge university—a rather politically incorrect thing to admit nowadays. If children in Hackney are to achieve all that I know they can achieve, Hackney will need more resources and support and it will need policies to tackle the poverty and poor housing that we have in Hackney.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch mentioned Clapton school for girls. It is actually one of the most improving schools in the country. I am very sad that the council is now talking about turning it into a mixed school. There is a history of educating girls on that site dating from the 19th century. I realise the difficulties in Hackney and I realise the pressures for more mixed-sex schools, but Clapton school for girls has an important history of educating girls. There are not that many schools in Hackney with a positive history. It is a good school.

Clapton school for girls educates substantial numbers of Muslim girls; a mosque has been built a stone's throw from it precisely because the community wants the girls to attend that school. I fear that, if the school is turned into a mixed-sex school, Muslim parents will withdraw their girls and there will be pressure for a single-sex Muslim girls' school in Hackney, which would be a backward step.

It is to the credit of schools in Hackney that they are able to educate so many children from so many different creeds and backgrounds together in one system. The decision to turn Clapton school for girls into a mixed-sex school is wrong. It will be detrimental and I believe that it will give rise to pressure for single-sex Muslim schools. Clapton school for girls should continue to be a school for girls.

As I have said, with all the politics and media hype we must remember that children, parents and teachers in Hackney are doing their level best. I should like that to be acknowledged in the House today.

10.29 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): I am glad to have the opportunity to deal with the question of education in the London borough of Hackney. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) on securing the opportunity to debate the issue this evening. I also congratulate him on being a constant supporter of the Government's decision to establish the improvement team and on being an assiduous attender at the various meetings that have been held to consider the way forward for education in Hackney in these most difficult times.

I noted the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), especially towards the end of her speech. I guarantee that we will take her concerns into account should the Government be in a position to respond to any reorganisation proposals from Hackney.

As both my hon. Friends said clearly, the Government are concerned about the 30,000 children who get only once chance of a good education. I want to take this opportunity to say, on behalf of the Government, that many schools in Hackney are doing good work, often under difficult circumstances. I am pleased to put that on the record.

When I met the head teachers of Hackney—all 69 of them—just a week or two after we established the improvement team, I was struck by their commitment and motivation. As I come from a local government background myself, I thought of how much more they could do if they had the support and assistance of a good local education authority. They have been denied that. I happen to believe—I know that the Opposition disagree with this—that a local education authority that works well adds value to what its schools can do. It is a great shame that the schools in Hackney have not had that support.

I reinforce the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington: there are difficult circumstances in Hackney. It is one of the most impoverished urban areas in western Europe. In 1993, one third of all Hackney households had a gross income of under £5,000. Two thirds of households have no car; two thirds of children in Hackney secondary

[Mr. Stephen Byers]

schools take free school meals, the highest number in the country; and Hackney has the highest rate of unemployment in London.

The Government believe that children of unemployed or impoverished parents do not have to do badly in school—education should be their ladder of opportunity into work and off welfare, the wage slip replacing the giro cheque. Poverty should not be an excuse for failure, but a reason for targeted support and assistance. Children in Hackney, perhaps above children in all other parts of the country, deserve the highest-quality teaching, just as their teachers deserve the best possible support.

I acknowledge that the LEA in Hackney faces an immense challenge, but the magnitude of that challenge does not and will not excuse the provision of an inadequate service. On taking office in May, I asked for an analysis of the performance of all LEAs. That was an exercise distinct from the review of the performance of individual schools.

One LEA above all others gave us cause for concern—Hackney. As a result, we invited the Office for Standards in Education to inspect the authority. It agreed, and Hackney accepted. Ofsted was originally due to report at the end of this year, but it was so concerned at what it discovered that it brought its report forward and published it on 18 September. The report's conclusions were damning. Ofsted said:

"The current position is unacceptable. Some significant statutory duties are not being met.

What needs to be done is, in fact, very clear. If Hackney children are to realise their potential, then the Authority must, above all else, act to raise standards in literacy and numeracy and focus on the needs of those pupils whose first language is not English".

It concluded by saying:

"The LEA is in a state of disarray."

The Government would have failed in their responsibilities if they had not acted on the basis of those clear recommendations. We were not going to stand to one side, turn our backs on the children of Hackney and see them made the innocent victims of administrative and political failure, so the Secretary of State for Education and Employment established an improvement team under the leadership of Richard Painter.

There were concerns about the establishment of that team and, given some of the press reports before it was even appointed, I understand why. It has sought throughout to bring parties together, particularly governors, teachers and head teachers, in the interests of the children of Hackney. It has succeeded in doing that.

We gave the improvement team a remit, first, to ensure that Hackney met its statutory responsibilities; secondly, to work with head teachers and officers of the authority to prepare an education development plan; thirdly, to review urgently the LEA's management structure. We had no power to force the team on Hackney, as we had no power to require an inspection of the LEA by Ofsted. At all stages, the co-operation and agreement of Hackney has been necessary.

It is regrettable that the previous Government failed to provide legal backing to efforts to raise standards, particularly in relation to LEAs. This Government are prepared to take action to give themselves those legal powers, which is why, later this week, we will publish a measure to allow us to intervene directly in LEAs that are failing to provide an adequate education for the children for which they have responsibility. Next year, Ofsted will begin a regime of LEA inspection, starting with 12 LEAs that will be inspected during 1998.

There is no doubt that, over the past few weeks, there have been periods of frustration for the improvement team and for all of us who are concerned about the education of children in Hackney, but I am pleased that the Hackney LEA has now accepted the team's recommendation of the appointment of a director of education at a salary that should attract quality applicants. The post was advertised last week and the appointment should be made by the middle of January 1998. At the request of the team, head teachers and chairs of governors will be involved in the recruitment process.

That is a vital breakthrough, ensuring that those who have responsibility for the day-to-day delivery of a quality education—the teachers, head teachers and chairs of governors—are involved in the appointment of a director of education for Hackney, but it is not enough. The team will vet all shortlisted applicants. For the reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch, we do not have confidence in the present administration making a suitable appointment, which is why the Secretary of State will approve the final shortlist. We need that power. I am pleased that Hackney has agreed that we should have the final say.

We have been pleased by the high level of co-operation throughout between the improvement team, many local education authority staff, head teachers, chairs of governors and the unions—not just the teacher unions, but those representing non-teaching staff. It is a long time since there has been liaison in Hackney at that level with the single aim of securing a better education for the young people of the borough.

A good example of that working together has been the discussions about the uses for the Government's £1.25 million of new capital money to be spent between now and March 1998 as part of our new deal for schools. Some head teachers have accepted that their schools will not benefit this time because there are other more pressing cases. That says a lot about co-operation among Hackney head teachers. The money will improve the condition of buildings to create an environment for quality education. I look forward to working with the head teachers and the improvement team to ensure that Hackney will benefit again from round two of the new deal for schools capital money in 1998-99.

Those are positive developments. The improvement team is to be congratulated on sticking to its task, often in the face of resistance and hostility. However, it tells me of its concern about the projected deficit of approximately £3 million in Hackney's education budget for the current financial year. That follows a substantial deficit in 1996–97. The improvement team has raised the matter directly with the elected members of the local education authority. Later this week, a joint meeting will be held to determine what action needs to be taken.

The district auditor is also concerned about overspend in other service areas. We shall monitor the situation closely. We expect elected councillors to take positive action to discharge their responsibilities.

There were 30,000 reasons why the Government set up the improvement team—the 30,000 schoolchildren in Hackney. We would have intervened more directly and more strongly if we had had the legal powers. When we have those powers, we shall use them in similar situations. Working with councillors, being prepared to put old dogmas and prejudice to one side and putting the children of Hackney first, the improvement team, with the Government's support, will seek quality education. Next time we debate Hackney and its education service, I hope that it will be to celebrate the success of its schools—as we have done this evening—supported by a regenerated local education authority and assisted by a Government that regard education as the top priority.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

77 CD79-PAG1/61

House of Commons

Tuesday 2 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Job Creation

1. **Mr. Swinney:** When he last met Scottish Enterprise to discuss job creation in Scotland. [17090]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Industry met representatives of Scottish Enterprise on 26 November when a number of issues, including job creation, were discussed.

Mr. Swinney: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. At a time when unemployment in Scotland is at a higher level than in the rest of the United Kingdom, and with press reports this morning that more than 1,000 manufacturing jobs in Scotland are under threat, what can the Secretary of State do to persuade his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to follow some economic policy other than total dependence on interest rates as a means of slowing the overheating economy in the south-east of England, which has nothing to do with Scotland?

Mr. Dewar: It is in the interests of the whole United Kingdom that we place public finances on a sound footing and get levels of growth that we can sustain and build on in the future.

I appreciate that there has been some disappointing news—it was well reported in the newspapers today—but there is always an ebb and flow and there has also been some good news. As the hon. Gentleman will realise if he reads the unemployment figures, which show a claimant count of 146,700—the lowest in Scotland since January 1980—and the index of construction and production, which was up 5.2 per cent. in the year ending the second quarter of 1997, there is no reason for being over-gloomy about the current position. There is every reason to continue to fight hard to build economic prosperity.

Mr. David Marshall: Does the Secretary of State agree that long-term unemployment is a huge problem in the city of Glasgow? Will he gave an assurance that the Scottish Office will give its fullest support to Glasgow's bid for employment zone status, which will enable the city to tackle this critical situation?

Mr. Dewar: My hon. Friend can be assured that we fully back Glasgow's bid and hope that it will be successful. I remind him that the welfare-to-work programme, which deals with those who have been out of the labour market for a considerable time, is an enormously important commitment, backed by heavy funding on the part of the Government, and Glasgow, in Scottish terms, is a very important part of that programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: In considering disbursement of money from the Scottish Office, will the Secretary of State recall that in the entire county of Sutherland there are now fewer than 2,000 people engaged in agriculture and country occupations while in the city of which the right hon. Gentleman represents a part there are 82,000 registered drug addicts? Which section of society does he think is more deserving of reward from the public purse?

Mr. Dewar: I think that the choice is a false one; it is not a matter of choosing between the two, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. I welcome his interest and concern for those who are struggling in Glasgow. No doubt he will be glad of my assurance that we work very closely with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, local authorities and other agencies to examine the problems of areas such as Sutherland, with which we are very familiar. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will take the pleasure that I do in the fact that a working party is closely studying land management and the ownership in that part of the world.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Secretary of State aware that yesterday the Wrangler jeans company announced 250 redundancies at the factory at Camelon in my constituency, and that that is a devastating blow for the work force and the entire local community? Will the Secretary of State therefore make urgent contact with the company to discover what can be done to save as many jobs as possible?

Mr. Dewar: I assure my hon. Friend that I appreciate the importance of this to his locality—it was disappointing news. I gather that it is proposed that production should go abroad on this occasion, but we shall do everything we can to help with the difficulty. Forth Valley Enterprise is already involved and my office is looking at the matter closely. We shall try to offer any constructive help that we can.

Mr. Ian Bruce: In his discussions with Scottish Enterprise, has the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the fact that it can offer new businesses coming to Scotland higher grants, that tourism in Scotland gets a lot more money, and that public spending there is higher too? Has he been able to reassure its members that Scotland will always enjoy that advantage over the other regions of England and that he will fight in Cabinet to ensure the continuation of that unfair advantage?

Mr. Dewar: That was a somewhat confused question. If the hon. Gentleman is asking for my view of the current discussions on the proper co-ordination of the inward investment effort across the United Kingdom, I certainly

welcome such co-ordination. In the context of regional selective assistance, the hon. Gentleman will know that there are guidelines on the money per job that can be offered which apply across the United Kingdom. We observe them closely in Scotland. It is true that Scotland has a big success record, but that record is based on the virtues and merits of the services offered, not on any unfair advantage. I welcome sensible co-ordination which ensures that every part of the UK can properly put its case. That is what the current discussions are about.

Ms Squire: Like my hon. Friends, I represent a constituency that has felt the full impact of large-scale unemployment. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the success of local authorities and local enterprise companies that work together on job creation, especially in Fife, where we have the fast-track skills seekers youth employment initiative involving 1,100 businesses, and where we have attracted inward investment? Will my right hon. Friend also join me in welcoming the unequivocal commitment offered by Hyundai last week to establish 800 new jobs in Dunfermline by this time next year?

Mr. Dewar: I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's good opinion of the efforts made by local enterprise companies and local authorities, in Fife and throughout Scotland. We are watching the Hyundai situation closely. There has been a good deal of rather excitable copy in the press about the costs of attracting that company. Most of the figures that I have seen have been wildly exaggerated. I also remind the House that under regional selective assistance and the many other elements involved payment is not made until the jobs are there: no jobs, no payment. However, I welcome the fact that the company has made it clear that it is committed to completing the first phase on time. We shall watch carefully—the more so in view of the unfortunate shock waves that have hit the Korean economy.

Dr. Fox: What do the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer expect to happen to unemployment in Scotland over the coming year? Following the job losses at Wrangler, Pringle, Grampian Brands, Telecom Sciences and others, who else will be joining the dole queue to satisfy the Chancellor's commitment to preparing for economic and monetary union?

Mr. Dewar: That is a very prejudiced view of what is happening in the Scottish economy. I have before me a long double column of recent job increases, but I do not think that swapping that sort of statistic is very helpful. The important point is that unemployment is low and there is growth in the economy. Our aims and policies, in Scotland and the rest of the country, are designed to sustain that state of affairs and to make sure that we avoid the stop-go cycles with which the hon. Gentleman, given the record of the Government he supported, will be very familiar.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the new deal must be tailored to meet local job creation requirements? The Minister for Education and Industry was in Dundee recently at a meeting hosted by Michelin and NCR—a meeting called to reflect the concerns felt on Tayside by all sections of the community. The one thing that marks out Tayside is the co-operation across the board between all in an effort to make it a successful pathfinder area.

Mr. Dewar: The Government see the importance of welfare to work as real and pressing. Dundee is a pathfinder area, and I am very satisfied to hear reports from my colleagues that these matters are going extremely well there; that was an impression that I gained from my own recent visit to Dundee. I associate myself with what my hon. Friend said about Michelin and NCR, and the level of commitment shown by local employers generally. I hope that my hon. Friend will not be embarrassed if I say that the hard work of both Dundee Members—my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross)—has been a feature of that effort.

Higher Education

2. **Mr. Welsh:** How many Scottish universities he has visited since 1 May to discuss higher education provision in Scotland. [17091]

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited the university of Dundee in November. I visited the universities of Abertay Dundee and Strathclyde in September and the university of Edinburgh in November.

My right hon. Friend and I attended a working dinner with the principals of the Scottish higher education institutions at the university of Glasgow in June. My right hon. Friend also addressed a meeting of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals in September, and I attended the annual forum of the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals in October.

Mr. Welsh: The Government claim that nobody should be deterred from higher education because of financial circumstances. Why, since the abolition of maintenance grants and the introduction of tuition fees—in addition to student loans—have applications for universities fallen by about 10 per cent.? Will the Government now abandon that short-sighted and disastrous policy?

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman would be well advised to wait until the figures are finalised. He would do his constituents and the young people of Scotland a service if he contributed to a more accurate flow of information.

The three virtues of our proposal are, first, that it will put up to £140 million extra a year into Scottish higher and further education; secondly, 40 per cent. of Scottish students will pay not a penny in tuition fees; and thirdly, when the vast majority of students in Scotland graduate, they will repay less per month than at present. If the hon. Gentleman would help to get those three messages across, he would be doing the young people of Scotland a service. I would send the same message to everyone who has participated in misinformation, possibly based on misunderstanding.

Mrs. McKenna: I welcome my hon. Friend's statement. Does he agree that access to higher education

is just as important for adults as it is for young people, and that the announcement last week of £28 million for out-of-school child care is an important part of that? Will he confirm that access to that is available to lone parents who will be taking part in further education?

Mr. Wilson: Indeed, I confirm that that will be the case from next April. That is a move forward of great importance to lone parents. We shall be producing a separate Scottish White Paper on lifelong learning which will cover a wide range of initiatives in that field.

My overwhelming message today is that nobody should be deterred from entering higher education by misinformation. I urge all potential students from all backgrounds to get the correct information and to make informed choices on that basis.

Sir Michael Spicer: The Scottish higher education budget is part of a wider education budget for Scotland. It is a matter of fact that that budget, per head of population, is 25 per cent. higher than it is for England. How long will that situation continue for Scotland, when the income differentials between England and Scotland have narrowed almost to nothing?

Mr. Wilson: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could take a tutorial from the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), who has some acquaintance with Sutherland. The hon. Gentleman would then learn something about the geography and demography of Scotland, and he might understand why more factors than mere population statistics determine how public funds are allocated. The decisions within the Scottish budget are taken according to priorities and needs. We place a high priority, as I am sure do my hon. Friends south of the border, on education.

We shall continue to make choices and I shall continue to take pride in the extra money that we have managed to get into every aspect of Scottish education since 1 May. I remind the hon. Gentleman that one of the burdens that we are very pleased to bear is £80 million from the Scottish block grant for students who come from other parts of the United Kingdom into higher education in Scotland.

Dr. Lynda Clark: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's assurances in relation to adult students. I am particularly concerned about the situation of students from low-income families. Can the Minister tell us what policies there are to assist such students?

Mr. Wilson: It is important to understand that the headline caricature of £1,000 a year tuition fees is not true. On present statistics, 40 per cent. of Scottish students will be entirely exempt from tuition fees. That is extremely important.

The other major inhibitor to young people from less well-off backgrounds going into higher education is the concern that they will have to pay back maintenance loans despite perhaps not earning after leaving university—in other words, a mortgage-type loan. It is essential that it should be understood that after our proposals are implemented all repayments will be income contingent, which means that if the individual does not earn he or she will not repay.

If those factors are put together, it is obvious that there is no barrier to people from lower-income backgrounds going into higher education. On the contrary, there are many incentives to do so. I urge every young person who has the academic ability and qualifications to go into higher education to do precisely that.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: How many of the principals of Scottish universities whom the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have met have given unequivocal support to the proposal for tuition fees, especially bearing in mind the effect that the proposal will have on students from other parts of the United Kingdom deciding to come to Scottish universities?

Will the Minister take an early opportunity to visit St. Andrews university in my constituency, which has substantial experience of these matters? Indeed, 44 per cent. of its students come from countries in the United Kingdom other than Scotland. Will not the Minister relieve himself of the serious charge of discrimination by abandoning the discredited proposals for tuition fees at Scottish universities?

Mr. Wilson: I would be anxious to visit a cross-section of universities. If I went to St. Andrews with its 44 per cent. of students from south of the border, I might equally go to Paisley university with its 1 per cent. If I went to St. Andrews, I would not swallow whole everything that the principal told me. I might even advise the principal that if he wants to maintain the precise number of students from outwith Scotland, especially from England, it is absolutely open to him to do so. He could do so by taking more students from that large group who are not subject to tuition fees and are therefore not affected by our proposals.

Mr. Campbell: It would make it more exclusive.

Mr. Wilson: By definition, those who do not pay tuition fees are students from lower-income backgrounds. If the principal of St. Andrews wanted to go down that road, I would welcome it. I wonder whether the hon. and learned Gentleman would do so.

Inward Investment

3. **Mr. Baldry:** If he will make a statement on the interdepartmental concordat relating to inward investment in respect of Scotland. [17092]

10. **Mr. Gray:** What discussions he has had recently with the President of the Board of Trade on inward investment matters. [17099]

Mr. Wilson: The Government undertook in our White Paper "Scotland's Parliament", Cm 3658, to produce a concordat on common guidelines and consultation arrangements on the handling of financial assistance to industry. Discussions are proceeding among interested Departments.

Mr. Baldry: Is not the concordat really a con on the people of Scotland? The Government are seeking to give the impression that a Scottish Parliament will have control over inward investment into Scotland when the reality

is that under the dead hand of the Treasury control throughout the United Kingdom will be transferred to the President of the Board of Trade. Far from more influence being in Scotland, more influence will be exercised by Ministers in London. Is not one of the reasons why it has taken such a long time to publish the Bill on the Scottish Parliament the fact that it is difficult for even the most creative parliamentary draftsman to produce a Bill that is not entirely transparent in terms of the con on the people of Scotland?

Mr. Wilson: I can understand the attractiveness of that line of argument to the hon. Gentleman. However, the timetable is bang on schedule. That is a tribute to the draftsmen and to everyone else working with them, and one that refutes the hon. Gentleman's implied criticism. It is entirely proper, and much in Scotland's interests, that a concordat should be in place and that there should be a set of rules.

Locate in Scotland has done very well over the years because it is extremely good at what it does. It is not in Scotland's interests to have a state of affairs where various agencies are bidding against one another, expensively and unproductively. That is why it is right to have rules and a concordat and on that basis Scotland will continue to do very well with inward investment, which is in the interests of Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Gray: Will the Minister pay tribute to the record £5 billion of inward investment that was achieved under the Conservative Government? Does he agree that that record achievement stands a good chance of being undermined by the triple whammy of the Scottish Parliament, the social chapter and the minimum wage?

Mr. Wilson: The brief answer is no, but I will make a slightly fuller reply in response to the earlier point. Yes, I pay tribute to a great deal of the work that was done. I pay tribute to some of the decisions that were taken and to the continuing work of Locate in Scotland throughout that period. I do not pay tribute, however—I do not attribute this to the hon. Gentleman—to hon. Members, perhaps from other parties, who welcome job announcements, but who at the first whiff of grapeshot and difficulty start to condemn and say things that are very different from what they said when the announcements were greeted. We have seen examples of that in recent days in relation to the reports on Hyundai.

Mr. O'Neill: Does my hon. Friend agree that although the success of Britain has been considerable, as a share of the European total the number of jobs and projects that Britain has achieved has fallen, that it is essential that there should not be wasteful competition between the various parts of the United Kingdom, and that for that reason as much as for financial concerns we need a proper concordat between the English regional development agencies, when they arrive, and the Parliaments in Scotland and Wales and the Northern Ireland Development Office?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend speaks with authority on these matters, and is absolutely correct. It is a paranoid response to believe that rules will always work against us. That is not the case. The political situation is changing, and there will be devolved Parliaments in Scotland and Wales. At the same time new agencies with their own ambitions will emerge in England. It is entirely right within those circumstances that there should be rules that are simple to understand and enforceable, but in which flexibility, which has ensured the success of agencies such as Locate in Scotland, is maintained. That is simple, it is in Scotland's interests and it is what we hope to achieve.

Mr. Connarty: Is my hon. Friend aware of the excellent joint ventures across borders between, for example, Elf of France and BP in my constituency at Grangemouth, or Toatsu of Japan and Zeneca in my constituency, or Rhom and Haas and its Japanese partners? Does he agree that it is the stability of the relationships between Scotland and the regions of England that has created these? In fact, in the chemical industries people do not talk about Scotland, England or other parts of the UK, but about east coast Britain, which goes from Teesside to the Don in Aberdeen. Does not the small-minded and hypocritical approach of the Conservatives merely continue the attempt to divide people and to prevent decent partnerships from being put together between the private and the public sectors, which has always been their strategy?

Mr. Wilson: I agree with the thrust of what my hon. Friend says, although I do not associate the last charge with anything that we have heard from hon. Members today. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that part of Scotland's strength as an inward investment destination is its place within the United Kingdom. In a recent visit to the far east, I had excellent assistance and co-operation from UK representatives abroad. There is, of course, a crossover between what we can do for Scotland directly and our inward investment effort for the United Kingdom as a whole, and long may that continue—it is very much in Scotland's interests.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Minister agree that, as well as the important job of attracting inward investment, the Scottish Parliament will be wise if it tries to devise strategies to promote indigenous companies in Scotland? It might equally be wise to enter into a concordat with other development agencies in the rest of the United Kingdom to try to prevent—I think that these were the Minister's words—the expensive and unproductive outbidding that there has been? Will the Minister assure the House that that will be a decision that the Scottish Parliament can freely make and not be bound beforehand by any decision of the Secretary of State?

Mr. Wilson: The Scottish Parliament's responsibilities in this area are clearly set out in the White Paper and will be translated into legislation. They are easily understood and must be enforceable. I have no doubt that the political focus that the Scottish Parliament will put on issues of economic development and inward investment will be beneficial for Scotland. I must make it clear that we are completely evenhanded. I am very anxious to stress again the support that is available to indigenous companies. No case has been brought to my attention in which indigenous companies have been refused assistance because resources were unavailable through the investment that was made in attracting companies coming into Scotland. The happiest arrangement of all is for

inward investors to stabilise, expand and become indigenous companies. The sooner we stop making these false distinctions the better.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: Given that Locate in Scotland is one of the most successful inward investment agencies in Europe, will the Minister explain why new rules are necessary at this stage? Furthermore, as Scotland usually competes not with the north-east of England but with the Czech Republic or the Irish Republic, is there not a danger that new rules will reduce the total amount of inward investment into the United Kingdom rather than transfer it to somewhere else in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Wilson: Let us be clear about this: Locate in Scotland does better for Scotland within the United Kingdom than any other development agency in Europe, and that is how we intend to keep it. The hon. Gentleman asked why we needed to change or update the rules. It may have escaped his notice that major constitutional change is taking place. There will be a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Parliament, and there will be a group of powerful economic development agencies in Europe. The hon. Gentleman should understand that rules can work in Scotland's interests. The idea that someone is always trying to steal our piece and working against Scotland is ridiculous. I welcome the rules, and we shall work with other Departments to bring them to fruition.

Mr. Ancram: Why were these important and totally foreseeable inward investment issues not resolved before the devolution referendum, which has given them such unhelpful exposure? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the unseemly Cabinet row that is now raging is very damaging to inward investment not only in Scotland but in the rest of the United Kingdom? Does he share my fear that if his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues in the same Cabinet find it so difficult to agree on such matters it will be well nigh impossible in the future for a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly and a queue of English regions to do so? Is that what his right hon. Friend meant by devolution strengthening the United Kingdom?

Mr. Wilson: The right hon. Gentleman should not always believe what he reads in the newspapers. There is constructive dialogue to produce the best possible solution for Scotland and for the United Kingdom as a whole. That is our aim, and that will be our achievement.

Ferry Services

4. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** If he will ensure that the present level of Caledonian MacBrayne ferry services is maintained. [17093]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Chisholm): The Government are committed to safeguarding appropriate lifeline ferry services for communities in the highlands and islands, and to maintaining Caledonian MacBrayne in the public sector. The level of service on individual routes within the Caledonian MacBrayne network is regularly reviewed by the Scottish Office and the company in the light of changing service requirements, the introduction of new vessels and other relevant factors.

Mrs. Michie: The Minister must be aware of the increasing concern that Caledonian MacBrayne is not able to maintain services. When will a decision be made about the Tarbert-Portavadie service? I take this opportunity to give the Minister a friendly but timely warning that he will encounter enormous opposition if any attempt is made to downgrade or remove the Dunoon to Gourock service, given the damage that it would cause to the economy of Dunoon. In the 1980s, the Tory party tried to remove the service, so I hope that the Labour Government will not go down that road.

Mr. Chisholm: Ministers have given approval for the Tarbert service to continue for the summer of 1998 pending further consideration in the comprehensive spending review. A report commissioned by the previous Government on the Gourock-Dunoon service is awaited. It will examine a number of options, and the recommendations will be carefully considered. I remind the hon. Lady that in 1981, when there was a proposal totally to withdraw the CalMac service on that route, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave evidence for the objectors at the public inquiry.

Mr. Godman: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is serious concern in Gourock about the management and development of the company under the regime of Admiral Rankin and Captain Simpkin and that the two vessels which operate the Gourock-Dunoon service are, in shipping terms, very elderly ladies and should be replaced long before 2002?

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree to meet a small delegation of the company's employees and me to discuss these issues. I also hope that he will ditch the report that was commissioned by the odd job lot opposite.

Mr. Chisholm: Of course we shall consult local bodies when we have received the report and I shall also be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter.

Anti-social Neighbours

5. **Mr. Davidson:** What plans he has to take action against anti-social neighbours. [17094]

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): We are giving effect to our manifesto commitment to take tough action on neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Provisions for anti-social behaviour orders will be included in the crime and disorder Bill. We recently announced proposals for further legislative and administrative measures to tackle this totally unacceptable menace in every community in Scotland.

Mr. Davidson: Do my hon. Friend and the Government accept that anti-social neighbours are a curse on good and decent people in all parts of Scotland? Will my hon. Friend pledge that the Government will take action during their first year in office? It is essential that action is taken quickly because the problem was completely neglected during the 18 years of the previous Government.

Does my hon. Friend accept that this is not simply a problem of council tenants misbehaving? Action must also recognise that many owner-occupiers and private tenants, often in previously council-owned houses, are also behaving in an anti-social manner. Simply to

have new rules for the easier eviction of council tenants will not address the whole range of problems. Does my hon. Friend accept that we must have action quickly?

Mr. McLeish: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. This is not within my power, but I expect that the crime and disorder Bill will become law by the summer of 1998. Everyone should appreciate that we are embarking on the toughest ever crackdown on anti-social behaviour. It will cover local authority tenants and private tenants and, of course, it will also cover home owners. We intend to make sure that the mindless behaviour of the few in every community in Scotland who undermine at every turn the quality of life of the many will be vigorously tackled.

Let me make it quite clear that the orders will be tough. They will be proposed by local authorities and will ensure that people's freedom will be restricted. People could be restricted to their houses or to certain areas and, of course, many types of activity will also be restricted. A breach of an order will result in a term of imprisonment of up to five years and an unlimited fine. These are tough measures to tackle a tough problem. Scots are sick and tired of having to live in this way in many communities and we intend to take the action that will solve the problem.

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister assure the House that the provisions that he outlined will extend to hon. Members whose constituencies neighbour that of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), whom we are delighted, if surprised, to see in his place?

Mr. McLeish: I am sure that that contribution was about suggesting that every hon. Member supports the tough measures that the Labour Government are taking on anti-social behaviour. We expect that the orders could cover almost 600 people. That means that the tiny minority of people who are causing mayhem in towns, villages and cities will be tackled. That is real progress and we await with interest the passing of the Bill.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Does the Minister recognise another matter in addition to his legislative proposals? For example, every time I visit west Inverness in my constituency for discussions with the three key public agencies involved—the police, the social work department and the housing department—they all point to the continuing resource starvation since the general election and the lack of improvement since the Conservatives were, thankfully, turfed out. Therefore, will he recognise that, until those agencies get more money, no amount of legislation will bring about a great practical improvement for people who are affected at the local community level?

Mr. McLeish: We appreciate that our measures will involve resources. We are willing to face that. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we are speaking not just about anti-social behaviour orders. We need to look at the questions of eviction and of witness intimidation, which is rife in many cases, and, of course, we want inter-agency co-operation in relation to witness protection. This is a package of measures and I assure the House that we intend to pursue the matter speedily to get appropriate and effective action.

Miss Begg: I am sure that the constituents who have written to me describing the misery that they have experienced as a result of anti-social neighbours will be delighted by my hon. Friend's statement, particularly his comment that not just council tenants but owner-occupiers and private landlord tenants will be covered. I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that, when such legislation is passed, anti-social neighbours are dealt with through the courts as quickly as possible to put the victims out of their misery.

Mr. McLeish: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I reassure her and the House that, when the Bill is passed, we intend to have proper procedures in place to maximise the speed with which anti-social neighbours are dealt with. That has been the problem: it has taken far too long to bring culprits to the courts. That has meant more misery for the victims, who can be found in every constituency.

Midlothian Community Hospital

6. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** When he expects construction of the new Midlothian community hospital to commence. [17095]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Sam Galbraith): I understand that the East and Midlothian NHS trust expects to submit a revised outline business case for the hospital to the NHS management executive by the end of this month.

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. I hope that he is aware that Midlothian is the poor relation in terms of medical facilities. We have two hospitals: the Rosslynlee, which is a mental hospital and is due for closure, and a geriatric hospital in Loanhead, which is due to be refurbished or replaced. As Edinburgh's Eastern general, Northern general and City hospitals, as well as the Princess Margaret Rose hospital, may close as well, my constituents are worried. They are not only poor; many are disabled, and to go to St. John's in Livingston or to the Western general in Edinburgh is an ordeal. I hope that my hon. Friend will give the utmost priority to the new hospital, which is badly needed in Midlothian.

Mr. Galbraith: I think I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that no hospital will close until suitable alternative facilities are in place. The timing for development of the new hospital is a matter for the trust and the board, but I know that, with a doughty fighter such as him taking up an interest, the hospital will progress as quickly as possible.

Housing and Health

7. **Sir Robert Smith:** What representations the Scottish Health Department has received since October about the links between poor housing conditions and public health. [17096]

Mr. Galbraith: Since October, 127 representations have been addressed to the Department, almost all in response to a campaign by Shelter. The links between housing and health are clear, as our forthcoming Green Paper on the subject will mention.

Sir Robert Smith: I thank the Minister for that answer. In the light of the representations and the fact

that 93 per cent. of Scottish housing is below minimum energy efficiency standards, does he accept that, in the long run, investing in improving the housing stock will benefit the health service by reducing the winter health crisis?

Mr. Galbraith: I have absolutely no problem with that. Poor housing is undoubtedly one of the links to ill health. We recognise that. It will be re-emphasised in our Green Paper. Recently, however, we have taken measures to deal with the problem. We have reduced value added tax on materials for insulating houses from 17.5 to 5 per cent. and the welfare-to-work programme contains a special option to insulate houses. We are taking action that will benefit the health of the whole nation.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend will accept that the statistics on the relationship between poor housing and poor health in Scotland are appalling. Ninety-seven per cent. of our stock failed a national energy efficiency rating, one in four houses suffer from damp and condensation and, every winter, there are 2,000 excess deaths as a result of poor housing in Scotland. Does my hon. Friend therefore accept that the link between bad housing and bad health in Scotland will never be finally broken until the Labour Government have the courage to recognise that we require a major programme of public investment in housing stock and in tackling the reasons for poverty, which cause so much ill health in our country?

Mr. Galbraith: I like to think that one of the differences that I have made to the health agenda is the recognition of the link between poverty and ill health, something that was always denied before. The problem relates not only to housing but to jobs, education, transport, leisure and recreation. Only when we have got these things right can people genuinely make choices, so we have not only to present them with information about the choices but to give them the economic wherewithal to improve their health.

University Students

8. **Mr. Chope:** What assessment he has made of the impact on Scottish universities of the number of students from England wishing to study at such institutions. [17097]

Mr. Dewar: Cross-border flows of students in both directions can contribute to a healthy diversity of backgrounds in our universities. The proportion of students from England attending Scottish universities varies greatly. In financial terms, English-domiciled students bring with them tuition fees paid for by local education authorities in England, and the remainder of the cost of teaching is met by grant funding from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

Mr. Chope: I agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman said, but my commitment to the Union comes from my four years' experience as an undergraduate at a Scottish university. How much would it cost the Department for Education and Employment in England to pay the tuition costs of English students at Scottish universities during their fourth year, thereby enabling them to benefit from the four-year Scottish education as I did and as I know the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Dr. Clark) did at the same time, in the same faculty and at the same university?

Mr. Dewar: I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Gentleman enjoyed his years at Dundee so much. I am sure that he benefited from them, although I would have liked to see further improvement.

As for the hon. Gentleman's question, the cost is variable. As has been explained, the tuition fees apply only to certain students, and getting on for 40 per cent. of them may be exempt. There are, of course, other misunderstandings about that, but, at the end of the day, English students, and, indeed, students from Northern Ireland and Wales, come to Scottish universities because they see advantage in doing so. I hope that they will continue to do so, as they are a very valuable addition to our educational kingdom.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The President of the Council was asked—

Statements

29. **Mr. Rendel:** What assessment she has made of the advantages of introducing time limits on Front-Bench responses to statements. [17120]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): I have not considered any changes to the House's rules on this, but I know that you, Madam Speaker, have often called for shorter questions and shorter answers, both on statements and at Question Time.

Mr. Rendel: Has the right hon. Lady noticed that the main spokesperson for the official Opposition seems to be taking longer and longer to reply to statements and that that not only makes it difficult for the Minister, who has to try to remember all the questions to answer, but tends to leave less time for spokespersons from other parties and for all Back Benchers? Will the right hon. Lady consider what to do about this in the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons?

Mrs. Taylor: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman. There have been occasions when the official Opposition have taken a very long time, but there are of course times when a statement is complex and detailed questions have to be answered. However, I think that we could probably improve the situation.

Mr. Dalyell: Is this not actually a matter for the Speaker? Is there not a precedent in the fact that Mr. Speaker Selwyn Lloyd on one famous occasion simply told the official Opposition that enough was enough?

Mrs. Taylor: Madam Speaker, it might be better if I left that to you.

Members' Allowances

31. **Mr. Steen:** If she will make a statement on the arrangements for the payment of Members' allowances. [17122]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Allowances for hon. Members are provided by resolution of the House. Claims and payments are handled by the Fees Office, whose systems are designed to ensure accountability for the taxpayers' money involved.

Mr. Steen: Because of the misdemeanours of one or two Members of Parliament, there has been an understandable push for greater transparency when allowances are claimed from the Fees Office. However, is the Leader of the House aware that this has resulted in a plethora of forms such as C1s, which are the reimbursement claim forms, C2s, C3s, Members' car allowance scheme forms and Members' constituency mileage continuation sheets? There is also a 43-page document called "Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Pensions" which includes details of where to get help. It takes many hours every week to fill in these forms, but would not that time be far better spent looking after one's constituents? Surely, accountability and transparency do not have to mean excessive form filling. We are not all crooks.

Mrs. Taylor: I think that hon. Members have a duty to ensure that our own systems are transparent and that we are as accountable as people in other spheres of public service. I realise that there has been additional paperwork for hon. Members, but I think that the vast majority of them are not finding it difficult to comply with the regulations.

Prime Minister's Question Time

32. **Mr. Robathan:** What plans she has to review the arrangements for Prime Minister's questions. [17123]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The new arrangements have been in use for barely six months, and I have no plans to review them.

Mr. Robathan: Does the right hon. Lady agree that, in a parliamentary democracy, the Prime Minister is accountable to Parliament? Did she see yesterday's report in *The Times* revealing that the Prime Minister had not voted since the summer recess—which may have prompted him to vote once, yesterday? Is she aware that the Prime Minister failed to declare a registrable interest by going to Silverstone, in 1996, and not putting the visit in the Register of Members' Interests? Does she agree that that shows that the Prime Minister does not consider himself to be accountable to Parliament? Furthermore, does she agree that he is treating the voters—all those, of whatever party, who elected us to this place—with contempt and treating parliamentary democracy and the House with disdain and contempt?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman was, I think, asking about Prime Minister's Question Time and accountability. Before I came into the Chamber, I checked the number of questions asked of the Prime Minister in the last week of the previous Parliament, before the system changed—when a total of 16 questions were asked—and last week, when he was asked 25 questions. The figures mean that more hon. Members had an opportunity to ask a question of the Prime Minister and that, perhaps most important, more Back Benchers had an opportunity to ask him a question.

Sir Patrick Cormack: What attempt has the Leader of the House made to discover hon. Members' reaction to the change? Is she aware that many hon. Members who sat in the previous Parliament do not believe that an improvement has been made? Will she also give the House a total assurance that there will be no more arbitrary changes to our procedures without consultation?

Mrs. Taylor: Yes, I can give an assurance that, when we are considering changes to the rota—which may occasionally happen, depending on the pressures and the wishes of the House for more time for certain Departments—there will be consultations through the usual channels. We have had very few representations criticising the current format of Prime Minister's Question Time. As I said, many Back Benchers seem to approve of the fact that more Back Benchers now have an opportunity to question the Prime Minister.

Private Members' Bills

35. **Mr. Mackinlay:** If she will take steps to increase the time available for private Members' Bills. [17127]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does my right hon. Friend realise that that is a very disappointing reply, bearing in mind the fact that we were elected as new Labour—*[Interruption.]* Some of us are Labour mainstream. Does she agree that, as well as checking the Executive, the role of Back Benchers is to be proactive in the House? It would therefore be greatly welcomed if she were to find parliamentary time so that the rank and file in this place could contribute to the legislative process.

Mrs. Taylor: I can confirm that my hon. Friend was absolutely on message about increasing the role of Parliament. I realise that Back Benchers have opportunities to be proactive, and that he is one of those who takes many of those opportunities and uses them to good effect. The Standing Orders of the House provide 13 Fridays in each Session for private Members' Bills. I know that some hon. Members think that that is not enough, but it is a rule of the House.

Mr. Forth: Does the right hon. Lady accept that many, if not most, members of the public do not wish to regard this place as a legislation factory? The thought of random, if not bizarre, legislation by private Members would scare the wits out of the public.

Mrs. Taylor: The public, like the House, have made their views on certain private Members' Bills very clear.

Mr. Rooney: Does my right hon. Friend agree that extra time would not be needed if certain hon. Members recognised the will of the House as expressed last Friday and did not try to obstruct it?

Mrs. Taylor: One of the most disappointing things about last Friday was the intervention by the hon. Member

for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who made it clear that, no matter how much time was provided for certain Bills, some Conservative Members would try to block them. Hon. Members have a responsibility to consider not just the strong views expressed and the strong majority last week, but public opinion.

Consideration of Bills

36. **Mr. Chidgey:** What assessment she has made of the advantages of spreading consideration of Bills more evenly throughout the parliamentary Session. [17128]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The annual nature of the legislative programme inevitably means that it cannot be spread evenly throughout the Session. The possibility of carry-over, which was approved by the House on 13 November, creates an opportunity to improve the House's consideration of Bills. I hope that we shall be able to test that out on appropriate occasions.

Mr. Chidgey: I thank the right hon. Lady for that reply. I welcome the advance publication of certain Bills, which is helpful. To return to a previous point, however, is the right hon. Lady aware that, following the Jopling recommendations, there is less and less time for Back Benchers to debate issues in the House? A case in point was the wild mammals Bill last Friday—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wild Members?"] Hon. Members must have misheard; I am referring to the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill, which had overwhelming support in the House and elsewhere. It is not tenable for a Government who have such a large mandate to rely on the Opposition not to oppose in order to get their Bills through. I ask the right hon. Lady to allow Government time so that the Bill can progress.

Mrs. Taylor: I do not think that there is anything I can add on that Bill. I believe that, post-Jopling, there have been a number of useful extra opportunities for hon. Members to raise issues. The Wednesday morning debates, for example, have proved extremely important for Back Benchers; that comment is slightly wide of the hon. Gentleman's original point. I believe that it is a question of swings and roundabouts, and that the interests of Back Benchers have been protected.

Mr. Pike: Was it not a fact that, in the debate on the report by the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, it became clear that the carry-over of certain legislation would lead to the better distribution of legislation? Was it not particularly notable that a well-respected former Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), wished to go even further than the report suggested?

Mrs. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of that point. It is true that the very distinguished former Leader of the House, who happens to be in his place this afternoon, strongly supported the principle of carry-over. I am pleased that the second report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Procedure also accepts that there is a case for the carry-over of some Government Bills. This is the first Session of this Parliament; I am not sure whether there will be any Bills that are candidates during this Session. I hope that we can move towards looking at legislation, especially if we can manage to publish draft Bills, in a more ordered way and I believe that carry-over will have a part to play in that.

Oral Questions

37. **Mr. Canavan:** What assessment she has made of the allocation of time to different Ministers to answer oral questions. [17129]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: We will review the rota from time to time. There have not been many criticisms of the existing rota, but I am always willing to listen to representations.

Mr. Canavan: Did my right hon. Friend notice that, in Scottish Question Time earlier this afternoon, we reached only Question 8? Until such time as the Scottish Parliament is established, can we have the restoration of a full hour of Scottish questions?

Mrs. Taylor: I sat through some of Scottish Question Time and I noticed that at 3 o'clock we were still on Question 3. I did not hear all the exchanges, so I do not know the reason for that. I know from conversations on the Bench that Scottish Ministers were disappointed by that situation.

Mr. Garnier: How many minutes has the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), spent answering questions or making statements or speeches at the Dispatch Box since his appointment to the Government?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not monitor those figures.

Modernisation Proposals

38. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** What are the main recommendations of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons which *(a)* have been implemented, *(b)* were rejected and *(c)* are pending further decisions. [17130]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: A new style of Order Paper has been implemented. The recommendations of the Modernisation Committee on the legislative process were approved by the House on 13 November. I am pleased that none of the recommendations has been rejected.

Mr. Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. Has she received any representations about better protection of time for private Members' Bills? For example, has she received any representations that any private Member's Bill that gets a majority greater than one third of the total membership of the House should be able to proceed without let or hindrance from delaying tactics? I say that in the hope of encouraging private Members to be more proactive, rather than "Prozactive".

Mrs. Taylor: I answered that point earlier, to a certain extent, but my hon. Friend is entitled to make it again. If Conservative Members do not frustrate the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill which was given a Second Reading last Friday, there is no reason why it should not progress further.

Local Government Finance (England)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the local authority revenue finance settlement for England for 1998–99. The Secretary of State comes before the House at about this time each year to make a statement about local authority finance for the following financial year.

There will follow a period of consultation with local authorities and others, after which I shall bring a report to the House, which, when approved, will finalise the arrangements. Today's statement is important to local authorities, because it gives them firm information on which to make progress in setting their budgets. The statement concerns England only. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will make an announcement today and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will make an announcement shortly.

As this is the first such statement of the new Parliament, I hope that it will be helpful if I put it into a wider context. We were elected on a manifesto that pledged us to a renewal of local government. We aim to achieve the reinvigoration of local democracy, a commitment to best value, a prospect of greater fairness and increased local discretion allied to greater local accountability.

We have made good progress so far, although we still have some way to go. We have set up a new central-local government partnership to help local and central Government work in harmony. We have signed the European charter of local self-government, which the previous Administration refused to sign. We have brought forward legislation to provide for the release of £800 million in additional capital expenditure in England under our capital receipts initiative. That money will help the unemployed, it will be used to build and refurbish homes for those in need and it will support our wider new deal objectives. We have put local authority public-private partnerships on a clearer footing. We are supporting Lord Hunt's Bill on local authority innovation, which will allow for greater experiments in local democracy.

We are discussing ways of renewing local democracy with the Local Government Association. We are decentralising decision making to the local level. We have introduced a Bill to give London a voice once again. Tomorrow we shall publish our White Paper on regional development agencies, setting out how we shall work with local government and others to revive the regions of England. Shortly, we shall announce the pilot local authorities for our best value programme. Finally, in co-operation with the Local Government Association, we have started a review of the system of local government finance—and not before time.

Each of those items is important in its own right. Taken together, they demonstrate that we mean what we say about a new relationship and partnership with local government. We have done all that in just seven months in government, but our full progress will be judged not in seven months but over a full five years of a Labour

We shall issue consultation papers starting later this year. Following that consultation, we shall publish a White Paper in the late spring.

This new relationship follows many years when the previous Government did not listen to local authorities and squeezed their expenditure year after year. Despite all that, local government has survived, I am glad to say. My aim is to build a strong partnership between central and local government to the advantage of our citizens and our communities.

The first important element of the local authority settlement is my proposals for the Government's provision for spending by local authorities. In forming my proposals, I have of course considered the pressures that local authorities will face in the coming year—which are considerable—and I have listened carefully to the views of the Local Government Association. In line with those views, we have chosen in the settlement to concentrate on the policy priorities—above all, education—that we set out in our manifesto, which was endorsed by the electorate.

We were elected on a pledge to stick to the previous Government's public expenditure totals for 1998–99. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget on 2 July that, by careful consideration of the priorities for public expenditure, we had been able to make available an extra £835 million for revenue expenditure in English schools in 1998-99. I can confirm that we shall provide an extra £835 million of revenue support grant for our schools. That means that none of the cost of the extra schools spending will fall on the council tax payer, as was so often the case under the previous Administration.

We are providing £662 million for local authorities for the education of four-year-olds, following the abolition of nursery vouchers, as promised in our manifesto. I also propose to provide up to £130 million for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation, such as for the unitary authorities. We have also taken into account smaller changes that will take place in local government functions. Taken together, those factors mean that the Government's view is that the appropriate level of total standard spending for local authorities in England in 1998-99 will be £48.2 billion.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will today be making a separate announcement on resources for community care. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will today be making a separate announcement on resources for the police. Both are included in the figure that I have just quoted.

The £48.2 billion provides for an increase of £1.78 billion—or 3.8 per cent.—in local authority spending year on year. That is expected to be 1 per cent. above inflation, therefore allowing an increase in real terms, to reflect our key policy priorities.

Education is the top priority for this Government and, indeed, for the nation. Raising standards in schools is not only of benefit to children. It is an investment in our country's future. Altogether, we have made provision for an extra £1.06 billion—or 5.7 per cent.—to go into English schools in 1998–99. It can and should be spent in the classroom, reversing the years of neglect. It meets the pressures identified by the Local Government Association and enables a start to be made on raising educational

Community care is another important area in which local authorities are facing up to the difficulties involved. Local authorities provide a vital service by looking after elderly and disabled people. We have maintained previous plans to make resources available in that area—£350 million. We expect a reduction in the net costs of financing outstanding debt. Therefore, we have been able to make a larger than average increase in provision for some services, including a further £70 million for children's social services—the first substantial increase for three years.

As the House will agree, fire services provide an essential and much appreciated service in the community. Therefore, I am pleased to announce that we have increased provision for the fire service by 4.8 per cent. within the overall increase for other services of 1.4 per cent. Other services include highways, libraries, probation services and environmental services.

I now refer to how much assistance local authorities will get from the business rates and the national taxpayer, which together totals £37.51 billion. That includes the extra £835 million, to ensure that the cost of our extra provision for schools does not fall on the council tax payer. It also includes an extra £20 million to make possible the development of £200 million-worth of local authority private finance projects.

The business rate will be increased to 47.4p in the pound, as provided by the legislation, following the 3.6 per cent. increase in the September retail prices index. That means that we can distribute £12.52 billion of business rates to local authorities in 1998-99. I am today publishing the detailed basis for that distribution to local authorities.

I propose that the revenue support grant should be £19.5 billion. In addition, some £5.49 billion of specific and special grants will be available. The total revenue support grant for England on which I am consulting may need to be altered slightly as a result of consultation. The total may be increased if it appears that less provision is needed for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation.

I come now to the means of distributing the revenue support grant. At its heart is the standard spending assessment for each authority. An authority's SSA is its share of the total provision for all authorities, taking account of its local circumstances. It is not a spending target.

We were elected on a pledge to remove the unfairness that has dogged standard spending assessments since they were first introduced. We have discussed with local government during the summer a wide range of ideas for improving fairness. I am today announcing changes that are well founded in research evidence, which respond to long-standing concerns of many local authorities of both parties, and which remove the more blatant cases of unfairness.

I first propose a new basis for assessing spending needs for the education of under-fives. The nursery voucher scheme was wasteful and a bureaucratic paperchase. The money released by its abolition will assist in our programme to make universal provision for four to five-year-olds. The new distribution will recognise the number of pupils for whom local authorities currently [illegible] will be able to get an additional grant from the Department for Education and Employment. That is just one element of the national child care strategy, of which after-school clubs form another part.

Secondly, I propose to tackle a piece of nonsense in the present formula. Currently some authorities have an incredible ranking on the measure of neediness. It is hard to believe that leafy Kingston upon Thames is as needy as beleaguered Barnsley. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am sure that the Liberal Democrats also agree with that. We have carried out, with the Local Government Association, a thorough re-examination. We have at last applied explicit principles to those calculations. I believe that the new measures of neediness that we are proposing are a clear improvement on what went before.

Thirdly, I propose a new basis for the allocations for elderly residential social services. The formula has had a thorough overhaul, using research commissioned by the Department of Health from the university of Kent. For the first time, it takes proper account of the changes in social services in the past five years, following the introduction of community care.

Fourthly, I propose a new treatment of debt incurred by local authorities before the current system was established in 1990. During the 1980s, local authorities had a choice. They could use capital receipts to pay off debt or they could use them to finance new capital expenditure. However, in 1990, the previous Government decided to penalise those which had chosen new capital expenditure during the previous decade. The previous Government treated everyone as if they had chosen to repay debt, whether they had or not. I am proposing to put that right wrong. [*Laughter.*] Just for the record, I am proposing to put that wrong right. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I propose that we should reflect in the standard spending assessment each authority's actual debt as at 1990, if that improves its position.

Finally, I have given priority to tackling the great unfairness whereby visitors and commuters were assumed to have the same economic and social characteristics as the residents of the authorities that they were visiting. That was an anomaly exposed time after time in the House. The previous Government's formula treated people staying in the Ritz in London as if they were as deprived as the average local resident. That was unfair and wrong.

Even the research on that, commissioned by the central London authorities themselves, which were the greatest beneficiaries, did not recommend keeping the existing approach. From next year, we shall get rid of that glaring injustice. We shall take account of visitors and commuters; but only fair account.

I shall mention only one of the many other proposals for changes which were pressed on me, but which I have not taken up. It concerns the area cost adjustment. That is the means by which higher employment costs, particularly in London and the south-east, are recognised in standard spending assessments. I do not believe that the evidence is sufficiently clear enough to warrant a change this year. However, I am commissioning research to see whether there is a sound basis upon which to consider changes for this time next year.

The changes that I have outlined, with some smaller [illegible] changes, are a big step towards making the [illegible]

[Mr. John Prescott]

Those changes will have a large impact on council tax levels in some authorities if the authorities do not adjust their spending accordingly. I accept that authorities and their council tax payers may need a period in which to adjust to those changes. I propose to phase in changes in the way in which standard spending assessments are calculated.

I propose that damping—or phasing in, as I prefer—of the larger corrections that we have introduced should be limited to the equivalent of half the SSA reduction. That strikes a reasonable balance between the need for time to adjust and the need to get more fairness into the system. There will again be separate phasing-in schemes for police and non-police authorities.

I also propose to repeat this year's scheme to phase in council tax increases that are directly due to reorganisation. The scheme would damp such council tax increases that are above a threshold of £52 a year at band D, for authorities that are subject to reorganisation from April 1998. It would also provide continued damping for the authorities reorganised in earlier years, where they exceed a threshold of £104 a year at band D.

Let me now refer to council taxes. We are examining in the local government finance review ways in which the fairness of the council tax might be improved. I do not propose to make any changes ahead of the results of that review.

I expect that, for the foreseeable future, the council tax will remain the prime means by which local residents contribute to the cost of local services. Each year, the Government identify a notional tax level for each valuation band. That is known as the council tax for standard spending.

We do that to calculate a distribution of grants that would enable all authorities to provide a standard level of service for a similar council tax level for a similarly valued property, whatever the differences in needs and resources. My proposals set that figure at £635 for a band D property. That reflects the previous Government's plans to increase council tax by 7 per cent.

The increase was built into the previous Administration's spending plans. That is not a prediction of the average level of council tax, nor of the band D bills for individual authorities. The actual council taxes in the individual authorities will vary considerably, depending on their spending decisions, their financing decisions, their collection performance and their efficiency. No Secretary of State could predict those factors with a high degree of accuracy for individual authorities.

The pressure on the council tax is inherent in the public expenditure totals set by the previous Government. We have sought to relieve pressures by a number of means, in particular by fully funding the £835 million extra for education. That extra funding for schools is worth £50 a year for the typical taxpayer. However, I have made it clear that local authorities must give full weight to the burden on their taxpayers when they come to set their budgets.

We remain committed to the ending of crude and universal capping, but in the light of our public [illegible] capping will remain in place for 1998–99. We have provided extra money for schools. We cannot risk that being undermined by unplanned increases in spending.

I am today announcing my provisional capping principles for 1998–99. I am also issuing proposals for the calculation of notional amounts for authorities whose boundaries or functions will change from 1 April 1998. Those include reorganised authorities and local education authorities affected by the abolition of the nursery voucher scheme. The notional amount is the base level from which I shall measure the increase in budget in determining whether that increase is excessive.

My provisional capping principles make allowance for expenditure on community care, which is being met in 1997–98 by the special transitional grant, and for changing funding arrangements for the National Criminal Intelligence Service. The adjustments are necessary to make a fair year-on-year comparison of budgets.

Subject to the allowances that I have already mentioned and to other technical adjustments affecting individual authorities, my proposals for capping are as follows. As in previous years, authorities whose base budgets are more than 12.5 per cent. above their standard spending assessment will not be permitted any increase over their 1997–98 base budget, nor will any other authority be allowed an increase that would take it beyond 12.5 per cent. above its SSA.

I propose to allow each class of authority to increase its base budget more than in recent years. That will be helped by changes to the so-called passporting about which I shall tell the House. Let me explain the term passporting, as it had to be explained to me. There is a lot of science in the language of local authority finance, and I shall have a bit more to say about that later.

In the past, the Government recognised increased spending needs for a particular service, but prevented councils from spending that money, through the capping system. That was a ridiculous situation, and passporting is designed to deal with it. When an authority's standard spending assessment increases, that will follow through into its capping limit so that the money can really be spent.

The permitted increases that I propose for classes of authority are as follows. For inner London boroughs, the City of London and shire districts, I propose that the year-on-year increase should be limited to 1.5 per cent; for outer London boroughs, metropolitan districts, county councils, unitary authorities, and the Isles of Scilly, to 3 per cent.; for police authorities outside London, to 3.2 per cent.; and for the London and metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities, to 4.5 per cent.

For all classes of authority other than police, the year-on-year permitted increases are substantially greater than they were last year, particularly reflecting the extra provision that we have made for schools. Shire districts have been treated especially harshly in recent years, so I am permitting them an increase in 1998–99 that will be three times greater than in previous years.

That is not all. I can further announce today that, for all authorities, other than police authorities, budgeting up to 12.5 per cent. above their standard spending [illegible] I intend to passport the [illegible]

first time. It will also be the first time that increases in highway maintenance, other services and capital financing blocks have been passported.

Those are important changes in the capping regime. They give greater discretion to local authorities; but I expect local authorities to look carefully at their permitted increases, including passporting, and to make a careful judgment about whether they need to make those increases in budget and whether their council tax payers can afford them.

Many authorities have budgeted below their capping limit in the past. I have given local authorities extra room within which to exercise their discretion, and I expect them to do exactly that. Those principles are necessarily provisional: I cannot take my firm decision on capping until authorities have set their budgets for 1998–99. When I come to take those decisions, I shall of course take into account all relevant considerations.

My Department is today writing with the details of the settlement to every local authority in England. That package includes a consultation paper setting out how we propose to distribute central Government support among authorities, including my proposals on standard spending assessments and damping. It sets out my provisional capping criteria, and includes my proposals for notional amounts. Copies have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library.

The package is large, and some elements are very complex and precise. That is possibly unavoidable for a system that distributes huge sums of money among 400 local authorities, all with different needs and resources. The basis of those calculations has been set out in detail, to assure the House and local authorities that each authority is being treated in exactly the same way.

We are reviewing how we might simplify the process in the long term, while retaining that reassurance. I know that if we can make the whole exercise simpler, it will be much appreciated by Members of the House, local authorities, the general public and especially me.

For the immediate future, I plan to provide the House, before the revenue support grant report is debated in the new year, with a plain English guide to these aspects of local authority finance. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I told you we were radical.

The proposals that I have outlined today represent a substantial improvement on the settlement that local government could have expected, following the Budget of the previous Administration a year ago. There is £835 million extra provision for education. Standard spending assessments will be made fairer. Local authorities will have more scope to exercise their discretion on budgets. This is a better and fairer settlement than in previous years.

Too often in the past two decades, central Government in Whitehall seemed to be waging a war on local government in town halls. When Labour was elected on 1 May, we declared that it was time to bury the hatchet. Whatever the considerable difficulties we found—financial, social or environmental—we shall face them together, with local government, regardless of the party in charge of any specific town hall.

In just seven months, we have taken the first steps in developing that new partnership. We shall be judged on a

The Government believe in local democracy. This year and next will be tough financially, but we are firmly on the road to reinvigorating local democracy, and restoring new and more positive relations between central and local government.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Government Back Benchers cheer, but I doubt that very many will cheer once the implications of the statement have been understood. Whatever else he has done, has not the Secretary of State opened the way for major over-inflation increases in council tax next year, which will affect millions of ordinary council tax payers throughout the country? Does he accept that the net result of what he has announced today will be that council tax bills could rise by as much as 10 per cent. next year? Does he realise that, for many elderly people, that wipes out at a stroke any advantage that they might have had from the winter payment scheme?

The Secretary of State says that he has inherited our Red Book figures, but can he confirm that, since May, local authorities have been burdened with a wide range of new costs? The increase in inflation since May will add more than half a billion pounds to local authority costs; there have been no fewer than five increases in interest rates since May, also adding to costs; and the £5 billion-a-year pension tax in the Budget has a direct impact on local authorities of £300 million a year.

Moreover, can the Secretary of State confirm that the £800 million for education in England, which was announced in the July Budget and has now been announced again by the right hon. Gentleman, comes from the contingency reserve provided by the previous Government? It was in the previous Government's spending plans. Is he aware that many Labour local authorities—not Conservative; Labour authorities—are saying that this settlement could have a dire effect on personal social services, especially those for children and the elderly?

Does the right hon. Gentleman remember that last year the then Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), said that the 1996 figures

"make no allowance for inflation, the cost of pay increases or the cost of providing extra services for the growing number of old people and of children at school"?—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 343.]

Is it not that very settlement that the right hon. Gentleman has just announced to the House?

As for debt, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he got it right the first time he attempted to make the announcement to the House? Will he confirm that his changes to standard spending assessments will mean rewarding councils that have run up large debts and penalising councils that have been thrifty? Will he further confirm that his changes to the damping mechanism will cause acute problems for many councils, which can be solved only by sharp council tax increases?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that in September

[Sir Norman Fowler]

Will not these major council tax rises that the Secretary of State has just announced hit the very people who relied on those promises at the election?

Mr. Prescott: We will take no lectures from the Opposition spokesman on taxation, assessments of need, relationships with local authorities or the benefits that council tax payers got for their money under the previous Administration.

I have admitted to a 7 per cent. band D increase in council tax—

Sir Norman Fowler *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: That is exactly the same increase as the Tories allowed for—

Sir Norman Fowler *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that it was more than that? I say that it is precisely the same amount as the Opposition allowed for when they were in government. The facts are easily checked in the Library. Despite considerable criticism, we have accepted the public expenditure plans of the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We have also made it clear that we are giving more money than is necessitated by inflation. The figures amount to a 1 per cent. real increase.

It is all very well saying that the money for education comes from the contingency fund, but of course the previous Government did not commit themselves to spending that amount on education. The previous Chancellor did not mention any extra resources for education. The fact that we choose to make education a priority is a reflection of our priorities, not those of the Opposition.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the effects on pensions cannot be calculated until the revaluation of pensions is carried out; pensions in this financial year are unaffected. The Chancellor has made it clear that if extra costs are eventually involved, he will take them into account at the appropriate time. The fact remains that local authority pensions in this financial year are unaffected.

In answer to the implied claim that local authorities were better off under the Tories, I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the electorate's view: the Conservatives had 240 councils in 1979; they now have about 30. That clearly shows what the electorate thought of the Conservatives' administration of councils and services.

The right hon. Gentleman claims that there is no extra money for children's social services, yet I have announced £70 million in that context. Nothing at all was provided in the previous three years—the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues could not find the money for desperately needy children and social services.

Our assessment of the social needs of local authorities is a good deal sounder than the assessments used by the [illegible] far greater needs. Our standard spending assessment system represents a fairer approach, of working with local government in partnership to improve local government services. We are justly proud of that.

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): I particularly welcome the new emphasis on fairness in my right hon. Friend's announcement, and the change to the treatment of capital financing charges in the formula. Will he join me in paying tribute to the long fight by the Newham Needs campaign for the abolition of the concept of notional debt, which played such a significant part of the formula used by the Conservatives?

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the beneficiaries of the change that he has announced are not profligate authorities, but several of the hardest-pressed authorities in the country, including Sunderland, Barnsley and Tower Hamlets, as well as my own authority in Newham?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The reassessment shows that Newham is in desperate need. It did not have a very high ranking under the assessment that I am changing. We make it clear that we are adjusting the programme so that Newham gets more resources. The present assessment is better than the previous one and is based on the greater needs in Newham. It is a good example of the way in which our fair assessment of the principles has applied.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): We on the Liberal Democrat Benches welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on the local government finance review. Liberal Democrats want a more accountable system, which raises tax on the basis of ability to pay and guarantees greater freedom of action for local councils.

Is it not the case, however, that today's settlement is one of the tightest ever? Council tax bills are set to soar, and council services are set to suffer. People will pay more and get less. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the figures published only last week by his colleague, the Chancellor, show that council tax bills are set to rise by more than 10 per cent. this year—the biggest increase since council tax was introduced by the previous Government?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the settlement fails to tackle the cash crisis in our schools? Does he accept House of Commons Library figures which show that, even after the extra money that is to be put in, this year there will be a 0 per cent. real-terms increase in funding for local authorities? Does he accept, therefore, that for every £1 that a school gets, there will be £1 off care for the elderly, as a consequence?

Is the Secretary of State aware that more than 476,900 children aged five, six and seven are in classes of more than 30? Where in his statement today is the extra money that will pay for his pledge on class size reduction? Where is the extra money to pay for the 55,000 additional pupils coming into our schools next year? Can he tell us whether class sizes will go up or down next year?

Does the Secretary of State accept that the previous Government [illegible]

tighter eligibility criteria and increased charges for home helps and meals on wheels? Are not the real losers from the settlement the most vulnerable pensioners?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that this is the last year of capping? Does he accept that capping distorts local priorities and undermines local accountability? Will he admit that because of capping and Labour's decision to stick to Tory spending plans, the responsibility for cuts and council tax rises this year rests with Whitehall, not with the town halls?

Local council tax payers will recognise in the statement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."]—I am concluding—not just smoke and mirrors, which is how the previous Government always treated such settlements. This year, we have added Labour spin.

Mr. Prescott: We certainly have added Labour financial resources. I have spelt them out, and they have nothing to do with spin. Instead, there is extra money to fund the new services that are needed. All these matters are under review with the Local Government Association.

We have made it clear that this will be the last year of crude capping. We think that what we propose is different from what we had last year. We want to move forward to a proper form of financing local government.

I have already referred to the local government financial review. The issues are complex and detailed discussions are taking place. I shall report to the House at the appropriate time. It is necessary for the review to take place, for the very reasons to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention.

As for education, we have provided £835 million. It is apparent that there are extra resources for that sector, even taking into account increased demands. We have already started to abolish the assisted places scheme, and money has to be transferred for reducing class sizes, which will certainly not increase. We shall be judged over five years, and we have started to take the essential steps.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer talked of 10.5 per cent. in his pre-Budget statement, but that is not comparing like with like with my 7 per cent. The Treasury book figure was for Great Britain—Scotland, Wales and England. It takes account of increased earnings and employment, and it assumes that some authorities will use the headroom that is allowed in the new capping arrangements.

I made a joke about passporting, but that process will allow more services to be provided. The Government used to assess a local authority and the services that it should be allowed to cater for, and then tell the authority that it did not have the resources to make that provision. The passporting principle will allow authorities to meet local requirements without encountering capping. Surely that is a sound principle and one that meets the need for more resources.

I have no doubt that more needs to be done, but we have taken the essential steps to improve the relationship between ourselves and local government and to put things on a new footing, to ensure that better value and better services are provided by local authorities.

Democrat spokesman, has put his questions, I require one question per Member from the Back Benches. There will be a question immediately, not a statement.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on his settlement and, especially, on the changes that have been made to the standard spending assessment reckonings, along with the ending of the pernicious bed-night factor, which did one local authority very well?

Will the principles behind the changes in the SSA continue, and does my right hon. Friend intend to ensure that there is greater transparency in SSA principles at an early stage in discussion between the Local Government Association and the Government?

Mr. Prescott: We are addressing an important principle on the SSAs. The process should be spread over a longer period than one year, and we think that three years could be appropriate. We shall continue to use the criterion that we have employed, but we are reviewing it under current financial arrangements. I think that Southampton will receive an increase in its SSA of 3.7 per cent., which is more than the average for the unitary authorities. We shall be using the present criterion and discussing with the Local Government Association how it can be further implemented.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that some council tax increases will be significantly higher than the 7 per cent. that has been predicated because of the weakening of the damping mechanism that he has announced? If the right hon. Gentleman is to get rid of crude capping, does he intend to maintain sophisticated capping? If so, what is it?

Mr. Prescott: It is a fair point that no Government can afford to ignore local authorities' expenditure. It would be foolish if I were to say otherwise. Indeed, I have made that clear already. When we set limits, we do not necessarily say that local authorities must spend up to them. We hope that they will exercise discretion. We are examining how we can have proper relationships between central and local government, because both have more than a passing interest in sound public finances. After 18 years of Conservative government, we were not left with sound public financing.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is it not a fact that the previous Government's final two statements at this time of the year on local authority financing did not fully fund education, which meant that local authorities had to squeeze other services? Does not it mark a significant change of direction that the new Labour Government are making a full commitment to funding £835 million, which shows that they are committed both to fairness and to local government?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said. How education is dealt with is a very important

[Mr. Prescott]

education will be fed directly into the revenue support grant, so that it can be spent and is not a penalty on the local tax payer.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the Secretary of State expand, preferably without rhetoric, on what he described as the fair account or amount for visitors and, in particular, commuters?

Mr. Prescott: The assessments, for example, of people in Westminster who are staying as commuters or visitors will now be considered at half the rate that applied before. *[Interruption.]* We shall consider them just as visitors, not as residents. That is the main point that will apply in those matters. We have changed it in that sense.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Will my right hon. Friend give further consideration to a point that I have raised previously with Ministers, about allowing local authorities to use their collection funds accumulated from successful council tax collection schemes to alleviate their financial difficulties? Does he agree that that would not increase the amount ultimately paid by council tax payers, but could go some way to improve services for them?

Mr. Prescott: I recognise that my hon. Friend has been campaigning on that matter since she arrived in the House. It has forced me to see what resources are available from what is known as the collection fund, where, as an incentive, local authorities hold back certain moneys from the collection of rates and the council tax. The amount appears to be about £300 million. That money, according to previous legislation, which I believe still applies, can be used only to reduce the council tax payment. It is a matter of some concern. Resources are there. I am advised that current legislation prevents us from acting immediately on that, but we shall take it into account during the local government review.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): What does the Deputy Prime Minister anticipate will happen to the difference between local government total standard spending and budget next year compared with this year?

Mr. Prescott: If I heard the question correctly, the difference between the TSS and budget this year will be in the calculation of the expenditure.

Sir Paul Beresford: What does the Deputy Prime Minister anticipate will be the difference between the local authority TSS and budget next year compared with the TSS and budget this year?

Mr. Prescott: I thought that it was just me. I do not think that that calculation can be made. I do not have one at the moment, and I await the [illegible]

financial programme for local government, and the way in which they fiddled the figures to benefit their own areas, unlike the way in which—

Madam Speaker: Come on, I want a question.

Mr. Leslie: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that that contrasts greatly with the way in which our Government are meeting the needs of local authorities, such as Bradford district, which have extremely diverse needs?

Mr. Prescott: Those are differences that one has to take into account. In this assessment, Bury was able to get an increase of 6.4 per cent.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): On pension funds, the right hon. Gentleman will be well aware that most local authorities are very concerned about the provision that they will have to make as a result of the abolition of advance corporation tax in a couple of years' time, and are looking to make that provision. Does taking into account mean considering but ignoring, or does it mean meeting in full the extra cost?

Mr. Prescott: That is a matter of some concern, and it has been discussed in the House. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it clear that he will take into account the changes in the next financial year. We must await his statement to see exactly what he will do and what the proportion will be, after a decision has been made on the revaluation of pensions. A proper assessment cannot be made until the revaluation has been completed.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. Will he confirm that Nottingham, which becomes a unitary authority this coming year, will not now be faced with the decision to make £13.5 million-worth of cuts so as to reduce the council tax? Will he further confirm that when responsibilities for staff are transferred from the county council to the city—the staff will do the same job in the same place but receive a different pay cheque—it will not be assumed to be facing increases of only half the rate of inflation that would have been allowed under the county council?

Mr. Prescott: The assessments affect authorities differently. My hon. Friend's authority will receive a permitted increase in the budget of 3 per cent., which, with passporting, will allow it to meet extra requirements without being penalised by the capping regime. That is how we have made the system fairer. We are moving away from the crude capping arrangements. I am sure that that is what his authority would want, and that is what we have done.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Why has Ryedale district council been given a nil increase in its budget? Is not that a disaster for shire districts, which will result in cuts in services for some of the most vulnerable people

be the capping limit. That is the reality. We have reviewed services and given our judgment on the SSAs. If an authority's expenditure over the SSA is more than 12.5 per cent., as the hon. Gentleman's authority's is, it will not benefit from the measure.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I welcome the statement. If I had achieved such a settlement from the previous Government in the years when I was leader of a council, I would genuinely have been very pleased. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the total spending on personal services represents an increase of about 5.8 per cent.? That increase, together with the retention of the community care grant in special transitional grant and the increase in money for children's services, will be widely welcomed. It gives the lie to the contention of Conservative Members that personal social services would be cut in the settlement.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend has given a good example of how we have made SSAs fairer. Trafford's SSA will increase by 2.9 per cent., and it has particularly benefited from the changes that we have made to the elderly residential social services formula. That is about needs, justice and fairness, and it is a good example of the changes that we have made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): The right hon. Gentleman made much of fairness and consultation. The town and country issues group of authorities represents a series of towns that dominate a rural hinterland. Will he or his Minister of State agree to meet that group, so that it can put its case direct to Ministers rather than through consultations with the Local Government Association? They can then hear its arguments for themselves.

Mr. Prescott: We intend to carry out considerable consultation with local authorities, including through video conferences and by other modern methods. I shall take into account the right hon. Lady's request for me to meet a delegation from her authority.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): My question is straightforward. Does the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I should have said Deputy Prime Minister. I was wrong, then right; or right, then wrong. Does the Deputy Prime Minister welcome the announcement by Mr. Ken Charnley, the leader of the Conservative group on Chorley council, that he has defected to the Labour party? Does my right hon. Friend think that he has done so because he considers the Conservatives to be incompetent and mean? He has bypassed the Liberal Democrats because, as they have shown today, they are two-faced and incompetent.

Mr. Prescott: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that that Conservative has left his party and joined the Labour party because these figures show that it is a fairer party and has dealt fairly with the problems in his area. In my hon. Friend's local authority area, the figure for [illegible] cent. and the leaving it with no organisation. The party that proudly proclaimed that it had 240 councils in 1970 now has fewer than 30. Councillors have left the party because the Conservative Government were not concerned about fairness.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Does the Deputy Prime Minister realise that people in Cambridgeshire will see nothing fair in a settlement that breaks a promise that was given during the election campaign by the Prime Minister, to get rid of the iniquitous area cost adjustment? The settlement means that council tax in Cambridgeshire will rise by an iniquitous amount—considerably higher than the amount that was stated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). However, the overall capping limits mean that expenditure cannot rise by more than the rate of inflation.

Mr. Prescott: As I have said, I am concerned about the area adjustment matter, but I am not convinced by all the current evidence. I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point, but I have promised to review the matter and make a statement about it. Cambridgeshire has had its resources for education increased by 5.5 per cent., although the permitted budget increase is 3.6 per cent. I do not think that the people of Cambridgeshire are likely to say that that is not good for the county.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): May I pursue the matter of weighting in the context of people moving to areas such as Westminster, because that affects my constituency in the other direction? Has the enhanced population figure been given a reduced weighting? I do not think that that can be the case, because north-east Derbyshire suffers terribly. It has finished up with a smaller revenue support grant than it received previously. Rather than the principle itself, the weighting for people moving and the area cost adjustment need to be considered.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend has spoken to me about the matter of the proper weighting for visitors and commuters. I know that he has another scheme in mind. Perhaps he would like to discuss with me how that might be considered in the financial review.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of the special situation in Southend-on-Sea where, incidentally, we had five gains from Labour and no losses on 1 May? It will become unitary in May and will totally break away from the county of Essex. Southend has a much higher than average share of social problems because of the number of bed-and-breakfast establishments and houses in multiple occupation. It also has a much higher than average percentage of elderly people and a much higher percentage of unemployment than the rest of Essex. Will those factors be taken into account in assessing our needs in comparison with those of Essex?

[illegible] I think that the hon. Gentle[illegible]

[Mr. Prescott]

The increase in the budget, taking into account some of the factors that the hon. Gentleman mentions, is 8.4 per cent. I hope that that is acceptable.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): When will the Government move to a triennial review system and get away from this annual nonsense? Will my right hon. Friend promise not to visit Bradford, because every time a Conservative Minister visited Bradford, we lost money?

Mr. Prescott: I cannot give my hon. Friend a timetable, but as I have said, we are reviewing the matter and considering a period longer than one year. Every year, much time is taken up by considering standard spending assessments, and meeting all sorts of delegations for many types of marginal changes seems to take up much of my Ministers' time. A fairer way to deal with this matter could be on at least a three-year period. We shall certainly take that into account in our review.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that Oxfordshire is already threatened by the closure of day centres and by a reduction in provision for respite care and home help? The situation is desperate. The right hon. Gentleman's figures propose for Oxfordshire a reduction of nearly £2 million in the provision for personal social services. How on earth can people there be expected to accept a year-on-year reduction, when they already face a critical situation? Is not the consequence of his statement for Oxfordshire and for other counties that the most vulnerable will be hit and will have a substantial hike in their council tax bills?

Mr. Prescott: I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing met the hon. Gentleman on Friday to discuss the implications of the settlement and, as he knows, the Government have had considerable discussions with the Oxfordshire authority, particularly arising out of the capping position last year. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. We are dealing with more than 400 authorities. All have similar problems and all are trying to deal with them. We are trying to provide a fairer system.

With regard to Oxfordshire, there has been a 4.4 per cent. increase in the education budget for Banbury—

Mr. Baldry: But not in social services.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, but the hon. Gentleman's constituency is to have a 4.4 per cent. increase in its education budget and the permitted budget increase is 3.1 per cent. That compares well.

Mr. Baldry: What about social services?

Mr. Prescott: I understand all the problems that local authorities face, and they are no more difficult in Oxfordshire than they are in other areas. We have to be fair in how we deal with the matter and in how we distribute national resources. That is what we have done. I have stated how the hon. Gentleman has fared, and that is our position.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We now come to the statement on social security uprating.

Social Security Uprating

4.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the uprating of social security benefits and on the re-rating of national insurance contributions for 1998–99. I should also like to report on our objectives for reforming social security.

This is the first benefits uprating announced by this Administration and, unlike those of previous years, it will not be marked by a long list of cuts to the welfare programme—not that we are content with the size of the budget. We cannot be complacent when, despite growing prosperity, spending on social security has continued to grow. It now consumes one third of Government expenditure and is set to break through the £100 billion barrier before the end of the century. That is more than is collected in income tax, twice what is spent on the national health service and nearly three times what is spent on education.

As important, we are not content with the way in which the money is spent. The huge cost that is our legacy has done little to reduce the amount of poverty. The inability to harness social policy, to use it as a tool for change, has not only been the main driver of welfare spending but has resulted in the greatest social division for generations.

We are committed to breaking with the past. We are undertaking a systematic review of the welfare programme. The review is both necessary and timely. We need a modern welfare system to reflect modern circumstances. Our welfare-to-work programme will provide people with a route out of benefit dependency, and our comprehensive spending review will lead to the modernised system that we need. I will say more about that later.

First, we have immediate business. The House knows that we are required to review the rates of benefits and national insurance annually. Our intention for the year 1998–99 is to uprate most national insurance benefits, child benefit and benefits for disabled people and carers by 3.6 per cent. That is the increase in the retail prices index in the year to September. War pensions will also be uprated by the RPI.

As in previous years, jobseeker's allowance and the main income-related benefits will be uprated by the Rossi index, which at September had a year-on-year increase of 2.4 per cent. As hon. Members will know, the Rossi index is the RPI less those elements for housing costs. It is a more appropriate index for income-related benefits, where housing costs are, in the main, met separately.

Most rates of deductions in respect of non-dependants have been increased over and above inflation. That will reduce the benefit that is paid in respect of housing costs to claimants who have a non-dependant living with them. Taking forward that measure allows us to reverse the previous Government's plans to extend the single room rent restriction. The withdrawal of the extension, which would have restricted housing benefit to people aged over 25, has been welcomed both inside and outside the House.

That was a hard choice in maintaining our commitment to live within existing spending ceilings. It is important to remember that the mandate that we so recently received was based on a manifesto which committed us to controlling public expenditure.

I shall deal now with national insurance. We do not propose to increase the rate of class 1 contributions paid by employees and their employers, or the earnings brackets for the three lower rates of employers' contributions. The rates of class 4 profits-related contributions paid by self-employed people will also remain unchanged. The lower earnings limit for class 1 contributions will increase broadly in line with the basic rate of retirement pension, as will the upper earnings limit which applies to employees' contributions only. Similar increases apply to the lower and upper profits limits for class 4 contributions. The weekly class 2 contribution paid by self-employed people and the voluntary class 3 contribution also increase in line with that formula.

The cost of the uprating will be £2.45 billion. The maximum available Treasury grant for the national insurance fund will be set at £800 million. Most new rates of benefit and the changes made to national insurance contributions come into effect on 6 April next year. Schedules showing the new rates of benefit and the new rates of national insurance have been sent to all hon. Members today.

The most pressing need is to develop our approach to people of working age. They are responsible for supporting their children. Their actions while in work will determine how adequate their income will be in retirement. The best we can do for people of working age is to give them the opportunity to work. That is our first objective for welfare reform.

The wage motivation to work is for most people compelling—with the best will in the world, benefits can never be a substitute for earnings. Equally, there are also very strong non-wage motivations for working which, in total, reflect and influence the shape of society. Work enables people to be in the mainstream of society, to make their own contribution, to develop their potential, and to offer a positive role model for their children. Work also provides access to social networks and to new opportunities for advancement. None of this is new. It could be argued that making work the best form of welfare has always been the objective of social policy, but the facts show that the current social security system fails actively to promote a return to work.

An indifference to social policy, and an assumption that unemployment is a price worth paying for economic success, have meant that millions of people have been set aside from the labour market and condemned to a life of dependency. Our objective is to root out that worklessness and to give all people of working age a chance to enjoy economic opportunity. That is why our new deal programme extends beyond the unemployed. We need to give lone parents and sick and disabled people worthwhile help. We also need to make sure that, where possible, work pays, and that tax and benefit systems encourage work, not deter it.

That is why we have a Whitehall task force on tax and benefits to help deliver the Government's pledge to streamline and modernise the welfare system. It is why we are introducing a minimum wage. It is why we are looking carefully at every benefit to see whether it helps or hinders people in achieving their aspiration to be in work. We are seeking totally to recast the aim and operation of welfare, and to make it clear that work, rather than benefit payment, is the right solution, economically and socially, for people of working age. We will continue to support those people who cannot work.

The second group needing our attention is children. Our objective is to ensure that all children are supported, wherever possible, by their working parents. Nearly 3 million children now live in workless households, which represents a threefold increase since 1979. The best way to support these children is to ensure that their parents are working. They benefit from the lasting financial security that work ensures and from role models which help them to learn how they can live independent lives when they grow up. Our new deal for lone parents will help to tackle the problem by providing a comprehensive package of back-to-work help for lone parents.

Effective child care arrangements are vital, as nine out of 10 lone mothers would work if they could afford child care. The Government are committed to a national child care strategy, which will help parents, especially women, to balance family and working life.

Child support maintenance will have a major part to play. Receiving regular maintenance payments helps lone parents to work, independently of all other powerful influences on their ability to work. We must also reach a point at which an absent father's failure to provide proper financial support for his children is regarded as socially unacceptable.

Our ambitions do not stop at people of working age, because it is also essential to help pensioners. On average, pensioners' incomes have grown over the past 20 years, but the gap between the poorest and richest pensioners has widened. Moreover, projections show that the gap will continue to widen unless urgent corrective action is taken. Our objective is to promote financial security in retirement in a way that enables people to build up a stake in their own provision.

It is clear that the difference between richer and poorer pensioners is a result of the extent to which the former have had access to second-tier pension opportunities, and have taken advantage of the chance to save during their working lives. Secure income in retirement will be achieved when people of working age realise that the more that they and their employers make contributions to their own pension, the greater will be the reward when they retire.

Work—to fund savings—is the best form of pension provision, which is why we have launched our pensions review. That is also why we are consulting on stakeholder pensions and developing citizenship pensions, which will extend the opportunities for good-value pensions to the 8 million people who are poorly served by current arrangements. Our review will also begin to address current inequalities between the opportunities of women and men to have adequate pensions.

We are taking action to ensure fair treatment of pensions on divorce, giving greater rights to women who have contributed to the build-up of pension by supporting their husbands in the home.

We are determined to tackle the situation in which nearly 1 million pensioners do not take up the income support to which they are entitled. We have already commissioned research to establish the reasons why they do not take up that support. From April, we will begin pilot exercises to discover the best ways of delivering income support to older citizens.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

As our manifesto has made clear, the Government believe that pensioners should share fairly in the nation's increasing wealth. That is not merely a long-term aim. We have already reduced VAT on fuel, and, from next year, we will abolish the gas levy—showing that we will act quickly.

In his pre-Budget statement, the Chancellor announced the winter fuel payment, which will pay pensioners £20 and the poorest pensioners £50. Those payments will be made in time for winter fuel bills and will be on top of normal pensions payments, which will be uprated next year, as I have already announced.

We are a modernising Government. We believe in bringing opportunities equally to all sections of the community, although we also believe that those opportunities bring responsibilities. Our reform will be guided by our objectives for the main groups that we are attempting to help: welfare to work for those of working age; security for older citizens, for now and in the future; and support for children.

As the House knows, the orders introducing the new benefit rates and the main elements of national insurance require affirmative resolution. We look forward to the wide debate on our programme for social policy to which that occasion will lend itself. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he accept that, in the past, this significant annual statement has been dealt with by the Secretary of State for Social Security, and that, at the previous week's business statement, it was customary for the Leader of the House to publish the date of the uprating announcement? I am mildly surprised that no answer was given to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), who raised the matter at business questions, and that we have had such short notice of it today.

Is the Minister aware of the written answer given by the Minister for Welfare Reform, who said that an uprating in line with inflation would cost £600 million above the 1996 budget assumptions? I should be grateful if the Minister will tell the House where that money will come from.

The Government have proved by their actions since 1 May that, although sticking to the previous Government's overall spending totals, they had room to manoeuvre in withdrawing the changes to housing benefit for over-25s. Will the Government repeal the measures for under 26-year-olds? Does the Minister agree that there is something illogical in the current policy? What is the difference between a 25-year-old and a 27-year-old? Perhaps he will explain that to the House.

In the repeal of the housing benefit rules, the Government have shown clearly that they could have honoured their pre-election pledges on lone parents, if they had been minded to do so. Will the Minister—as we are on the issue of lone parent benefits—confirm that the Government have continued the freeze for existing lone parent claimants, therefore effectively allowing that benefit to wither on the vine for current claimants?

Does the Minister agree with the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who said this week that, before the election, Labour described the abolition of help to lone parents as "particularly spiteful"? Does he agree with the comments made by the Secretary of State for Social Security in the uprating order debate that

"Cuts in lone mothers' benefits make the poorest families poorer"?—[*Official Report*, 19 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 944.]

Will the Minister tell the House—as he and the Secretary of State for Social Security have singularly failed to do so far—what aspect of the issue is different now, compared to last winter, except that there has been a general election, and that the Labour party has milked the issue for all the votes possible by leading people to believe that Labour would not implement the previous Government's policy?

The Minister has also been trying to duck questions on the new deal on child care in the context of lone parents. I should be grateful for some answers on the child care issue, because there are so many unanswered questions. Will he explain what the charging policy for child care will be for the remainder of this Parliament? Will it be means-tested? I should be very grateful for an answer—an answer of substance, not a soundbite—to that specific question.

Does the Minister understand the irony in his statement that the Government's objective is

"to promote financial security in retirement"

for pensioners? How can he reconcile that objective with the raid on millions of personal pensions made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his July Budget, which was worthy of Mr. Robert Maxwell?

The Minister also talked about moving towards equality in pension opportunities between men and women. How can he reconcile that aim with the possibility that the Chancellor will remove the independent financial status of women in the United Kingdom?

The hon. Gentleman mentioned also the matter of reducing value added tax on fuel. Will he confirm that the Government—by reducing VAT on 1 September 1997, rather than on 1 October 1997—ensured that the pensions uprating was calculated on a lower inflation figure, costing the average pensioner just over £6 a year, whereas savings from the 1 September VAT cut are infinitely less than that?

Far better than most hon. Members, the Minister will understand that, since 1 May 1997, the Department of Social Security has been riven with differences of opinion between the Secretary of State and the Minister for Welfare Reform; there has been a plethora of reviews, which are getting nowhere, as even some of the reviews are being reviewed; and there seems to be utter chaos, with no one knowing exactly what others is doing.

Could the hon. Gentleman, just for once today, treat the House with some respect and answer the questions that have been posed to him so often in the past in Committee and in debates on the Floor of the House? We want meaningful answers to the questions arising out of the statement.

Mr. Bradley: It is not the normal practice to announce when the uprating statement will be. In the past, the uprating statement has normally followed the Budget and it has been the Budget debate which has been announced. There is no problem there.

The published plans include an assumption of the cost of uprating. The assumption made for 1998–99 was too low, so the reserve will be used; it is designed for the shortfall between forecast and outturn.

It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman raises the single room rent limit. The Conservatives intended to extend the limit to apply to people up to 60, but they should welcome the fact that we did not proceed with that measure. We are continuing to evaluate the impact of the single room rent limit for the under-25s because there is a view that at that lower age, different circumstances apply compared with those for older people, some of whom may be forced to live in houses in multiple occupation or worse. We will continue that evaluation and report on it next year.

I can confirm that the higher rate for lone parents in receipt of child benefit will be £17.10, the higher rate for family premium in income support and the jobseeker's allowance will be £15.75, and in housing benefit and council tax benefit, the higher rate will be £22.05. The family premium for existing lone claimants on income support will still be £4.70 a week more from next April than is paid to two-parent families in the same circumstances. Existing lone parents receiving child benefit will still get an extra £5.65 a week on top of the basic child benefit. In terms of the new deal generally, it is our view that lone parents will be better off in work because of the national child care strategy. From the evidence we already have, they will be an average of £50 a week better off, which is far better than being dependent on very low benefits.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the tax credit system. The Chancellor announced in his pre-Budget statement that a working family tax credit was under consideration. We are considering all options; replacing family credit with a working family tax credit is only one of them. It must be pointed out, however, that most wage earners in low-income households with children are women. The proposed working family tax credit would build on the successful elements of family credit and would involve better help through the tax system for child care costs.

We are trying to create the economic conditions to ensure that pensioners have their fair share of the rising national prosperity which only this Administration are prepared to deliver. My statement, which will ensure that pensioners receive a 3.6 per cent. uprating in their pension, on top of the £20 for fuel costs, £50 for pensioners on income support, the reduction in VAT on fuel and other measures, including the abolition of the gas levy next year, is a package of help for pensioners which the Conservative Administration never even considered.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my hon. Friend aware that in trying to meet the rising social security bill of £90 billion-plus, which will rise to £100 billion before the end of this Parliament, he would be in a much better position if, for instance, the Government realised, even at this stage, that it was necessary to increase taxes for people such as Members of Parliament and those who get even more money than we do? That is one approach which has, sadly, been excluded, but it will have to be returned to.

My hon. Friend talks about welfare to work and the new deal. It is difficult for me to understand that kind of language. I have seven villages in my constituency where pit closures took place three or four years ago. One thousand young men, who hitherto had training schemes under British Coal, no longer have training schemes. Almost everybody is out of work in those pit villages. There is nowhere for those young men to go, as I hope the Minister understands. He is not saying, is he, that these people have got to get on a bike? I do not like that kind of language.

I want Ministers to understand that there are areas of Britain, including mine, where the idea of work being available is laughable for many people. Unless special measures are taken in that respect, we can talk about welfare to work only for areas where it is feasible. The Government should not rub the noses of people where there is no work at all in the idea of welfare to work. If the Minister will see the matter in that fashion, he may be able to deal with the problem generally.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend always talks passionately, and rightly so, about the problems of his constituency and I hear clearly what he says. On his first point, I will refer his remarks about taxation to the Chancellor.

My hon. Friend talked about welfare to work. It is essential that we do not give up on unemployed people and that we give them hope for the future. It is essential that the welfare-to-work programme recognises the problems that my hon. Friend identifies. The programme must be tailored and it is important that we recognise that there are different regional economic problems. The programme must deliver hope for my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I welcome many aspects of the statement, but I want to press the Minister to look more closely at three aspects of it. First, will he look at provision for pensioners aged over 80? As happened under the Conservatives, the Minister has chosen to freeze the extra help for the over-80s at just 25p a week, which is an insulting amount. Does not he accept that pensioners over 80 are the poorest in the land and that many of them do not claim income support? Converting that 25p into a worthwhile sum such as £5 a week would guarantee help for the poorest and would give them not £20 a year, but £20 a month.

Secondly, I understand and appreciate why the single room rent reform was reversed. Would the Minister, however, look at the way in which that change has been funded? Has the increase in non-dependant deductions—that is, the tax on young people who live with their parents—gone too far? For the highest-earning young people, the figure has gone up by 36 per cent. in the statement. Will the Minister at least undertake research to see whether the change breaks up households? It may produce more demand for housing and more burden on the Exchequer.

Thirdly, we must return to lone parents. The statement means a freeze not for new claimants, but for the 1.5 million lone parents who are existing claimants. Does the Minister accept that many of those people will not move from welfare into work? Does he accept that, yesterday, the Secretary of State for Social Security seemed to acknowledge that looking after young children at home was a valid thing to do? Will he explain why he is cutting the real living standards of those families?

Mr. Bradley: I shall try to answer the hon. Gentleman's three questions. We recognise the plight of

[Mr. Bradley]

very elderly pensioners and our pensions review will look specifically at that point. At a recent meeting of the review team at which Jack Jones, a doughty champion of pensioners, was present, that item was specifically put on the agenda. The pilot schemes that we are introducing to find out why the poorest pensioners are not claiming income support will recognise that many of those may be the very elderly. We must study the pilot research projects to find out why that group are not claiming their entitlement.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support for our decision not to extend the single room rent limit to 25 to 60-year-olds. I recognise that the non-dependant changes are hard choices, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that we have protected the lowest-paid within that to ensure that the system is as fair as we can make it, in context. In our current housing review, which is under way as part of the comprehensive spending review, all those matters will be reconsidered as we develop a sensible housing policy and sensible housing benefit changes.

I have confirmed the figures for lone parents. I must put them in the context of the new deal and in the context of the speech yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about choice for lone mothers and about flexibility. The crucial aspect of the national child care strategy will be to ensure that that is a reality.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I welcome the opportunities that my hon. Friend outlined to move the poorest from welfare to work. As part of his review, will he consider the opportunity for substantial housing benefit savings that might be afforded through rent reductions? Does he accept that a 10 per cent. rent reduction would not only afford substantial housing benefit savings, but could offer many households the chance to move from welfare to work, alleviating the poverty trap?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I recognise and value her expertise, particularly on housing benefit. We recognise that housing costs can be a critical element in decisions on general reform programmes. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall look carefully in our housing policy review at the disincentives that emanate from the current system in our welfare-to-work programme. I should be grateful if she could send any further comments on that to me at the Department.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The Minister may know that I have always been rather in favour of a minimum income scheme. One of the disadvantages of the idea is that it involves a minimum wage at some point. Now that the Government have decided that we shall have a minimum wage, will the Minister look carefully at the advantages of a minimum income scheme?

Ministers have constantly complained about the lack of skills in society. Will the hon. Gentleman give further thought to the 50-year-olds who have been sliced out of employment, often to save their employers' considerable pension contributions? Will he ensure that that pool of potentially highly skilled people with the capacity to learn new skills is properly catered for in the new deal or in some other manner?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for the obvious overwhelming support for the Government's reform programme, particularly the recognition of the introduction of a minimum wage. I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's comments to the Taylor review of the tax-benefit system. I am sure that his contribution will be valued. We recognise that many people have been dumped out of employment and on to benefit dependency at too early an age. That is not acceptable. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's recognition of that. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives did not recognise the value of people in that age group when they were in government and did not do anything to help them get into work, where many of them want to be.

Audrey Wise (Preston): My hon. Friend said that all children should be supported by their working parents. For lone parents, that implies full-time work, as one part-time job is not enough to support a family. Will he clarify what he means? Will he also tell the House why child care is regarded as a job if done by a stranger, but not if done by the child's mother or father?

Mr. Bradley: The purpose of our reforms is to create opportunities and flexibility, so that people can move flexibly into work. Many lone parents want to work. The changes that we have made to family credit and the increase in the child care disregard to £100 will help to fund those proposals. The national child care strategy, with the development of 30,000 after-school and out-of-hours clubs to benefit up to 1 million children will help in that. Our package of measures will give real help to ensure that children do not remain in poverty and are able to benefit from the fruits of economic prosperity.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): The Minister said that his comments would not be marked by a long list of cuts to the welfare programme. There may not have been a long list, but there were cuts. Does he accept the growing anxiety about the Government's proposals to cut child benefit for lone parents? Will he give a commitment that the Government will think again about the concern that is being expressed and remove the relevant provisions in the Social Security Bill?

Mr. Bradley: I have made the rates of child benefit for next year clear in my statement. Personal allowances and children's additions in income support will be uprated as normal. That will mean an increase in benefits. Lone mothers in low-paid work will benefit from the full uprating of family credit by the Rossi index. I have confirmed that the child care disregard will go up to £100 per week from next June. All those measures will help lone parents and their children. All Departments, including the Department of Social Security, always look carefully at new measures and evaluate them before undertaking the reforms that are necessary for a modern social security system.

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): The aim of full employment, which seemed implicit in my hon. Friend's statement, is laudable, but I do not understand how that is

compatible with cutting the higher rate of child benefit for single parents, which provides a disincentive to work. The higher rate generally applies only to single parents who are already in work. Those who are not in work are likely to be on income support and do not get the means-tested money.

My hon. Friend talks about tough decisions. Tough decisions are not made by people who earn a minimum of £43,000 a year. Tough decisions are made by people who live in genuine poverty, which has affected ever greater numbers in this country for the past 10, 15 or 20 years. People who have to choose between eating and heating are the ones in difficulty. We are in danger of making their situation worse by cutting the higher rate of child benefit.

Madam Speaker: Order. That was an interesting contribution, and would have been so in a debate, but there was not a question in it. If the Minister would like to make some comments, of course I shall allow him to do so, but I want questions from other hon. Members.

Mr. Bradley: I agree with your view, Madam Speaker. As I have said, there will be an opportunity for a full debate on the orders when they are presented to the House, before they are implemented.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the year that I was elected to the House, Buckingham palace sent just over 200 telegrams of congratulation to those who had reached their 100th birthday? Last year, the palace sent 5,460. Anecdotally and from constituency experience—I have no definite evidence—I suspect that many nursing homes and homes for old people do not take up the income support that people in their late 90s are unable to claim themselves. Will that be addressed in the review? Will something be done to help carers, who play an increasingly important role?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. He is right about the number of telegrams that are sent out. As a new Minister, I was surprised to learn that there is a dedicated official for that task because of the number of telegrams to be sent. My hon. Friend has raised important points, which our pensions review and our review of long-term care for elderly people must take into account. It is crucial that elderly people do not live in abject poverty.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the Minister confirm that hidden in half a sentence of his statement was a comment that made it clear that the thresholds at which employers pay national insurance will be frozen in cash terms? That means that he is introducing a real-terms increase in business taxes.

Mr. Bradley: May I clarify that? No employer will pay more on existing payrolls as a result of the freezing of the bands.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Minister bear in mind the fact that unemployed people whom I often see are unemployed not because they want to be but because of genuine disability or age—people who are in their 40s and 50s have been made redundant and cannot find work? They want to find employment. Despite what the Government have said, there will continue to be much difficulty for such people. They should not be penalised by any cuts in social security payments. That would be wrong.

Like my hon. Friends, I welcome what the Government have done for pensioners in the past six months—actions which the Tories would not dream of taking, such as the action on fuel payments. There is more to be done, as my hon. Friend has said. Far too many pensioners are living in dire poverty, and among them are a good number of war veterans. We should do justice to those people, and as soon as possible.

Mr. Bradley: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's continuing and effective championing of the plight of pensioners. I recognise that and pay tribute to him for it. Our pensions review will take into account the matters that he has raised; it is essential that it does.

Clearly, there are barriers to work. Part of the pilot scheme that we are setting up—especially the £195 million of new deal money to help people with disabilities—will look at those barriers so that we can effectively address them. As my hon. Friend rightly said, many such people want to work, to recognise their capacities rather than their incapacities. We have to learn from the pilot experience to ensure that the new deal is effective for all people who want to move from benefit dependency into work.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): My hon. Friend rightly recognised the growing gap between poor and rich pensioners. Does he also recognise that the present generation of pensioners bequeathed to our generation a national health service and a welfare state from which all of us have benefited? Does he further recognise that, for the poorest among them, it is now too late to take out a second-tier or stakeholder pension? At the very least, we owe it to them to restore the link between pension increases and average earnings, which was so callously broken by the Conservative party in 1981.

Mr. Bradley: Clearly, we recognise the plight of pensioners who have not been able to make proper second-tier provision. That is why we are looking closely at those who are not claiming their income-related benefit—income support—to ensure that they at least come up to the minimum level. The pensions review recognises the plight of the poorest pensioners. I assure the House that representatives on that review will not let the Government forget it. Through that review, we will explore how we can most effectively help those poorest pensioners.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. Will he reflect on his rather anodyne words about the Child Support Agency, which is a vital component of social security? It would be more appropriate to describe its operations with alarm, especially as the resources that it is allocated for the detection and pursuit of people who evade its operations seem to be very low. Does my hon. Friend think that the agency should be deemed not the Child Support Agency

[Mr. Tony McWalter]

but a child neglect agency? Will he consider seriously whether its operations should be more profoundly reviewed?

Mr. Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. As I mentioned in the statement, we recognise the importance of payment of child maintenance. It is not acceptable for the money not to go to the parent who cares for children. It is an essential element of such parents' income and they need to know that it will be reliably and efficiently received. That is why we are undertaking a fundamental review of the CSA. We hope to bring forward proposals on the matter in the first half of next year.

Mr. Burns: Will the Minister please tell the House categorically whether the Government have any plans at all in the new deal for lone parents to bring in compulsion, as there is compulsion in welfare to work for young people? Yes or no?

Mr. Bradley: The Secretary of State has made it absolutely clear that compulsion is not the issue. We shall continue to work to help lone parents to get into work. That is what they want and that is what we shall continue to do.

Welsh Ports (Blockades)

5.14 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, to debate an important matter that requires specific and urgent consideration, namely,

the blockading of Welsh ports by farmers at Holyhead and Fishguard, and threats that the illegal action will spread.

I should make it absolutely clear that we cannot condone the action of the farmers involved. We understand their anger and resentment, and sympathise with their plight, but we cannot condone the blockading of any ports in Wales or elsewhere which prevents the free movement of goods by people going about their lawful business.

The wilful dumping of 40 tonnes of beefburgers on Sunday night in Holyhead harbour was disgraceful, as were the skirmishes with the police. The blockading of lorries at Holyhead and Fishguard cannot be allowed, and the turning back to Rosslare of six lorries carrying £600,000-worth of beef and lamb flies in the face of free trade.

The Government need to address this urgent issue quickly. Enough damage has already been done. As the actions of French lorry drivers demonstrated recently, compensation claims will follow—as happened with British lorry drivers who saw their livelihoods being damaged. The Government must act to ensure that all ports remain open at all times. They must not allow the issue to deteriorate.

The economic issues about which the farmers are rightly angry must be addressed, but not as a reaction to illegal actions and midnight ultimatums. The disruption must stop. The Government must look separately, and without duress through threats from anyone, at the crisis facing farmers, especially beef farmers and those in less-favoured areas.

It has been estimated that farmers' incomes this year will drop by between 37 and 50 per cent. One commentator has described the industry as bleeding to death. Prices are sharply down on 12 months ago, and, even in the past seven days, prices have fallen dramatically—in some dairy herds they are lower than they were 17 years ago—from 89p per kilogram to 50p per kilogram. Farmers are selling some of their meat at a loss.

Interest rate rises by the Government have strengthened the pound, so we are sucking in imports at the expense of domestic produce, which is hitting our farmers. The Government could seek more compensation from the European Union, but they refuse to do so. They could use some of the rebate from the ewe premium underspend, but they refuse to do so. They could reinstate the hill livestock compensatory allowance—extra payments that the Conservative Government made to the tune of £60 million last year—but they refuse to do so.

The Secretary of State for Wales should be fighting his corner against the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He either refuses to do so or has failed—whichever it is, it is dismal. Instead of concentrating on the siting of his beloved Welsh Assembly, he should concentrate on the urgent plight of his farmers.

Farmers' unions have condemned the illegal actions, but, at the same time, they want urgent talks with the Government. They want the crisis in farming to be addressed. They need help and support, and they need it now. The president of the National Farmers Union said—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have listened very carefully to what the hon. Member has said. Of course, I must give my decision without giving any reason. I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24. I cannot therefore submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

5.17 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Was it in order for the Paymaster General to make a statement today on the replacement of the whole regime for saving, replacing the highly successful tax-exempt special savings accounts—TESSAs—and personal equity plans—PEPs—and to choose to do so outside the House? Is it perhaps possible that he is avoiding the Chamber so that he does not have to take questions on other matters which may embarrass him?

Madam Speaker: I understand that a Green Paper has been issued. It is perfectly in order for such a statement to be made outside the House. On other matters, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave yesterday.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Further to your ruling in response to the application under Standing Order No. 24, may I seek your guidance? Although, understandably, the application was made by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on Wales—I notice that the Welsh Office Minister responsible for agriculture is present—many of us on both sides of the House and from all parts of the United Kingdom feel that the issues raised by the events in Wales go much broader and deeper than just what has happened in Wales.

That being so, and while acknowledging that many of the issues predate the present Government and cannot be divorced from the actions, decisions and track record of the Conservatives, all of us who are deeply concerned hope that you, Madam Speaker, might look favourably on an application for a Wednesday morning Adjournment debate, during which matters could be explored much more fully on a cross-party and cross-United Kingdom basis.

Madam Speaker: I would look very favourably on such a debate, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that I do not select the subjects. That is done by ballot. However, the hon. Gentleman must get his application in tonight.

National Transport Safety

5.19 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to create a National Transport Safety Authority.

The Bill is designed to create an authority to promote safety in all modes of transport, including aviation, rail, road and maritime; to investigate accidents and all safety-related occurrences; to report to Parliament annually; and to receive information on all related matters.

The reality of modern transport is that, overall, it is becoming safer, but every time there is a major accident of any kind in any form of public transport it attracts considerable attention and worries the travelling public, who want to feel completely confident in the method of travel that they have chosen. It is not only those of us who are especially interested in transport who feel like that.

After the Clapham and Cannon Street rail crashes caused fears about the age of rolling stock—which is a real concern to anyone watching what privatised companies are bringing back on to the rails—the whole question of safety was raised in the reports on both crashes. After Zeebrugge, the deficiencies in the design of roll-on roll-off ferries were very worrying. The marine engineers who gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee suggested that there was a good case for reconsidering the granting of safety licences to new types of ferry.

The Civil Aviation Authority was reluctant to introduce a system of inspection for foreign-registered aircraft when that subject was raised by Members. Concern is increasing about safety on London underground, especially as it is becoming so congested. The channel tunnel is governed not by normal safety procedures, but by a treaty, so the House does not receive reports that provide the level of detail that many of us feel we ought to receive. It must be clear from those examples that the public have real worries about the provision of safe transport.

It is also clear that there are many instances, even in the properly regulated safety authorities, of people acting as judge and jury in their own cases. Railtrack gave evidence to the Transport Committee last week, explaining that the part of Railtrack that was responsible for safety was independent. We were told that a Chinese wall existed between the two parts of the authority. I am of a suitable age to have grave reservations about organisations with Chinese walls between one part and another.

The time has now come for us to set up a national, independent—I emphasise independent—transport authority that would cover the whole range of transport facilities in this country. It already exists in embryo in certain organisations, such as the Civil Aviation Authority and the maritime authorities. A number of agencies could be combined into one large, independent unit that would investigate and report on problems; make the reports public, if necessary; and take advice and transmit it from some parts of the transport industry to others. The unit's role would be clear to the public.

The idea is not revolutionary, because it has already been done successfully in the United States of America, Canada, Sweden and elsewhere. We could benefit from

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

several aspects of those examples. The Canadian system, for example, provides the opportunity for people working in the transport industry to report, in confidence, any worrying aspect that they have discovered during their working lives. That opportunity is not restricted to workers in the industry.

Confidentiality is respected and it is possible to report to the safety authority any incidence of equipment not being properly used or some aspect of safety legislation that is not being operated correctly. Of course, personal grudges are carefully ruled out, but it is made clear that people reporting to the authority will have their cases taken seriously and that their names and involvement will not be disclosed without their agreement. If there are sufficient cases of misuse, or clear evidence in one case, that will be investigated. That does not happen in this country.

It is essential to have a national transport authority that seeks to improve safety at every level. It should not, as many of the agencies currently do, be only reactive: it should consciously offer support and help to all aspects of the transport industry. All areas of transport could benefit from the reports made by the safety authority. If other countries can do that successfully, we should follow their lead.

Such a move would also restore the public's confidence, given the true independence of the authority. How often do Members find themselves arguing with Ministers about inquiries into rail crashes, air crashes or ferry disasters? Individual Members often have to demand the publication of reports. If a national transport authority made an annual report to the House of Commons, the evidence would be available and the House could demand, in specific instances, that it be made public for the benefit of everyone with a specific involvement.

The time has come to demonstrate that although we appreciate and respect those working on safety in the various transport industries, a wholly independent agency would have more muscle, better support and an obvious transparency which is lacking at present. Because this is a Bill presented under the ten-minute rule, I would not dream of suggesting any monetary support for such an authority, but there are several ways in which we could set up such a unit and give it sufficient muscle to carry out its work.

I have great faith in the transport industry, those working in it and, above all, those who seek to regulate it, but that is no longer enough. The changes that have happened—including the privatisations, the pressures on ferry operators and the intense pressure on the national air traffic services—mean that we should have a national authority that stands outwith any of the existing structures. A national authority could ensure that it reported consistently and continually to Parliament, and could be seen to be doing its job. I believe that such an authority would be warmly supported by the general public.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Second Reading what day?

Mrs. Dunwoody: On 12 December, my birthday.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, Mr. Gwyn Prosser, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Kate Hoey, Mr. John Heppell and Mr. Nick Ainger.

NATIONAL TRANSPORT SAFETY

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody accordingly presented a Bill to create a National Transport Safety Authority: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 December, and to be printed [Bill 92].

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Considered in Committee [*Progress, 27 November*].

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

MEANING OF "THE TREATIES" AND "THE COMMUNITY TREATIES"

Amendment proposed [27 November]: No. 65, in page 1, line 12, at the end to insert the words

'but (for the avoidance of doubt) not Article 1 of the said Treaty.'—[*Mr. Howard.*]

5.29 pm

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I remind the Committee that with this we are taking the following amendments: No. 13, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 1)'.

No. 14, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 3)'.

No. 15, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 5)'.

No. 17, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 10)'.

No. 18, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 11)'.

No. 19, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 12)'.

No. 20, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 13)'.

No. 21, in page 1, line 13, after '(i)', insert

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 14)'.

No. 1, in page 1, line 13, after 'Articles', insert

'1, other than the words in paragraph 5, (Cm. 3780, page 9) "and through the establishment of economic and monetary union, ultimately including a single currency in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty".'.

New clause 30—*Extension of jurisdiction of European Court of Justice: legal advice*—

'.—This Act shall not come into force until Her Majesty's Government has obtained specific legal advice from the Attorney General setting out the extent to which the provisions on police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters in Article 1 para 11 of the Treaty of Amsterdam extend the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the United Kingdom, such advice to form the basis of a report to each House of Parliament and to be subject to an affirmative resolution.'.

New clause 37—*Relations between European Union and WEU*—

'—The Government will not take any steps to foster relations between the European Union and the WEU with the view to the possibility of the integration of the WEU into the Union, as contemplated by Article 1, paragraph 10 [Article J.7] of the Treaty of Amsterdam, without first tabling a motion in each House of Parliament which shall be subject to affirmative resolution.'.

New clause 38—*Common foreign and security policy*—

'—The Government shall not take any steps to participate in the decision making arrangements as set out in Article 1 paragraph 10 [Article J.13 1 and 2] of the Treaty of Amsterdam, without first tabling a motion in each House of Parliament which shall be subject to affirmative resolution.'.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): There is a real concern among Conservative Members that article F.1 of the treaty of Amsterdam is a device conjured up by supporters of European federalism to end the use of the national veto. To date, that real concern has been met by Ministers with a mixture of faint puzzlement and lofty disdain. Clearly, they do not comprehend our concern.

The Minister will, I hope, recall that I promised him last week three examples which illustrate the basis of our concern. I had time to offer him two; I would like simply to conclude by providing the third. The two with which I dealt last week related to the minimum wage and to the possibility of a conflict between the attitude of other member states to the age of consent with that of the United Kingdom.

The third example which I offer for the Minister's consideration is that of strikes in essential services. Let us suppose, for example, that a future Government were to decide to outlaw strikes in essential services. My concern—shared by a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends—is that under article F.1 of the treaty of Amsterdam, there is a danger that we could be had up by the institutions of the Community on the ground that we had breached a fundamental right or freedom. That concern is exacerbated or reinforced by the reference in article 1 to the

"Fundamental Social Rights of Workers."

Is there not a danger that that wording and that article could be used as an excuse to take action against this country and to strip it of its voting rights if its Government were to opt to ban strikes in essential services? Has the Minister considered the point? Has he obtained a guarantee from other member states that the article will not be invoked in that way? Can he say? Does he know? Will he share his view with us?

Silence is no longer an option. We must have answers. I respect the fact that the Minister genuinely does not believe that this problem will arise—my anxiety is that it might. A prudent Government must guard against the possibility of that problem arising. The problem will not go away. It cannot be wished away. It cannot be pretended out of existence. I respectfully ask the Minister to take account of our concern and to seek to respond to it. I have no doubt that other right hon. and hon. Members will reiterate the concern during the debate. I ask him to respond to them and, in the first instance, to me.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): This debate has run on for some time, and I have sat through quite a lot of it. I read the remainder of the debate—which, unfortunately, I had to miss—before this debate restarted. I propose to make a short speech, as we have gone on for some hours.

I note that I was quoted earlier—I think with approval—as having said that I did not think there was any great reason to get very excited about the treaty of

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

Amsterdam, which did not seem to me to have made any fundamental changes. Indeed, I was rather disappointed by the treaty of Amsterdam. Certainly, there are people on the continent of Europe—who, no doubt, are more pro-European than me—who think that the outcome of the proceedings at Amsterdam was a triumph for British caution at the expense of those who wish to go for European integration at a faster rate.

I have always thought that it was a mistake to insert in the treaty of Maastricht a binding commitment to hold an intergovernmental conference at a set time. The aftermath of Maastricht showed the great dangers that Governments in Europe faced in trying to go for great institutional reform ahead of public opinion. A certain flexibility in the timing of the inevitably necessary intergovernmental conferences might have been of value.

I voted against the Second Reading of this Bill because I have two great objections to the treaty of Amsterdam. First, it contains references to the agreement at Amsterdam that we would accept the social chapter and waive the opt-out negotiated so carefully by the previous Government. Secondly, I do not believe that Amsterdam remotely faced up to the problems of enlargement. It was so unsatisfactory for those of us who attach great importance to the enlargement of the Union to include more and more countries from central Europe. The result is that a great deal of business is left undone.

I would like to make a full speech about the social chapter, but I have made my views clear on many occasions. I simply wish to record that I think that subsequent generations will bitterly regret that we exposed ourselves to the risk of introducing into the British economy provisions on labour market regulation which might increase the cost of employment in this country. We derive considerable advantage from the opt-out negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) at Maastricht. It has been one of the marked differences between the British and the European economies in recent years.

We have been able to combine strong economic growth with the creation of new employment. The principal reasons for the tragically high levels of unemployment across the remainder of the continent, in my opinion, remain the inflexibility of labour markets there and the inheritance of social legislation which causes great difficulties when the prospect of new jobs arises.

By waiving the British opt-out from the social chapter, the British Government have done a great disservice to many people in other member states. The climate of opinion was steadily moving in our direction across Europe. I encountered many German, French, Spanish and Italian employers who agreed that the British model was better for the creation of employment, and that the burden of social legislation—which, in most cases, had been implemented by their national Governments, although some was implemented as a result of European directives—was a serious disadvantage to them.

The argument was going our way, and I am afraid that the British accession to the social chapter is likely—for a short time, at least—to give a fresh breath of confidence to all those who adhere to an older model of how an employment market should be regulated. We will have difficulty in fighting off Padraig Flynn and his directorate as fresh proposals are made, because it is believed that we are back on the old agenda which ought to be discredited—that social legislation is somehow the way of providing more security in employment to people in the modern world.

My second objection is that Amsterdam failed to tackle the problems of enlargement. As I have said, I think that the enlargement of the Union is one of the great objectives for European politicians in the next few years. The most dramatic events of my political life—the first was before I came to this House—were the erection of the Berlin wall, which symbolised all that was worst about the division of Europe, followed by the moment I never expected to live to see; the demolition of the Berlin wall by the citizens of Germany, symbolising the end to the division of Europe.

As the European Union is one of the ways in which we strengthen our commitment to liberal democracy, human rights, the free market economy and the principles that we hold dear, the sooner we reinforce the reunification of Europe by admitting into the EU those countries in central and eastern Europe which steadily become ready for it, the better.

We cannot simply enlarge the present Union without tackling serious policy and institutional problems. Policy problems are to be dealt with under a separate heading. It is plainly necessary to reform the structural funds and the common agricultural policy.

I strongly support the German, Dutch and other politicians who say that, when enlargement is attained, the enlarged Community should have a budget limited to 1.27 per cent. of gross domestic product, as at present. That accelerates the need for reforms that were in any case desirable in the interests of the present members of the Union. That matter will be addressed at another time.

Institutional change has to be made, touching on the size of the Commission, weighted voting for majority voting, and other matters that we shall have to return to at an intergovernmental conference. I voted against Second Reading because I object to the social chapter, and I am disappointed by the outcome on institutional reform.

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the importance of human rights in the context of European integration and enlargement to include eastern and central Europe. Does he agree with the shadow Foreign Secretary, who objected to the way in which human rights clauses were to be incorporated, referring especially to the importance of procedures for triggering sanctions in cases of human rights abuse? Surely it is crucial that, when we enlarge to include countries in central and eastern Europe, we anchor those countries' commitment to human rights.

Mr. Clarke: I intended to comment on that, so I am happy to do so in response to the hon. Gentleman. I listened to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) last week, and I entirely share his commitment to human rights, in every ordinary sense of that phrase. He went out of his way to emphasise the fact that no one in the Conservative party challenges the principles of human rights, the need to protect individual liberty and free speech, and the right to demonstrate, to have parliamentary democracy and to be governed by the rule of law. There is no division in our party on those principles.

I agree that, as the Community is enlarged, we must consider what happens if any member state acquires a Government who fall short of those fundamental standards. That involves not only new members. One of the reasons why we admitted Greece was to reinforce the change that had taken place there, with a return to parliamentary democracy and a proper standard of human rights.

We have never known what would happen if, tragically, the Greek colonels were to return to power, or if some military regime were to take over in the Iberian peninsula. The idea of that happening in Portugal or Spain may be utterly fanciful these days, but it is legitimate for the treaty to consider the possibility.

If we enlarge into eastern and central Europe, where the tradition of stable democracy is hardly well established, some protection will be required. I believe that article F.1 is an acceptable part of the treaty. My right hon. and learned Friend shared my analysis but suggested that the matter should be tackled in some other way. As I understand it, he objected to the treaty rights of a member state being taken away if it remained subject to the treaty obligations, but I can envisage that being an attractive response.

I do not see why, if a military regime has taken over a country in eastern or central Europe, it should be released from the obligations, or why we should sever our trading contracts and the policing of those contracts by the European Court, simply because we disapprove of the Government; but I would strongly object to a Government who were not respecting human rights casting votes at the Council of Ministers, and perhaps blocking action, when vetoes were the order of the day, without effective action being taken to stop them.

It is difficult to say with certainty that the procedures will ever be invoked, because every relevant situation that arises will in itself be a political crisis, and will have to be responded to according to the facts of the case, but I personally have no objection to article F.1.

The fear is raised that the article might be totally abused, to remove the veto of the Government of a member state with a satisfactory record on human rights, but with some peculiar social provision that could be described as a breach of human rights. Anything is possible in international relations, and in debates on the treaty of Rome, the Single European Act 1985, and the treaty of Maastricht, I have heard some pretty fanciful suggestions about what might occur, but the provisions of the treaty envisage the clause being invoked only by the unanimous vote of all member states, except the one whose conduct is under examination, ratified by two thirds of the Members of the European Parliament.

5.45 pm

There is nothing in the treaty that allows me to turn to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and say that what he fears is absolutely legally impossible, but when I consider the dangers of having a military regime inside the Union at some time in the future, I am prepared to say, as a matter of political judgment, that I do not think that anyone will deprive the United Kingdom of all its voting rights and leave it bound by the treaty obligations because, in the opinion of the heads of state of 14 other member countries, our refusal of the right to abortion on demand, or some such matter, is a breach of human rights.

One must consider the risks in both directions, and I personally share the alarm of those who were at Amsterdam about the lack of any provision in the event—again, we hope that it will never happen—of some member state being governed by a regime that is in breach of fundamental human rights.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): It has been suggested that it would be preferable to expel a member state rather than suspend it in those conditions. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the legal complexities, and the consequences and ramifications, of expulsion of a member state, including the suspension of contracts and the possibility of actions arising therefrom, would be so great that, in effect, the sanction would become a useless deterrent, whereas a suspension in the conditions that he has described would provide a relatively effective redress?

Mr. Clarke: I am inclined to agree with my hon. Friend. In practice, if some military regime seized power and started abusing human rights, article F.1 might not be the end of the story. The European Union could not tolerate the situation indefinitely.

My right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary suggested that the proper course would be expulsion, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) that we would then have to consider whether to sever trading relations or renegotiate them and what would happen to existing contracts, and so on. I understand the fears about the article, but they do not seem to me to be totally credible.

The European Court of Justice always causes a certain agitation in the House. I was glad to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) confirming that the European Union needs a strong and effective court of justice. It is impossible to have a single market in the European Union, with trading taking place on a fair basis, with the nations subject to the same obligations and specifications, including open access to markets and freedom from state subsidy—all of which we want—if there is absolutely no means of enforcing the rules.

In Britain, we labour under what I believe is a slightly exaggerated notion that we are the only ones who obey any of the rules, and that they are systematically broken throughout the rest of Europe. That perspective can be taken only on this side of the channel, but we do, indeed, bind ourselves by the rule of law and our treaty obligations, and we are entitled to expect that those in other states will do likewise. That is why we in this country go to the European Court of Justice with such persistence, and that is why we win most of our cases when we do so. That is why we shall have no redress against complaints of unfair trading, breach of treaty obligation and so on if the European Court of Justice is diminished. On that, I trust, we are now all agreed.

I shall not discuss specific judgments. In my surgery, I frequently meet disappointed litigants whose confidence in British justice has momentarily dropped because, unfortunately, they have lost a case before the High Court of Justice or the Crown court. I always listen with great sympathy. They are usually going to the Queen, they are going to the Pope after that and they are usually going to the European Court of Human Rights to get a finding of fact reversed. Recently, we lost one or two cases that I,

[Mr. Clarke]

as a Minister, was anxious for us to pursue, but I do not judge a court on the basis of whether we have won every action there. On the whole, we have used the European Court of Justice to considerable advantage.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: No. I see that I am in danger of being drawn into the details of individual litigation. I will do that on another occasion.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: All right—I give way just once.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. and learned Friend concede that, although some of us accept the idea of a court of justice with limited functions, objections are made to the expansion of the court not only because it tends to go into judicial—and even political—activism, but because the functions that have been conferred on it under the process of continuing treaties, in the continuous rush towards ever closer union, are creating a situation in which the court is becoming a supranational body with power over areas of governmental activities, including economic and monetary union? That is the problem that many of us have with the European Court of Justice. If its powers were more limited, it would be more acceptable.

Mr. Clarke: I do not agree with that. We use the European Court of Justice and it seeks to reach its decisions judicially.

I will not be drawn into my full comments on the European Court of Justice. One of the dangers that makes all the court's judgments unpredictable is that it is usually required to interpret treaties, regulations and directives that have been somewhat carelessly drafted.

The decision-making process in Europe has been experienced by quite a few of my right hon. Friends, and it is less than perfect. I have probably taken part in more Councils than most people still alive, and I am used to late-night decisions being taken on texts, hurriedly exchanged between officials, looked at by Ministers and wrangled over in the Council. Anything that gets agreement is published, on the basis that it will be sorted out later. All too often it winds up before the judiciary in the European Court of Justice, who are expected to give some expression of what the draftsman of the regulation intended. As, at the time, different Ministers went out of the meeting and addressed their national press, each claiming that they had achieved a totally different type of triumph at the expense of the other, that can be difficult to resolve. That lies at the root of most of the problems.

The idea that the court is supranational has always been established and was accepted as part of our membership. It has been known for 25 years—ever since we entered the European Union—that legislation of individual national Parliaments can be set aside if it is inconsistent with a judgment of the European Court. I remember it being fiercely debated for days on end in the House of Commons soon after I entered the House. The idea that we supposed that we were entering only a trading arrangement is one of the great myths of our time.

I believe that the European Court serves its purpose quite well. The British win more cases than we lose there. We should use it more often in future. However, I strongly agree with the points that my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary made about our proposals for the European Court of Justice.

In my views on the European Union, I am not a starry-eyed idealist; I have seen it at far too close quarters for that. There are countless defects, not only in the decision-making process but in many of its institutions. The previous Government carefully prepared a lot of propositions for improving the workings of the European Court of Justice and protecting all member states against judgments that could have horrendous implications.

We wanted to limit the retrospective nature of judgments. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, I was extremely worried about the constant challenges that were made at the European Court to the scope and incidence of our VAT because, whereas in this country we have imposed limits on how far back in time such claims may extend, in the European Court, judgments might be awarded undoing the imposition of VAT all the way back to the introduction of VAT. Several countries risked billions of pounds of damages.

We also wanted to introduce a principle that member states were liable for compensation only in cases of serious and manifest breaches of their obligations.

We wanted national time limits to be respected when people brought actions before the European Court. That was not Euro-sceptic or Europhile. It was an extremely constructive approach to improving the workings of the European Court. It is no good dismissing what my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary said as though it was a frontal attack on the European Court; it plainly was not. Astonishingly, the new British Government, who I trust were advised—we cannot inquire about their advice—about the point of all those changes, appear to have abandoned them when they reached Amsterdam.

We had allies on that point. I may have had a biased view because I was attending ECOFIN, but I assure the House that Finance Ministers were rather enthusiastic about limiting the scope of the court's judgments. We have never had a satisfactory explanation of why those arguments were not pressed. I believe that those objectives could have been attained and it is a serious weakness that none of the arguments was advanced.

I understand the concern that my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has about the ECJ and the home affairs pillar. I agree with him that the pillared approach of Maastricht was one of the best features of the Maastricht negotiation. In my opinion, the only proper way to proceed on foreign affairs and security and on home affairs was on the basis of intergovernmental co-operation and not using the institutions of the European Union. That was the best feature of the Maastricht treaty; it has led to some progress, and I would defend the pillared approach.

The pillared approach appears to have been encroached on marginally by giving the ECJ some jurisdiction in that area. If there are conventions and so on under the home affairs limb, it is necessary for someone to resolve disputes about their meaning, but we should be very cautious about the implications, and I trust that the jurisdiction of the ECJ will not be extended further into other pillared areas.

The failures at Amsterdam included not only the apparent adoption of the social chapter by everyone, but the failure to make any proper institutional reform. The Government failed to get any progress on what the weighting of individual member countries' votes would be in weighted majority voting. I have long believed strongly that qualified majority voting cannot continue on the present basis, whereby votes in an electoral college are given to individual member states rather arbitrarily, in a way that bears no relationship to their population.

That matter was raised by my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister during the Greek presidency. When he returned to the United Kingdom, he took a lot of abuse for raising it. He was obliged to accept that the matter would be postponed until the Amsterdam conference so that we could not be accused of excluding the Scandinavians and others from membership; and then nothing was done at Amsterdam.

The bigger the European Community gets, the more necessary it becomes for states like our own to ensure that any risk of QMV is based on a weighting of votes that reflects the position of individual member states. The present voting system gives rise to the possibility that small states will be given overweening power; that position is not sustainable. We are drifting towards a situation where, if many more states enter the European Union, we might have Germany, Britain and France, or Germany and Britain, or Germany, Britain and Italy voting together and being voted down by the combined weight of all the other member states, despite the fact that, in population terms, nothing like an adequate majority had been achieved.

We must address the size of the Commission, which is far too big. It is absurd. If the Community gets bigger—for example, if we take in micro-states such as Malta if the Maltese resume their application—we cannot have a Commissioner from every member state. We should not have two Commissioners from the bigger states. We should have rotation between states with the right to nominate Commissioners.

People complain about the overweening power of the Commission; I believe that the power of the Commission is waning. The power of the Delors Commission will turn out with hindsight to have been the high watermark of the Commission. We are moving to a Union based more on the power of the Council of Ministers, subject to the democratic checks of the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

The problem is that the more Commissioners there are, the more they try to do. There is the continual attempt to extend their competence and jurisdiction to areas where subsidiarity should prevail. That problem should have been tackled at Amsterdam; it will have to be tackled again.

6 pm

I realise that many of the speeches by my colleagues in the debate have not always taken exactly the same approach as mine—*[Laughter.]*—although I have shown that there is quite a lot of common ground between us. Listening to the concluding remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham, I realised that he remains concerned about this commitment to an ever closer Union, which appears again in the article under discussion, as amended. I have already made it clear that the European Union has for 25 years been a political as well as an economic endeavour. This House committed itself to ever closer union in the debates that I attended in 1972, when the implications were debated at inordinate length.

The process of ever closer union will continue, but it is a mistake to think that that means a united states of Europe, or that it is a threat to the power of the nation state. A united states of Europe is no longer contemplated by any of the members of the EU. I remember in my younger days meeting the founders of the Union, who actually believed in the blueprint: the Commission would become a European Government, the Council of Ministers would be a senate, and the European Parliament would be the European House of Commons. I believe it was that idea to which my right hon. Friend Baroness Thatcher emphatically said, "No, no, no." If my recollection is right, I say no, no, no to that too. It is a dead blueprint; no one pursues it any longer.

Since we joined in 1972 when all these fears were first raised, in my judgment this country has become a more powerful nation state and more respected around the world, with more influence than it formerly had. We have built on our membership of the Union and have become a more successful and self-confident nation. But we live in the modern world, where the political interdependence of nation states will grow ever stronger; where the power of each and every nation state in Europe will increasingly depend on our ability to act collectively; where we have common interests that reinforce our influence; and where our economies are going to become ever more integrated whatever Governments want, or do not want, to do about it. We are moving into a free trade, integrated global economy—and I welcome that.

What we need to retain—and what the Government are losing—is influence over the direction of this process. If we detach ourselves too much from what is going on, we shall lose our influence on the environment in which our political power and economic well-being can flourish. I read of the Chancellor's dismay at the fact that the other member states propose to proceed with an informal Council of Economic Ministers and may not let him attend. I share the Chancellor's view; I spent my time arguing with colleagues on ECOFIN that such a Council should not be created. I am not surprised, however, that the right hon. Gentleman has failed. Once he had made his statement that was supposed to clarify his approach to economic and monetary union; once it was obvious that he had done no such thing; once it was obvious that he had put off making any definitive decision, because hard choices are what the Government talk about but do not make readily; once all this had happened, I could sense the influence of the Chancellor weakening when he returned to Europe. He cannot ask to sit on the new informal Council and influence its decisions but also say that he has to go back and consult Alastair Campbell, Rupert Murdoch and perhaps even the Prime Minister to find out whether he can seriously commit this country to joining once the economic conditions are right.

This is an illustration of how, if we do not take clear decisions based on hard choices, when the circumstances eventually are right, British influence will be damaged. I do not say that it will be damaged by Amsterdam, which is a mouse of a treaty compared with what the people who first thought of the IGC intended. It has some good and some bad features. Among the latter was the failure to get the right deal on the European Court. I strongly agreed

[Mr. Clarke]

with the criticisms in that respect levelled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Chairman: Order. I should like to assist the Committee. This is a wide grouping of amendments, but it is not infinitely wide. I sense that the Committee is in danger of repeating the Second Reading debate, which would be out of order. I remind hon. Members that there is a debate arranged for Thursday, when it will be possible to roam far and wide on the subject of the European Union.

The other danger is that some of the speeches already made on this group of amendments are more pertinent to later groups. That will obviously influence the attitude of the Chair to the length of those future debates. I would therefore ask the Committee to bear it in mind that I have tried in my selection of amendments to allow every aspect of the Bill to be discussed in an orderly manner; and it would assist the flow of debate if the Committee kept strictly within the terms of each group of amendments.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I am and always have been a pro-European. I have worked in almost every country in Europe; I have bought and sold products in every country in Europe; and I have run a business in Germany. I believe in free trade, in breaking down tariff barriers and in removing state aids, but we have a long way to go in practice before we can genuinely say that we have created a single market in Europe.

One has only to look at a set of Italian accounts, or to try to sell a product in southern Italy, to know that we have a long way to go before we reach a true single market. It is because I am pro-Europe that I am opposed to article 1 of the treaty of Amsterdam, and opposed to the monetary union foreshadowed in it.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) that the treaty of Amsterdam marks

"an unnecessary move towards further integration of the European Union. It contains a series of measures that transfer power to Brussels from the national parliaments".—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 1138.].

The treaty raises two issues that go to the heart of the European question. First: is the Conservative vision of Europe as a community of independent states compatible with the treaty and with monetary union, or is the treaty compatible only with the Government's vision of a Europe of the regions? Secondly: is the economic and industrial playing field being created in Europe, inspired as it is by a corporatist and dirigiste ethic, good enough to be competitive with north America and Asia in the future?

I shall deal with the first point first. The Conservatives have always focused on trade. Whether it was the European Coal and Steel Community, the Common Market or the Single European Act, our focus has been on trade—although I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) that there has always been a political dimension to Europe as well—but we in this country have not stressed that dimension as much as we should have for the purposes of a truly fair public debate. Indeed, we have played down the loss of sovereignty inherent in the moves afoot in Europe. Under this treaty, with the extension of qualified majority voting, the increased powers of the ECJ and the foreshadowing of a common defence and foreign policy, the political aspects of Europe become more explicit.

I believe that we are arriving at a watershed. No longer can we pretend to our constituents that Europe is solely about trade, because it is not. We must be more honest and accept that there is a sizeable political dimension to our continued involvement in Europe.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): My hon. Friend is right to say that the politics may not have been stressed enough in public debates, but one of the key achievements of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister was her realisation that qualified majority voting was essential in the about-to-be created single market to overcome the protectionist instincts of any one nation. She realised that it was vital to Europe's wider interests that there be no national veto in the single market—which I am sure is why my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) voted in favour of the Single European Act.

Mr. Prior: I, too, am in favour of the Single European Act, but when the Chancellor of the Exchequer says that monetary union will involve some pooling of economic sovereignty, that statement is disingenuous. I believe that monetary union goes beyond that. That view is not necessarily wrong, as I accept that there are different views on Europe, but monetary union goes way beyond some pooling of economic sovereignty.

The combination of Amsterdam and monetary union provides the basis for a single European state, and that is what the debate should be about. Although my personal views are against that, it is the nub of the issue that we should be debating. It would be a tragedy if, in the discussions on monetary union, we were diverted into a narrow debate about convergence criteria, and so on. We would be doing the public a great disservice.

Nothing could be more dangerous to this country than if the British public went into closer political union without fully understanding the facts, and that is what they are doing. In those circumstances, political union would unquestionably be damaging to Europe.

My second point is the economic one. In 1972, when we joined the Common Market, the continental systems had performed extremely well for 20 years. There is no doubt that, despite the high levels of state ownership and the more dirigiste approach to managing their economies, they were extremely successful That was before the general agreement on tariffs and trade had largely opened up free trade, before the globalisation of business and the capital markets, and at a time when the western economies were still pre-eminent technologically.

That has changed. Over that period, America has re-emerged as probably the great dynamic economy in the west. The UK's economy, as well, was transformed during the 1980s and 1990s. I would be the last person to write off the continental economies. No one who has seen Germany, France and Italy would dream of doing that; they still have very strong engineering and manufacturing bases. Nevertheless, to tie ourselves irrevocably into the continental social system at this time could prove to be a great mistake.

On both political and economic grounds, this is a bad treaty. It is a clear departure from the popular notion—albeit not the notion inside the House of Commons—that the EU is first and foremost about trade. Lastly, it will make Europe a more difficult place in which to do business.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): At the Committee's previous sitting, the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who unfortunately is not in his place, suggested that the defeat that the Conservatives suffered on 1 May was a consequence of the events of September 1992, and our inability to control our interest rate in what he called

"a global international currency situation."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 1169.]

In some respects, I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I want Labour Members to consider what would have happened if, instead of entering an exchange rate mechanism, we had been bound into a full currency union, and therefore were unable to take the escape route that we took—unable to reduce interest rates and make the best of the remaining four to five years to bring about an astonishing recovery. Had that not been possible, what vengeance might the electorate have wreaked? Perhaps Labour Members might learn from that experience.

The hon. Member for Harlow went on to complain about the sentiments expressed by the Opposition, which he called "xenophobic rhetoric". I do not know how tightly one should define the word "xenophobic", but it was not my experience that the arguments advanced by Conservative Members were xenophobic in any sense. However, the hon. Gentleman is a reasonable man, and if he wishes to call such sentiment xenophobic, that is his right, although we would disagree.

The hon. Member for Harlow may not have realised how grave an accusation he made, as the treaty goes some way towards outlawing such sentiments. The hon. Gentleman may believe that the sentiments expressed were xenophobic, but I am sure that he would also believe that we have every right to express them. That is not a point of view consistent with the treaty. Labour Members should consider voting for amendment No. 65 on precisely that ground.

6.15 pm

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend recall that, when the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) was invited to cite a single example of a xenophobic statement during the Committee's deliberations, he could not produce an example?

Mr. Swayne: I thank my hon. Friend, as I had indeed forgotten that. It is pertinent that I should be reminded.

I draw the attention of the Committee to article 1 of the treaty, which replaces article B of the Maastricht treaty. It states:

"The Union shall set itself the following objectives:".

I draw particular attention to the fourth objective:

"To maintain and develop the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, in which the free movement of persons is assured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime."

Attention has perhaps rightly focused on the abolition of border controls and the so-called flanking measures, whatever they might be. The United Kingdom, of course, has an opt-out, as is made clear in the protocols. Despite that, I find it difficult to believe that we will escape being drawn into some centralised process of interference in our administration of justice and law.

That is precisely because of further provisions. I draw the attention of the Committee to article K.1, which states:

"Without prejudice to the powers of the European Community, the Union's objective shall be to provide citizens with a high level of safety within an area of freedom, security and justice by developing common action among the Member States in the fields of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters and by preventing and combating racism and xenophobia."

Now we realise the gravity of the accusation made by the hon. Member for Harlow. How long will it be before my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is arraigned before some court for xenophobia? How long will the teaching of history in our schools be secure from those who would revise it and interfere with it to exclude xenophobic tendencies?

The most important question is what on earth that has to do with a treaty that deals with the development of Europe along the lines that the Government have suggested. Where is the need for common action among all the member states on such activity? Why is that not left to individual member states? What became of the principle of subsidiarity?

The answer is in the treaty. The fifth objective set out in article 1 makes it clear what the attitude to subsidiarity shall be henceforth. It will be

"to maintain in full the aquis communautaire and build on it with a view to considering to what extent the policies and forms of cooperation introduced by this Treaty may need to be revised".

That is as far as we seem to be able to go on subsidiarity.

We are talking not of bland statements or of flowery words. Instead, we are dealing with legal documents, which will be interpreted as such. They must, therefore, be tightly defined and coded.

There is a great danger that the treaty creates a means by which the European Court of Justice—certainly article K.2 is fully justiciable before the ECJ—can extend its jurisdiction into the administration of criminal and civil law in the United Kingdom. That is precisely the process that took place in the United States with the 14th amendment after the civil war, which required that the states give equal protection to citizens under the law. That was an entirely unobjectionable amendment, but it gave the federal supreme court the ability to exercise huge jurisdiction over state law. It led to a great advance in federal achievement in the United States. That is fine if one is looking for that sort of development in Europe.

The article calls for an area of freedom and justice that affords a high level of safety and protection to the citizen, and I fear that it will create the 14th amendment for the European Union. I urge the Committee to vote for amendment No. 65.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The debate is important because it does not turn on a small, minor item that the approval of the treaty of Amsterdam represents. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) said, we are talking of a step down the path towards European integration.

[Mr. Howard Flight]

It is interesting that no one is clear about the form of political integration. Will it be the United States federal model or a relatively undemocratic model that is run by the Commission? As my right hon. and learned Friend suggested, will it be a new model that will activate the power of the European Parliament? It is clear that we have reached a significant stage.

The treaty provides for universal, including British, membership of the social charter. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) said, the extension of powers to the European Court of Justice gives the potential power of veto over United Kingdom criminal law as well as creating the framework for a European model of the United States supreme court. The harmonisation of civil law must mean for citizens of the United Kingdom the erosion of UK common law. The progressive framing of a common defence policy, wherever that leads, is, self-evidently about attempts to pull together European defence activities.

Included also is the introduction of citizenship of the Union. As we know, everything to which I have referred is accompanied by other outside measures involving tax harmonisation.

Right hon. and hon. Members may claim that the House of Commons has known that Britain embarked a long while ago on the course of integration into a European state of some sort, which must mean inevitably the ending of the nation state as we have known it. It is clear, however, that the nation has scant awareness of that process. That leads me to ask why there is hiding and deceit. Why is it pretended that the treaty represents a little something that does not matter much? Why is it that the newspapers and other sectors of the media do not more clearly bring to the attention of the British public the fact that we are faced with a sequential stage? I am understanding of those who wish that to be, but it is astonishing that the citizens of the United Kingdom do not understand that that is what it is all about and that that is the path down which we are going.

I warn the Government and others who wish to advance down the path to which I have referred that, because citizens do not understand and have not been fully educated, there will be a major nationalistic backlash, when they suddenly realise where the treaty is leading us. We shall then be locked up in xenophobia.

The provision for a single currency is crucial. The other issues on which I have touched can ultimately be abrogated by a future United Kingdom Government, but inclusion of sterling in a single currency would be much more difficult to reverse than other processes.

It is still a controversial issue with some that a single currency is clearly to be accompanied by the harmonisation of taxation. We are all to sign a code committing ourselves to such harmonisation and it is inconceivable for any major currency—a fiat paper currency—not to have the backing of some form of single state. It would be impossible ultimately to pledge the assets of such an area, or even to manage that currency in the event of a major crisis, without there being at the back of it the concept of a single sovereign state.

Cross-subsidies would not be possible to organise without central power in some form of a single state. The two issues to which I have referred go hand in hand. It is not a matter of Ireland having been able to have its punt managed in line with sterling in the past. After all, Ireland is a very small economy.

I wish to focus on the economic arguments. It is self-evident that a single currency means the loss of ability to manage our own interest rates. There will be the loss of an independent exchange rate. As I have said, powers will be lost to pursue tax policies and tax rates.

Let us think of an economy that is facing serious problems. Let us consider the problems that are likely to spread round the world because of what is going on in Asia. The individual Governments of the surviving nation states in Europe will have lost virtually any individual power to manage their own affairs. That seems likely to cause major political problems and major nationalistic reactions.

I move on to the case study analogy of united Germany. Much has been said about the reunification of Germany, but there are some crucial points to bear in mind. Two economies have been put together—east and west—with entirely different capital stocks, work habits and skills. The east of Germany has on average a productivity level that is about 35 per cent. below that of western Germany. The rate at which things started does not matter because that represented about the value of east German savings.

I predicted at the time that German firms would be looking to Czechia, Hungary and Poland for investment, not to eastern Germany. Indeed, they looked to Britain as well. What has happened to eastern Germany? The answer is virtually permanent stagnation. It cannot compete with economies with much cheaper currencies to the east. It cannot compete either with the superior west German economy. That is what is happening in one country with one language with a fair degree of labour mobility. At the same time there is a major fiscal burden on the west German economy in subsidising the east German economy.

My fear is that one can apply that case study Europewide. Anyone who believes that a single currency can be operated without an increase in cross-subsidisation is living in a world not of this planet. From where is the cross-subsidisation to be raised? Who will pay for it? Who will take the political decisions? I cannot see any Government winning an election here or in Germany on a ticket of putting up taxes to give greater cross-subsidisation to Italy, Spain, Greece, east Germany, or wherever. I fear that a substantial undemocratic element will be involved.

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): Do my hon. Friend's concerns, which, on the whole, I do not share, about the possibility of Britain joining the single currency lead him to conclude that we should never in any circumstances join a single currency union, whatever the impact on Britain, because of the fundamental objections that he sees? Therefore, it is not a question of postponing a decision for five years, 10 years, or whatever; it is a question of saying never.

6.30 pm

Mr. Flight: Clearly, joining the single currency means surrendering the existence of the country as a nation state. It means giving up a considerable amount. If we are to give up such an amount, the argument has to be

powerfully in favour economically. I assert that the argument is, if anything, negative economically. It is certainly negative in terms of economic cycles being out of sync and, if anything, becoming more so. If one is to sell one's birthright, do not sell it for an economic mess of pottage. It is worth selling only if there are economic gains to be had.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point. If not for a mess of pottage, for what would he sell his birthright?

Mr. Flight: Like all Conservatives, I am ultimately a pragmatic person. Who knows what the circumstances will be in the future? There is no case for selling our birthright in the immediate future. One of the things that has most worried me is that the provisions of the Maastricht treaty for coming together are a completely wrong measure of the economic homogeneity that is needed for a common currency to work.

Even America, since the civil war, has had the problem that the deep south—anyone who has been there will know this—has remained a relatively depressed area. It was a backward plantation economy and has never really got off the ground.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Georgia?

Mr. Flight: The deep south, Sir. Certainly not Georgia, which is the mid-south.

The issue is that, if economic regions that are insufficiently economically homogenous are put together, it will cause major problems. The less successful areas will become worse. One then has to choose whether to subsidise them. If not, unemployment will rise on a massive scale. Considering when or whether this country should sell its birthright is a serious issue. The Maastricht criteria are by no means a measure of adequate economic homogeneity.

The second crucial point that I wish to make was made substantially by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe. Does the single currency encourage or discourage areas of Europe to adapt their economies towards economic success, towards competing with the new emerging parts of the world, towards the new world of free trade and free global flows? I do not see any evidence of that whatever.

For nearly a decade, there has been talk of setting up private sector pension funds. What has happened? Scarcely anything. A major problem, of huge unfunded debt, has not been addressed. What has been done to remove barriers to employment? What has been done to lessen the 40 per cent. employment taxes that keep people out of employment, and price people out of jobs? Absolutely nothing. It is Europe's priority, in terms of its own good in the world, as well as in terms of creating the single market, to address those items. For too long the excuse has been given, "You can push those under the bed; the single currency will do everything." The single currency will worsen Europe's economic problems, not solve them.

Thirdly, I shall talk about the role of the euro as a world currency reserve. I see a very great danger, because, to a large extent, there is an element of resentment and jealousy in wishing to compete with America, which is the leading world power and owner of the reserve currency, and in the desire to compete with and perhaps even overtake it. If one follows policies that are designed to achieve a strong, hard reserve currency, where one is running a substantial external surplus, one runs the risk of slipping into the very problems that face Japan. A country can have a substantial reserve currency only if it is in regular deficit, creating the external ownership of the currency, which others can buy, hold and trade among themselves. I severely warn Europe and the Government that, if that is the way in which the European central bank goes, there is a danger that Europe will face the same problems in a few years that have faced Japan this decade.

I conclude by making the essential point that the Committee should vote for the amendment, because at its heart is the single currency, and because it is a serious stage down the path of European political integration. That is something of which this country has little or no knowledge, which perhaps the House of Commons or others have deliberately concealed from it. It is time that the people of this country knew where we are going, what is involved and what the risks are and were free to express what I believe to be their view—that they do not wish to lose their nation statehood.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I wish to touch on three topics—two briefly and one in more detail. I shall say a few words about economic and monetary union, then a few words about the human rights provision of article F.1 and, finally, and in more detail, I shall speak about a common foreign and security policy.

On economic and monetary union, I have no difficulty with the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney). I believe that, in principle, a single currency is wrong. It will not work and I cannot envisage any circumstances in which I would support our joining it. However, there is always the possibility that all one's predictions in economic and political forecasting may be proven by events to be wrong.

If, over a decade, everything that people believe—as I do—is wrong with the single currency were tried out by other countries in the European Union and, against all our expectations, all our fears were shown to be groundless, we would have to admit that we were wrong, but we do not expect that to happen. That is why it is possible for people who believe—as I do—that we should never join the single currency to live quite happily with the formula propounded by the Conservative Opposition: that we should oppose the single currency in this Parliament and the next.

Even someone as certain as I am that the single currency will prove to be a disaster for the countries that enter into it would have to admit that we were wrong if at the end of this Parliament and the next our fears were shown to be groundless. I am happy to give that hostage to fortune because I do not believe that we will be shown to be wrong. I believe that EMU will turn out to be an implosion on an even greater scale than was the implosion of the exchange rate mechanism in 1992.

It is rather strange that people—not necessarily hon. Members who are present for this debate—increasingly refer to European monetary union rather than to economic and monetary union, which is what EMU stands for. The distinction is important, because the term economic and monetary union recognises the fact that there cannot

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

be monetary union without economic union. We cannot have a single currency without creating a single economy. I have said before—and I shall never tire of saying—that we cannot have a single economy without creating a single Government, and we cannot have a single Government without creating a single state. It therefore follows that those who oppose the creation of a single state of Europe must oppose the introduction of a single currency for Europe, because the one leads directly to the other.

I was interested in the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). He said that he is not in favour of a single state, but that he is in favour of ever closer union, by which I take him to mean ever closer political union. My logical faculties may not be up to the task, but it seems to me that that argument is like saying that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. I remember a philosophical paradox that goes something like this: if a person starts out a certain distance from a fixed point and always moves towards it by covering half the remaining distance between him and that fixed point, he will move forward without ever reaching the fixed point. That is what my right hon. and learned Friend seems to have in mind: it is fine for us to go on having ever closer political union, but heaven forfend that we should end up with a politically united Europe.

People who believe in ever closer political union should have the courage of their convictions and say that they want a politically united Europe. They cannot say that they want one without saying that they want the other, because the one will inevitably lead to the other.

Conservative Members have gone into the human rights provisions in great depth and I do not intend to repeat their arguments. I shall merely point out that, in response to a question from me during the debate on 12 November, the Foreign Secretary said that he was willing to give me

"an undertaking that, so long as the Labour party is in power, it will not be possible to find 14 EU states that will agree that the Government are in serious and persistent violation of democracy or of human rights."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 912.]

Much has been made of the example of the Greek colonels and much has been said about what we would do if an undemocratic regime came to power. My fear about the provision is not so much that it will be used directly against this country as that it could be used indirectly.

Suppose this country were in a minority of one, not over a human rights question but over some other matter such as our budget rebate or the beef crisis. Would it not be tempting for other EU states to invoke the clause on a completely separate issue, such as discrimination on grounds of gender or homosexual rights in the armed forces, not so as to overrule us on the matter of the human rights that allegedly we were persistently abusing, but to deprive us of our veto so as to overcome the fact that we were the sole member state blocking progress on the other issue? My concern is not about direct application, but is about the indirect leverage given by article F.1, which would enable others to deprive this country of its protection, its veto and its voting rights.

6.45 pm

The main purpose of my remarks is to deal with common foreign and security policy. It may come as a surprise to Labour Members—

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): Both of them.

Dr. Lewis: As my hon. Friend observes, the Labour party is represented in this important Committee by fewer than the proverbial contents of a telephone box.

I have a confession to make. It may come as a surprise to such of those dedicated Europhiles as are present on the Labour Benches to know that I am a Johnny-come-lately Euro-sceptic.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend took far too long.

Dr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can even name the day on which I became a Euro-sceptic: it was 22 March 1995. I read an article in *The Times*, which was headed:

"Santer seeks right to shape foreign policy for Europe".

It said:

"Brussels should have the right to shape Europe's foreign and security policy, a power currently jealously guarded by the governments of the European Union's 15 member states, Jacques Santer, the President of the European Commission, said yesterday."

The article said that he had addressed the institutional committee of the European Parliament and had called for

"a strengthening of the European Commission as the guardian of the European treaties. He said the Commission should be given the right of initiative in foreign and security policy."

I have another confession to make. One does not often hear a politician say, "I was wrong," but I was wrong in my assessment of integration theory, which I learnt about when I studied international relations. Integration theory was developed more than a score years ago. As undergraduates, we were told by our lecturers that if states could not directly be persuaded openly to coalesce and to become a single nation state, they could indirectly be lured into doing so by a process of functional integration. The idea was that common patterns could be created through a particular sphere of activity so that states would be drawn together and, before they knew where they were, they would be irreversibly interlocked.

In my naivety, I thought that that would never work because states have a hard-headed understanding of their national interests. I thought that they would be drawn part of the way along that slope, but that they would see what was happening, would turn round and would retreat from it. I confess that I underestimated the power of functional integration. The process of creeping federalisation has undoubtedly been far more successful than one could possibly have anticipated.

Mr. Bercow: I am following closely the logic of my hon. Friend's thesis. Does he agree that the people of Britain will never knowingly consent to being governed by those who do not speak their language, live in their country or depend on their votes?

Dr. Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend, but I am not saying that that will not happen because the operative word in his intervention was "knowingly". The methods

that have been adopted bear a frightening resemblance to the methods that were used by other philosophies in the past. During the cold war, I often had to look at Marxist doctrine and the speeches of Soviet leaders. The people who delivered those speeches tried to cram as many words as possible into the smallest amount of thought. They tried to deaden the perception of people who were attempting to establish the propositions that were being conveyed by obfuscating them with massive amounts of jargon. In the end, people gave up rather than continue to try to tease out the meaning in the small print.

Not only has the technique of trying to bore people into not knowing what they are being lured into been used; people have tried selectively to misquote history. I have in mind the attempts to cite Winston Churchill and his Zurich speech in 1946 as if he were recommending that Britain should be part of a united states of Europe. I shall read a few brief extracts from his speech of 19 September 1946. He said:

"I am now going to say something that will astonish you. The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. In this way only can France recover the moral leadership of Europe."

Later he said:

"Our constant aim must be to build and fortify the strength of UNO."

The United Nations Organisation. He continued:

"Under and within that world concept we must re-create the European family in a regional structure called, it may be, the United States of Europe . . . In all this urgent work, France and Germany must take the lead together. Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America, and I trust, Soviet Russia—for then indeed all would be well—must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live and shine."

That was under the aegis of a world body because in 1945–46 the United Nations was seen primarily as a "world security organisation". The phrase was often used interchangeably with "United Nations Organisation". In that context, it was possible to envisage regional groupings and alliances for collective self-defence.

It was greatly to the credit of the post-war Labour Government that they signed the treaty of accession to NATO in April 1949. The treaty contained vital provisions, especially in articles 3 and 5. Article 3 stated:

"In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this treaty, The Parties, separately and jointly by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."

Article 5 stated:

"The Parties agreed that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all".

When there is such a superbly strong, successful and impossible-to-improve NATO treaty, why is it necessary to create a common foreign and security policy? The answer is spelt out in article B of the Amsterdam treaty, which states:

"The Union shall set itself the following objectives:

—to assert its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a common foreign and security policy including the progressive framing of a common defence policy".

That is not an intention to replace the NATO treaty or to improve the security of Europe's nation states. The aim is to assert the identity of this creature, the European Union, on the international scene. If there were ever a case of poor motivation for a dangerous act, that is it.

Sir Raymond Whitney: I am listening to my hon. Friend with great interest, not least because he and I have collaborated in the past on many ventures. On this issue our views are somewhat different. Is he not satisfied that the Amsterdam treaty clearly secures the role of the Western European Union and its relationship with the European Union rather better than was done by the Maastricht treaty, which I am sure my hon. Friend would also condemn? Surely that was, from his point of view, a step forward. The close relationship between the WEU and NATO is not challenged or threatened. My hon. Friend is concerned about the potential loss of sovereignty. He spoke about our NATO defence obligations. Does he agree that to some extent our membership of and commitment to NATO are a derogation of our sovereignty?

Dr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes two points. I warmly remember our joint ventures against the unilateralist policies of the Labour party in the 1980s. I could not have had a more staunch colleague in those battles. He was from the front rank and he held ministerial office during that important period for NATO as a whole. He asked about the pooling of sovereignty. I have another conceptual problem about that which is analogous to the one about closer political union without ever having a united political society. One cannot pool sovereignty any more than one can pool virginity. One either has it or has lost it. In the context of NATO, one must ask whether the loss of sovereignty is parallel to the loss of virtue.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend recall that, in the past, he likened the process of European integration to the process of seduction? He has observed to me and to others that the outcome in both cases seems to be the same.

Dr. Lewis: I recognise my words of wisdom from the past, but I do not wish to be distracted from my words of wisdom in the present. On whether one has pooled sovereignty or lost virtue, the issue of NATO is a case in point. Nothing in the NATO treaty is irreversible, but the European treaties are irreversible. If there were a parallel with the NATO treaty, rather than a treaty from which one cannot withdraw or whose provisions cannot be reversed if they work out badly, I would be far more relaxed about these matters.

I am getting signs that I am using up my allotted time very quickly. The WEU is a useful political prop to NATO, but it could turn into the Achilles heel of the alliance because, naturally, the WEU does not have the involvement of America. The more that is done to build up the parts and aspects of NATO that exclude America, the more is done to undermine the basic security of Europe, which depends upon American involvement.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am worried that my hon. Friend's characteristic eloquence is masking an illogical position. He says that the European treaties that the United Kingdom has signed are irreversible and that it

[Mr. Damian Green]

is impossible to pool sovereignty, which is like virginity; but this country has already lost its virginity and sovereignty, so all his arguments are a waste of time. On his own terms, his argument that we cannot pool sovereignty and that it is like virginity must be wrong.

Dr. Lewis: With respect, that is not true; we are being asked to abrogate each aspect of sovereignty and we either keep that function or lose it irretrievably. Just as there is more than one person in a country, so there is more than one opportunity to lose one's virginity irrecoverably. There is no chance to recover subsequently each one of the functions that is lost.

7 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I challenge one aspect of my hon. Friend's admirable speech? He says that the acquis communautaire is in essence an irretrievable process—an irrecoverable process. As a sovereign Parliament, could we not, if we had the support of the British people, abrogate the treaty on union, as we could any other treaty? We could make a unilateral declaration of independence at any time of our choosing.

Dr. Lewis: We could do that at present but, as I have explained, the idea of economic and monetary union is to have a situation in which we could no longer do that because we would be subject to the authority of a single Government. We would be in no position to abrogate any of the treaties that we had been drawn into over previous years.

I wish to place other Amsterdam treaty provisions on the record. It says:

"The European Council shall decide on common strategies to be implemented by the Union in areas where the Member States have important interests in common.

Common strategies shall set out their objectives, duration and the means to be made available by the Union and the Member States . . .

The Council shall ensure the unity, consistency and effectiveness of action by the Union . . .

Joint actions shall commit the Member States in the positions they adopt and in the conduct of their activity . . .

The Council shall adopt common positions. Common positions shall define the approach of the Union to a particular matter of a geographical or thematic nature. Member States shall ensure that their national policies conform to the common positions."

The treaty fulfils the aim that Jacques Santer set out in that speech in March 1995. He intended that the intergovernmental conference should do for foreign and security policy what Maastricht attempted to do for economic policy. I fear that the treaty will do that. I wholly oppose it and support the amendment.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I take great pleasure in following two such cerebral contributions by my honourable colleagues. I am not sure that I can emulate them. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) might have said that they were perhaps a touch too ideological in tone. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) touchingly spoke about his Pauline conversion and quoted the headline about Santer dictating foreign policy, which sounds like a proper offering for the Christmas season. Nevertheless, perhaps it did not have the same beneficial consequences as the original Pauline conversion, which I think was for the better: my hon. Friend's conversion was, sadly, for the worse.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who from his previous occupation is genuinely well informed on matters of currency and international currency movements. We need to put one or two factors about monetary union firmly on the record. Whether or not the Conservative party is in favour of a single currency, a single currency there will be. There will also be considerable consequences for world foreign reserves, not least because there will be considerable debt instruments. Under the convergence criteria and the terms of monetary union, it is likely that all Governments' deficits will be converted into euros and that those will be securitised.

The second factor that one needs to bear in mind about monetary union is that it will have a massive effect on world trade and the currencies held in world trade, largely because of the propensity to import by the European Union, which is greater than that of the United States of America. The consequence is that contracts are likely to be written in euros.

Let us be under no misapprehension: whether we like it or not, the euro will come and it will have a dramatic impact on world trade and on reserve currencies. In many different ways, it will also have a considerable knock-on impact on British companies, including—despite what the Institute of Directors erroneously says—medium and small companies, simply because they are part of the supply chains that will, inevitably, increasingly use the euro as part of their internal accounting, treasury and supply contracts. All the new systems will, to a greater or lesser extent—but at least to some extent—have a knock-on effect on hundreds of thousands of smaller British companies.

That will all begin from 1 January 1999. Many small UK companies will find that their price lists will have to be denominated in euros. Their computer databases will not be able to cope, because the convergence criteria are different from those established in international currency markets. The databases will in any case have to be updated. Those companies will have to learn all sorts of new and exciting things, such as triangulation, dealing in currencies that are not part of the euro, and dealing with the euro.

I am not trying to be too technical. I am pointing out merely that the euro will emerge and have a knock-on effect on British business, yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer still believes that he can sit around and wait and see what happens. Not surprisingly he has found—much to the UK's cost—that sitting around and not making a firm commitment to make sterling a part of economic and monetary union has excluded him from the conference table. That is a sad event. Once it is realised that the UK and sterling will be less influential in world markets—because of our exclusion from the controlling bloc that will influence the future of economic and monetary union and the euro—the British public will wake up to the fact that this is genuinely a loss of sovereignty. That is the opposite of the arguments that have been advanced over the past few weeks in the Chamber and outside.

It is not timely for us to enter a cerebral, intellectual and academic discussion of what the word "sovereignty" means. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest,

East showed the dangers of that when he started almost to decline the noun "virgin", as if it had different meanings. It has one meaning. One loses one's virginity—I would not understand that, of course—or one does not. The UK has lost its virginity many times and it has not been that painful, except, funnily enough, in relation to currency.

Currency is the one sector where we have not had sovereignty for a long time. It has been mismanaged and, sadly for exporters, over the past few months, it has been the opposite—it has been too strong. In those circumstances, if we are not going to be able to influence the principal currency used in 80 per cent. of our single market—namely, the European Union—we shall lose sovereignty. It is not only by joining that we lose sovereignty, but by not joining. We lose sovereignty by not having influence and not being able to ensure that the rules of the game are not only properly formed but observed. That seems to be the public's main concern as to whether the government of this country, now in the hands of the Labour party, is being properly conducted in the long-term interests of our people, not some semantic debate about whether joining might or might not mean the loss of some academic form of sovereignty. Conservatives are supposedly famous for practical politics, so we should be concerned about whether we can influence the economic well-being of our people if we are not part of something as dramatically important as economic and monetary union.

I wish to refer to another matter that has been touched on by other hon. Members. There is no doubt that the development of what is now called the European Union has been political. My political activity began in the 1960s. I became a member of the Conservative party because the party was positive about Europe. Europe was a political experiment. I never engage in debates about what it might become, and whether it might become more like the United States. Europe is a unique experiment, and there is nothing to compare it with. We are making it up as we go along. That sometimes leads to failure, and sometimes to success, but let us not fall into the trap of making comparisons. It was the attempt to experiment that attracted me to the Conservative party in the 1960s.

The European Union is a political exercise. After all, it stemmed from the most political exercise of all—the European Coal and Steel Community and the desire to pool the key industries of what had been the driving powers in the first and second world wars. Out of the Coal and Steel Community came the Common Market. At no stage has there been any attempt to disguise the political element.

In an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior), I said that when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, she made the greatest political gesture of all. She had deliberately given away—let us use those words provocatively—sovereignty, knowing that without qualified majority voting in the single market, there would be no single market. There would be no way to overcome the protectionist instincts of certain countries unless it was possible to override them in the voting structure. She understood that when she gave up national sovereignty—I would not insult her by saying that she did not understand, so I assume she did.

Perversely, it is not being said that the Amsterdam treaty is political. In fact, it is the least significant of the several treaties that the House has debated over the years. In some ways, it is beneficial because it tidies up some of the things that we did not get right at Maastricht.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend believe that there is a ratchet for European integration which, to all intents and purposes, is irresistible?

Mr. Taylor: No, I do not believe in the ratchet theory any more than I necessarily believe in the train theory, for the reason that I started to outline a moment ago. There is no preordained destination. The whole point is that mistakes will be made in the European Union. None of us who regard ourselves as Europhiles, because we are supposed to have labels these days, would say that the European Union is always right and that no mistakes have been made. I will oppose things that are wrong in the European Union, but if I oppose them, or if the Prime Minister of the day opposes them, it is important that in doing so we have influence over the other members of the Union if we are to get our way. We shall not get our way if we sound abusive from the sidelines.

7.15 pm

It is important to make a clear commitment to being part of the most exciting political and economic experiment of our generation, one which we have to ensure succeeds. There is no benefit for this nation in any political party investing all its political capital in the failure of the euro. The failure of the euro would be a disaster for the economic interests of this country and its business men and women. Of course, no political party would dream of investing all its political capital in the failure of the euro—

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Except one.

Mr. Taylor: I do not know which one that might be, but I certainly hope that it is not the one to which I am proud to belong. It is important to understand that influence is part of the power structure that some call sovereignty, and our influence over the rest of the European Union is critically based on our credible attachment to it. In that respect, there are no half measures. If there are successful ways to bring about an ever closer union or unity, we shall pursue them because they are successful. The single market is one of them.

I am often puzzled by those who are worried about this form of ever closer union in view of the way in which the markets are driving that union. Within the single market of which we were, in a sense, the founding fathers, we are breaking down barriers and forcing the market to dictate terms to national Governments. It is not possible to have an independent fiscal policy if independence means that we pay no attention to what else is happening in the same market in which we are freely trading in goods, services and capital and in which people can move.

There are implications. No Chancellor in living memory has set an exchange rate without paying close attention to what is happening in the capital markets, and in particular the market in which there is free movement of capital—again, incidentally, something of which we

[Mr. Taylor]

were the leading proponent. It was as a result of our arguments that the French eventually opened up what had been a much more protectionist market.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): My hon. Friend is saying that markets are driving these matters but, if that is so, does he not think that they are driving them in a curious way? Today, there are FF10 and almost DM3 to the pound. No one who has considered the practicalities has ever suggested that we would join the single currency at a rate higher than DM2.6 to the pound. How would we relate to the practical currency in practical terms? One of the reasons why sterling is so strong against the deutschmark and the French franc is precisely that the international markets think that we are not going to join the euro, because it will be a disaster. If it is a disaster, it is better to be out than in.

Mr. Taylor: First, I repeat that the failure of the euro would not leave us immune and would be extremely damaging to our economy. Secondly, I do not draw the same conclusion as my hon. Friend. The position of sterling at the moment is due to a variety of factors, not least those being witnessed in Japan. They are a sign of the considerable turbulence and disruption that can occur on international markets. They also point to another factor that I have not yet mentioned, which is, once the euro is out there, sterling is likely to be buffeted up and down because of the squeezing effect of the euro as a reserve currency, the dollar and whatever happens to the yen. None of those factors is very comforting to any British Chancellor or British business man.

My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir P. Tapsell) should not conclude that the markets have assumed that sterling will not join. I am not going to make a speech about economic policy, but I suspect that the Chancellor is holding back some information about the slowing down of the British economy towards the end of the cycle. We need more information from him about how he expects convergence to take place and then be sustained, and how he intends to run the economy to achieve the convergence that he says would be ideal. Those factors will have a big impact on sterling.

My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle is absolutely right that one of the factors causing us to pause and preventing us from immediately entering economic and monetary union is the way in which sterling has bounced all over the place. There will have to be some currency stability and other types of stability as we join.

The market signals given by the Chancellor could be very encouraging. I dare say that, if he stood up and said, "We now have a clear timetable for joining monetary union," British exporters would be extremely happy, because sterling would begin to converge; and it would be a downwards movement.

The treaty's overall effect is to tidy and tighten up one or two aspects of previous treaties. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary, who, in his opening speech for this debate, clearly said that there would have to be an institutional structure and a strong European Court of Justice. Such beliefs do not prevent us from saying that there should be criticism of or changes to the European Court of Justice. We can argue that case forcefully. Sadly, I do not believe that, at the Amsterdam summit, the Foreign Secretary argued the case as strongly as he should have done.

The point is that the European Court of Justice and the many other institutional parts of the European Union are vital to its success; and that is why I support them.

Amendment No. 65 merely confirms that article 1 is not part of the Bill. On that basis, and that basis alone, I shall be very happy to follow the shadow Foreign Secretary and Opposition Front Benchers into the Lobby.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): When I am required to reply to debates, I try to keep myself in order by putting page numbers on my notes. Today, I have used not only page numbers but dates. We have had a very wide-ranging debate. Not all the speeches have been directed completely to the central point of the amendments, but—because of the nature of the subject and the way in which we have to debate the issues—that has largely been inevitable.

To help the Committee, I should like first to explain in reasonably technical terms my specific views on the amendments and new clauses. Subsequently, I should like to deal with some of the issues raised in the debate. It would be impossible to deal with all the issues, although I shall try to do my best.

The Government reject amendment No. 65 because it would delete sections of article 1 that are necessary to write into British law sections of the treaty and of the first pillar, such as the flexibility provisions.

The Government also reject amendments Nos. 13 to 15 and 17 to 21, which would also prevent us from adopting the necessary sections of article 1, but for different reasons. Although they accept article 1, they would make certain exclusions. Therefore, the effect would be the same.

The Government also reject amendment No. 1, which was tabled by some of my hon. Friends. The amendment would delete the section on economic and monetary union, which was originally included in the Maastricht treaty and repeated in the Amsterdam treaty. The Government wish that provision to remain.

We reject new clause 30. I believe that it would be inappropriate to delay the Bill's enactment so that the Attorney-General could report on any extension of the powers held by the European Court of Justice.

The Government also reject new clause 37, which would require a resolution of the House before any relations could be fostered between the European Union and the Western European Union. Anyone who has been involved in any of those matters will know that that is clearly impractical.

The Government also reject new clause 38, which would require a vote of Parliament before any decisions were taken on a common foreign and security policy. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—who mentioned his involvement over the years in the Union's various forums—will know, as will the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), that dealing with such matters in the Chamber would be impractical.

The Government are committed to improving scrutiny of European matters, as we have already announced in Select Committees. The Leader of the House will soon be

making a general announcement on the matter. If I have managed to assess correctly the response of Select Committees, they were reasonably warm to our plans to improve scrutiny.

In trying to deal with the issues raised by hon. Members, it may be useful if I start with the speeches that were made today, because they are most readily in the minds of hon. Members.

I used to think of the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor)—who tried to talk out my Access to Health Records Act 1990—as an errand boy from the Government. I have changed my view, as he is clearly a man of independent thought. The House welcomes his independence. Whatever one may think of his speech, he raised some very important issues, which have also been raised by members of the business and commercial community with whom I have met. I commend him for raising the issues in the debate.

I did not agree with all the points that the hon. Member for Esher and Walton made or with his comments on the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose recent statement in the House has been well received by our European partners. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman pointed out that when a euro is established, it will have a dramatic impact as a reserve currency. Surely that must be true. He also said that companies will begin to price in euros because it will suit their businesses to do so.

Companies such as Marks and Spencer have already said that they plan to offer customers and suppliers the possibility of making transactions in euros. People from many small companies have told me that, because they are involved in the European economic chain, they would like to be able to quote in euros. They have formed their assessment on that basis.

The hon. Member for Esher and Walton was right when he said that the euro's failure would be disastrous not only for those involved but for all of Europe and for the entire European monetary system. Arguably, the consequences could extend even beyond Europe.

We heard an interesting speech by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). He began by confessing his sins, reminding me that a militant tendency is not peculiar to one party, and that confessions by those belonging to such tendencies are not peculiar to one party. Nevertheless, I tell him that it is better to be honest with oneself and to be honest about the issues. The Committee will respect him for his honesty.

I do not know what the Committee will make of the comment by the hon. Member for New Forest, East that the United Kingdom should never join a European currency. He may have some difficulty, because, in the past six months, the Leader of the Opposition has held five positions on a European currency. Originally, he said, "Never"; then it was "Maybe"; then it was "In 10 years"; then it was "Maybe"; and now he is back to "In 10 years". At least the hon. Gentleman is consistent. He says "Never", and the House looks forward to his sticking to that position.

The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) made the important point that Europe is not only about trade; it has a political dimension. I did not agree with his other remarks, but I concur with him on that point.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) said that he was concerned about the word xenophobic. He was worried, after listening to some Conservative Members' speeches, that they might risk being indicted. He has identified that risk, but Conservative Members know what to do if they want to keep themselves straight.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said that if we had to sign up to the treaty, it would be the end of the nation state. He also thought that it was deceitful of other hon. Members not to own up to that in their comments on the treaty, and that they were particularly deceitful when they said that the treaty did not matter. I respect the fact that the hon. Gentleman holds a different view from mine, but I believe that he also holds a very different view from that held by many of his hon. Friends who have spoken in the debate.

7.30 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) said that this was a modest treaty and that he expected it to take us forward from Maastricht to an era of enlargement and reform of the common agricultural policy. He believed that if we accepted the amendments, we would hold up that process. He rejected the amendments for that important reason; I reject them for that reason and others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) supported my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South; he opposed the amendments for similar reasons. He also said that he thought that the contributions from Conservative Members were unrepresentative of the views of the Committee and of the Opposition generally. That imbalance has been partially corrected today, because we have seen that there are very different views within the Conservative party on Europe.

Many Conservatives feel that the leadership of their party has got things wrong and risks alienating the British public for a long time. It is important for British democracy that that view has been put today and that the British people know that the Conservative leadership does not have the support of a significant section of the Conservative party on the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) said that she would not support the amendments because she wanted to move on to the real debate on structural funds which would follow the Luxembourg summit. She said that that was of great importance for her constituency and I can understand why she took that view.

I did not expect the same support from my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) as I had from other hon. Friends. However, I was pleased that they highlighted the importance of seeking high employment. There may be some differences on how we can best reduce unemployment and get higher employment, but my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend agreed that it was important that the treaty emphasised tackling unemployment, and they are right.

My hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend also asked, in different ways, whether it was possible to define a high level of employment. I do not think that it is possible to define that because there are as many different views on that as there are Members of Parliament. What matters is that we all recognise the importance of tackling the terrible problem of unemployment. That is a very important issue in the European context and in the context of our nation state.

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

My hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend said that by raising the issue of employment, we also raised the important issue of employability. I know that we shall discuss the matter later in Committee so I do not want to dwell on it now. However, it is crucial that as a wider European community, we consider how we best prepare ourselves to take on the jobs challenge of tomorrow. There is agreement on that in the factories and businesses of my constituency because the people who work there know that they must be employable tomorrow. If they are employable, businesses will flourish and will be able to provide them with employment.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Can the Minister explain to the Committee why the United Kingdom is enjoying increasingly lower unemployment while unemployment is rising on the continent? Is it, perhaps, something to do with the social chapter and all the burdens on business on the continent which we in these islands have resisted?

Mr. Henderson: I am tempted to say to the hon. Gentleman that seven months of a Labour Government have not done us any harm in that regard. The hon. Gentleman raises a serious question, however. One cannot measure employment over a short period; one must look at it over the long term. Over the long term, we have no better record than comparable countries in the European Union. It is arguable that for much of the period of Conservative Government, we had a far poorer record than many of our European partners. The main factor is that the business cycle is at a different point and that is the real reason why there is a difference between us and our European partners.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): If we can have inflation targets, monetary targets and deficit targets, why can we not have employment targets?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend will recognise that it is easier for the Government to be specific about inflation targets and to take measures that are tightly linked to achieving those targets than to set employment targets. Even if the Government had to set employment targets, it would not be easy to hit them, as my hon. Friend will understand. That is why it is important to get the approach right. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it clear in his statement to the House three weeks ago that the important thing is to fight inflation and to get the right monetary context, and then to take all the other measures to raise employability which will help to tackle the problem of unemployment.

Sir Peter Tapsell: The hon. Gentleman has just said what people are perpetually saying, which is that the economic cycle in Britain is different from that on the continent of Europe. The whole point of economics is to try to influence economic cycles. The reason why our economic cycle is in a beneficial phase is that we left the exchange rate mechanism in 1992. The reason why European countries are in a bad economic cycle is that they stayed within it.

Mr. Henderson: I know that the hon. Gentleman follows these matters closely. He would be dishonest with himself if he did not recognise that the reason why our unemployment levels are now lower than those in Europe is the stage of the economic cycle. One can then have an argument about the extent to which the economic cycle has been influenced beneficially or in a damaging way. The point my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made in his statement to the House three weeks ago was that we must influence European matters positively. The reason why there has been a marginal improvement in employment in recent years is that we were recovering from the devastation caused by the Conservatives' mismanagement of the economy from 1987 to 1992.

Mr. Flight: Unemployment can be caused by cyclical or structural factors. Surely it is clear that the major cause of unemployment in Europe is structural. The European economies have been in an up-cycle for the past 18 months and will probably reach the peak of that cycle during the next six months. There is still massive and rising structural unemployment which results from the social chapter and the huge cost of employing people.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman is in a fantasy world. Of course employment is influenced by cyclical and structural factors, but the hon. Gentleman is surely not telling me that the reason why all the shipyards went bust in the north of England was cyclical issues or burdens on business. It happened because of fundamental structural imbalances in the economy. We have to improve employability to take on the challenges in Europe and the rest of the world. It is important to make progress in the Amsterdam treaty so that we can take up the other issues at Luxembourg and beyond.

Mr. Ian Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli) *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: My patience will be exhausted in a little while.

Mr. Taylor: I intervene to help the Minister. The flexible labour policies that the Chancellor has been preaching recently—he has begun to understand why we put those policies into practice when we were in government—are crucial to the success of economic and monetary union. Those of us who can envisage economic and monetary union taking place understand that flexible labour markets are at the heart of it. There is no confusion. The Minister can admit that flexible markets will assist the reduction in unemployment and the increase in the number of jobs created on the continent. That will be good news for the whole European Union.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I do not totally disagree with him. However, I do not think that there is any conflict between giving working people protection—in some instances at a European level, but in more instances at a nation state level—and having a flexible labour market that allows companies to change their production methods and reskill workers so that they can take on the challenges of tomorrow. I see the hon. Gentleman smile slightly. He knows that business people tell him the same as they have told me.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend. As a non-economist, I have always been

interested in the economic cycle. The Old Testament talks about seven lean years and seven fat years. I think that someone called Krondatieff talked about 50 years. How long will the economic cycle last?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that. If I knew the answer, I would be rich—although I am probably debarred as a Minister from allowing my bank to invest on my behalf. A cycle lasts as long as it lasts. We cannot predict how long the current cycle will last. We can only prepare for decisions that we may want to take in future on European currencies. It is crucial that we debate such matters and that businesses are aware of the debate, take part in it and prepare themselves for the decision.

I want to move on, because we have had a reasonable exchange of views on economic issues. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) seems to be in the Chamber only when he is speaking—which is quite frequently. He said that the provisions on basic rights were about meddling on issues such as the minimum wage, the age of consent and strikes in essential services.

As the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe made clear, the hon. Gentleman has misread the purpose of those clauses, which is to prepare the European Union for enlargement. The provisions would be invoked only if there was a massive change in one of the new countries, or in one of the existing countries, that posed a real threat to democracy, such as the establishment of an entrenched fascist Government. That was the intention of those who were involved initially. I am sure the Conservatives who were involved in the discussions took part in that dialogue. I was involved for six weeks before Amsterdam and my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary continued that dialogue. The intention is clear. Being alarmist about the issue does no good.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Does the hon. Gentleman recall my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) saying that there was no guarantee that the provisions would be interpreted in that way? Their interpretation is to be entirely at the behest of the other member states. Would it not be better if a power were taken in the treaty to expel any member state that was in serious and fundamental breach of human rights rather than attempting to hold that state to its obligations while depriving it of rights?

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is not aware of the debate that has taken place with our partners. We are talking about how to deal with a critical situation, not an everyday situation. It is a political decision which would have to be taken by a 15 minus one majority. Every country other than the country involved would have to agree. The power would not be used in a trifling way, to take revenge on an existing member because one country or a group of countries disagreed with it. If that happened, the future of the European Union would be in great jeopardy. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] No, it is not. The member states of the European Union have a deep commitment to making changes when necessary, agreeing common positions when it is sensible and retaining our distinctiveness when that is better.

7.45 pm

I am sorry to be taking so long, but I want to reply thoroughly to the debate. We should have a full interchange of views so that hon. Members know all the arguments when we come to vote. I shall have to take some time to reply because there have been so many contributions.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that there were two differences between his position and mine on the treaty. He disagrees with the social chapter. We have already had an exchange on those arguments. I do not believe that the social chapter threatens the economic integrity of the European Union or that the business community here or elsewhere believes that. The social partners recognise that it is an essential part of the development of the Union, and one with which they can cope. It is not the case that every idea put up for inclusion in the social chapter will be included. There is a firm understanding of that among the majority of the partners I have talked to. I understand the right hon. and learned Gentleman's concerns, but he will find, as business will find, that it will not damage his other objectives.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also talked about enlargement. He wanted further progress on that in the treaty. So did I. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary pushed hard on the final evening of negotiations for progress on institutional reform. Our inability to reach an agreement was not due to a lack of motivation or an unwillingness on our part to consider other views. The problem was the intransigence of other partners. We shall continue to press for progress. I agree that reform of the institutional arrangements is essential before enlargement. The treaty says that that will be the case. I hope that when he has more time to reflect, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will follow his original instinct to be a little bit in favour of a modest treaty. I hope that he will give that further consideration before Third Reading.

I want to link the comments of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe with the opening comments of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe about article F.1 on basic rights. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that he had no worries about establishing the basic right that if a country joins the European Union, it must meet certain conditions, which must be broadly reflective of what is only wise and consistent with a democracy. That is different from the position adopted by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe.

On the first day of the debate, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe said that he had some concerns about the flexibility of articles K.12 and K.15 and that he had sympathy for the objective. I understand that; I have read his speeches. We both agree that there is a need for flexibility, but that when that flexibility is applied, it should be applied by unanimity. I think that there is a misunderstanding on the matter.

In effect, there is an unanimity provision in the treaty: it is called the emergency brake. If nine or 10 countries decide that they want to act together to do something that the rest of the Union does not want to do, they should have flexibility to do so. However, if one or more than one country outside those nine or 10 countries says that it is in their national interest that such a thing does not

[Mr. Henderson]

happen for a particular reason, they can invoke the emergency brake, and the decision would then need to be made by unanimity in the Council. What the right hon. and learned Gentleman is looking for is in the treaty. I hope that he will recognise that. That might make it slightly easier for him to vote with the Government.

Mr. Howard: I do not want to raise false expectations on the Minister's behalf. If that is indeed the explanation—it may be the explanation on a proper reading of the relevant portions of the treaty—why on earth does the treaty not make it clear that the article is based on unanimity? Why on earth does it use such circuitous language? Why does it use the language of qualified majority voting instead of saying straight out that such matters will be decided on the basis of unanimity?

Mr. Henderson: I am very glad that I gave way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I like to give those who wish to confess an opportunity to do so. That is not the first confession of a change of position in Committee. I genuinely welcome the fact that there has been a debate in Committee and that the Opposition have recognised that the Government have achieved what the Opposition said that they would have wanted to achieve had they taken part in the negotiations.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: I shall not incessantly give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I am tempted on this occasion.

Mr. Cash: Does the Minister accept that this new-fangled concept of flexibility has serious dangers not least because, as he suggested, it creates a legal framework in which there is a momentum towards the creation of functions for certain member states? There is a continuous momentum towards the kind of integration that, apparently, the Government on the whole do not want. Is not there a contradiction in their position in allowing, through the adoption of flexibility, a momentum towards integration, which they say they would rather not have?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman is not aware that there was a discussion at the intergovernmental conference about whether flexibility is necessary in principle. The answer to that question was, by and large, yes, there may be circumstances in which different groups of countries want to do things at a different speed. The point was made that we could not have continual flexibility or it would destroy the single market, and everybody would want to do what they thought was in their interest and not combine over a common cause when it was not in their interest. There had to be some way of meeting the two objectives.

One of the ways, of which the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) may be aware, was to exclude all sorts of circumstances in which flexibility would not be possible. On reflection, and in the debate at the IGC—it was essentially agreed before the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary endorsed it on the final day—it was agreed that there should be a facility for an emergency brake. None of the EU partners thought that it would be applied on a regular basis. It was included because it was thought that it might be necessary in some circumstances and the possibility should not be excluded.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): On that point—

Mr. Henderson: I think that I have exhausted that point. The Opposition have put a fair argument and the Government have given a fair response.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe mentioned policing and said that article K.2 empowers Europol to join national policing operations in a support capacity. Yes, it does, but it does only that. There are very strict limits on how that should take place.

British police forces are, and will remain, responsible for British policing in Britain. That is not in any doubt. Any Europol personnel would be involved on the invitation of the British police and have no powers of arrest. The operational rules for Europol, which would have to be agreed in future, would be agreed only by unanimity. That is in the treaty. Therefore, if there were any suggestion that any operational rule would put Europol officers in a position—in Britain or anywhere else in the EU—that we felt was not proper or right, we would be able to block it because unanimous agreement would be required. I hope that I have been able to reassure the right hon. and learned Gentleman on that point.

I apologise to hon. Members who have just joined the Committee. There has been a very long two-day debate and there are many issues to cover.

The next issue is foreign policy. The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) made a useful contribution—although not in support of the Government. Although he was trying his best to support his Front-Bench team, he said that it was firmly established in the treaty that NATO was the basis of British defence for the future. We strove hard to achieve that in negotiations in Amsterdam and I am pleased that he recognised it.

The hon. Member also said that he supported the enlargement process. Again, I welcome his commitment. I hope that, when he weighs up the commitment that we achieved on NATO and our commitment to move forward from Maastricht in the EU to a post-Maastricht enlargement agenda, he will see the need to endorse the Amsterdam treaty as a way of moving from one position to the other. If we fail to endorse the Amsterdam treaty, there will be such disruption in the EU Councils that we will not be able to take on board enlargement in a way necessary to make progress. I know that that would concern the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The point that I made was that the NATO aspect sits alongside the progressive framing of a European defence identity. I should like the Minister to address that issue.

Mr. Henderson: The point is clear. When it comes to defence, it is the responsibility of NATO. There is a need to co-ordinate—for the Western European Union to talk to the European Council about important issues such as foreign policy issues that were agreed under Maastricht's second pillar by the previous Government. There is a need to liaise and work together, but ultimately, if it comes to

the defence of this nation, NATO will be the bedrock. That is firmly established in the treaty, but was a little ambiguous in the Maastricht treaty. We recognise that as one of the most important parts of the deal that we struck, although it is also part of a deal that other countries think is important.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall move on to the points raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe about foreign policy.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked whether there was a vision. The answer is yes, there is a vision. The vision is that we should be more co-operative with our European partners. After agreeing that foreign policy was a right area for the EU to be involved in under Maastricht, it is important that there is maximum co-operation, so that all the different organs know in which direction they are moving on any issue. Ultimately, there is a bedrock position on NATO.

How will the system work? It will require unanimity. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe and others raised a question. Under the treaty, a strategy is differentiated from an action. A strategy must be agreed by unanimity, but an action in meeting a strategy can be agreed by qualified majority. The question was: if there was any possibility of force being involved, could it be agreed as an action to meet a strategy under QMV?

I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had serious worries about that issue, but I reassure him that such matters cannot be agreed by qualified majority voting. Anything that involves force—any defence issue—would have to be agreed by unanimity. If that decision were to be part of a strategy that involved a foreign policy initiative and defence considerations, the strategy would have to be agreed by unanimity. If force were not involved and a difference of view arose between one European nation and the other partners, an emergency brake could be applied, in a similar way to the one in the flexibility clause, which would put a stop to the proceedings and require unanimity. I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's worries on that point have been met.

8 pm

I shall move on to the question of justice, on which several issues were raised. The first was raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe and several of his colleagues. They asked why the European Court of Justice was not reformed by the Amsterdam treaty. The right hon. and learned Gentleman implied that a Conservative Government, had they been in power at the time of the Amsterdam talks, would have achieved reform, but I do not believe that that is the case.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that support for reform existed in ECOFIN. He may be right, although I have my doubts. However, even if he were right, I assure the Committee that there was no question of our European partners agreeing to the proposals made by the previous Government to limit the retrospective effects of the court's jurisdiction. If the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe had been a member of the Government in June, he would not have been able to achieve reform, even if he had told his hon. Friends that it was his main aim.

Several of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members raised the question of extensions to the powers of the European Court of Justice. A strong case for the ECJ has been made in the debate, because if any doubt arises about what is intended by any agreement for Community action, we need a body that intervenes to decide. I am glad that the laudable principle behind the ECJ has been recognised on both sides of the Committee. The question then arises about the extent of the authority of the European Court of Justice, but I can reassure hon. Members that the extensions are third pillar extensions.

I wish to give specific answers to the points raised in the debate about the extensions. The first extension is that the ECJ can be asked to give a preliminary ruling on the validity and interpretation of framework decisions and other Council decisions. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe will know from his time at the Home Office that such issues arose in the discussions that he had with me. I know that he has a deep interest in them. He will know that, under the Maastricht treaty, it was possible to provide in conventions in the third pillar that the ECJ could intervene to settle any arguments about the workings of the convention. Indeed, the previous Government, on at least two occasions of which I am aware, signed conventions containing specific provisions allowing the ECJ to intervene. They signed the conventions on the application of customs information systems and on the protection of the financial interests of the Community. They were right to sign those conventions, because it was important that the ECJ should be able to intervene if any argument arose.

This Government, like the previous Government, do not want to see massive extensions in the powers of the ECJ in the third pillar. That is why, in the Amsterdam treaty, we agreed provisions that made a modest increase in those powers, which now apply to any framework decision under the Amsterdam treaty. If a member nation—for example, the United Kingdom—felt that it did not want the ECJ to intervene in an argument, it could block the framework decision because that would be decided by unanimity. Therefore, we would have to be sure when we signed a framework decision that we were prepared, if necessary, to have any argument adjudicated by the ECJ.

The second area of extension of the ECJ's powers is its ability to review an action brought by the Commission or a member state on whether the Council had acted beyond its powers. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe will be aware that it is extremely unlikely that that power would be invoked, because a member state would not be likely to give the Council the authority in the first place and then challenge it through the ECJ at a later stage. It might happen on an interpretation of the wording, but not on a point of principle. There is, therefore, no great extension of power in that area.

The third area of extension of the ECJ's power is its ability to rule on any dispute between member states. The previous Government accepted a limited form of that power under the Maastricht treaty, and it has now been widened.

[Mr. Henderson]

The fourth area of extension is the ability to rule on whether a Council decision in the areas that I have previously outlined—preliminary rulings, actions brought by the Commission and disputes between member states—is lawful. The ECJ may intervene on such points, but it is unlikely that that power will be used very often.

The fifth area of modest extension is when a group of member states pursue a flexible arrangement in the third pillar. The role of the ECJ would not be to mediate on the substance of any agreement, but it could mediate on whether the procedure had been followed in reaching the appropriate decision on flexibility.

I put it to the Committee that the Amsterdam treaty will mean only a limited extension of the powers of the ECJ. That extension is essential, and the Government welcomed it in concluding the treaty.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: No, I will not give way now. There is also no question of the ECJ's having any role in the maintenance of law and order in this country or our internal security.

I have given the Committee a fair opportunity to debate the issues. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear a lot of hungry voices and I therefore wish to conclude my remarks. I hope that when the Committee votes on the amendments, it will reject them.

Mr. Howard: I shall attempt to be brief. We have had a good and wide-ranging debate. It is true, and I acknowledge it, that not every speech from my hon. Friends has been identical with the speech before or after. Nor would I wish that to happen, because the Conservative party does not encourage the kind of clone-like attitude that we see from the Labour party.

Notwithstanding the predilection of the Labour party for clones, it obviously escaped the Minister's mind that almost 50 per cent. of speeches by Labour Back Benchers were seriously critical of the Government. The speeches by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) went far beyond the one point to which the Minister referred—their questioning of a lack of a target for high employment. Their devastating speeches indicted the Government's whole strategy. It was a pity that the Minister did not acknowledge that.

I thank the Minister for the extent to which he endeavoured to answer the questions that we raised. He took much trouble over that and I am grateful, but he did not entirely succeed. For example—I do not wish to detain the Committee, but I wish to dwell on this example so that we may have a proper answer in the future—I put an important series of questions to him on the way in which qualified majority voting would work in the implementation of a common foreign and security policy. The Minister answered my question by talking about brakes; the way in which the unanimity rules could be used in certain circumstances to stop countries taking certain action.

The question that I put to the Minister was entirely different. What happens if a common decision on strategy has been taken to take certain action, for example, against Iraq? What happens if a qualified majority decision is then taken that that action should stop short of the use of force? What happens if this country, for example, wishes to use force? In those circumstances, will this country be debarred from using force, according to the provisions of the treaty, by the qualified majority voting provisions? That is very important, and we have not had an answer. I hope that we shall have an answer; if not tonight, then at some future stage.

It has been clear from the debate that there are many different reasons for opposing article 1 and for voting for amendment No. 65. A number of my right hon. and hon. Friends have identified those reasons. There is the fact that the treaty brings in the social chapter. There is also the absence from the treaty of proper provisions for securing enlargement of the EU, to which the Opposition attach great priority.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) referred to the total failure of the Government to press the argument for the reform of the European Court of Justice. It is not a sufficient reason for failing to press the argument that there was not at first blush a tremendous amount of support from the other member states. In previous negotiations, we have secured our position by pressing home our case and by persuading our partners of its merits. That is what the Government manifestly failed to do at Amsterdam.

For all the reasons that I identified last week, and which my right hon. and hon. Friends have identified today, I urge the Committee to vote for amendment No. 65 and to reject article 1 of the treaty.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 133, Noes 328.

Division No. 103] **[8.11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert

King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*

Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Rowlands: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 13, after 'Articles', insert

'1, paragraph 9 (Cm. 3780, page 10)'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 8, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'(except Article 2 paragraph 57)'.

Mr. Rowlands: The amendment was designed to offer the Committee the opportunity to discuss the new article F.1, but it has been made semi-redundant by the contributions to the previous debate, so I hope to be brief.

The shadow Foreign Secretary took up at least two columns of *Hansard* on the subject of article F.1 when he opened the debate on amendment No. 65. He made a bit of a meal of the issue, and over-egged the pudding. I would not say that he was put in his place, but the position was, quite rightly, well qualified by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who spoke from the Back Benches.

The shadow Foreign Secretary argued that the new article was vaguely defined and that it would be dealt with not by a judicial body but by politicians. I detected a somewhat derisory view of the idea that politicians should be involved. I think that he said that individual countries would be at the mercy of others. He argued that there was no need for such a provision, because if a country in the European Union fell into dictatorship, started persecuting its citizens, and confiscated private property or suspended the due process of law, there was one simple solution: expulsion.

I do not think that my hon. Friend the Minister had the full opportunity, despite his extensive reply to the previous debate, to remind us what procedures and effort would be required to expel a state under the present provisions of the treaty, given that expulsion was the shadow Foreign Secretary's only solution. How difficult would it be to deal with a state that had offended?

When I tabled the amendment, I wanted to underline my support for the principle of the provision in the treaty. Despite some differences of nuance, I think that we all agree that it is essential that European Union membership—to become and to remain a member—should require good, fundamental democratic credentials. As many hon. Members said in the previous debate, it is almost impossible to envisage how one could sit on a Council of Ministers if one of the company was a colonel who had seized power in a coup.

That idea is not all that fanciful. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe reminded us of the fact that when I entered the House in 1966 Greece was governed by one of the most brutal abusers of human rights that western Europe has known for a very long time. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman also pointed out, the Iberian peninsula had been in a similar position. Therefore one need not go back into the mists of time to recall that, even within the existing membership of the European Union, in my parliamentary and political lifetime, we have had dictatorships and authoritarian Governments that would now be intolerable in the European Union.

Therefore it is important to assert that democracy is a fundamental obligation and to say that, if a member state persistently abuses fundamental human rights, it should be subject to discipline. However, I found it difficult to appreciate the argument by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) that a country could go from nothing to expulsion without any gradation of action that could be taken by other member states to tackle the problem of persistent infringement of human rights.

We all support and endorse the argument made by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe that, as a precondition for membership, applicants must root their institutions in principles of democracy and human rights. It will be a matter of considerable scrutiny by the Commission and by the present Union that any applicant must fulfil those conditions and achieve those democratic institutions in a way that has a sense of permanence and does not look fragile or capable of being abused.

8.30 pm

I believe that we all agree with that, so one hopes that the situation envisaged in the article will not arise. If, as observations made by Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members on both sides of the Committee suggest, the provisions turned up in the treaty in anticipation of the problems that might possibly occur if applicant states enter the European Union but cannot sustain democratic institutions, obviously the key must be to ensure that the application process for membership ensures that the institutions that create and form that state are generally democratic.

I should be grateful if the Minister would reveal more about the origins of the article and tell us how and why it came into existence when it did. Was it anticipating some of the problems that may occur in the case of new applicants?

I wondered where I might get a feel for the issues that the article might wish to address. I believe that it is useful to bring to the Committee's attention the Agenda 2000 document and the Commission's assessment, under the Copenhagen criteria, of the political situation of the applicant countries. The document gives a flavour of some of the issues and arguments that may well arise, even after individual states have successfully joined the European Union, and of how, presumably, F.1 might address them.

I shall quote from two of the country reports of the Agenda 2000 Commission opinions. The first relates to an applicant country that I believe had expectations of being in the first group—Slovakia. The report obviously damaged those expectations. The following passage gives us an idea of the problems that might arise if a member state lapsed into certain behaviour. On the subject of applying the Copenhagen political criteria to Slovakia, the Commission said:

"The operation of Slovakia's institutions is characterised by the fact that the government does not sufficiently respect the powers devolved by the constitution to other bodies and that it too often disregards the rights of the opposition. The constant tension between the government and the President of the Republic is one example of this. Similarly, the way in which the government recently ignored the decisions of the Constitutional Court and the Central Referendum Commission on the occasion of the vote on 23/24 May 1997 directly threatened the stability of the institutions."

That is a powerful assessment of the fragility of the institutional position in an applicant state—Slovakia.

As a result of that Commission opinion, it now appears that Slovakia would not achieve membership without tackling, and satisfying the present European Union that it had tackled, those fundamental problems. In fact, as the Commission report says,

"Despite recommendations made by the European Union in a number of demarches and declarations, there has been no noticeable improvement."

Would the provisions of article F.1 apply if a similar situation arose in a state such as Slovakia after it had joined the European Union? Are those the areas of constitutional and democratic concern that were considered when the article was drafted? If a member state in a sense persistently abused its own constitution in key respects relating to human rights, would that allow the European Union to act as the article suggests?

I do not want to take too long because these arguments have been discussed, but I want to prise out of my hon. Friend the Minister some illustrations of the persistent breaches of rights that would trigger the processes described in the new article.

The other Commission opinion that raises a similar set of arguments is that on the political institutional position of Bulgaria. The Commission says that democratic institutions in Bulgaria

"need to be reinforced by fuller respect in practice for the rule of law, at all levels of public administration".

It says:

"the operation of the judicial system"

needs to be improved

"to protect individual liberties in the face of too frequent abuses by the police and the secret services."

That is another opinion in the context of an applicant state and the Commission giving its view. If such behaviour had occurred in a member state in the enlarged Union, would it be the type of behaviour that the article was meant or designed to start to bite on?

Those are the questions that have been left in my mind. I have listened in the Committee to most of our previous debates. I want to know more about the way in which Ministers envisage the operation of the provision.

If the article relates to the types of problems that have been identified in the Commission opinions on applicant states, I say to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe that I believe that there is a case for a political judgment, not a judicial one. These are decisions about politics and democracy. I am not sure that judges are necessarily the best guides in that area. There is a case for saying that, in assessing whether certain behaviour is acceptable, the collective view of democratically elected politicians who represent public opinion is as good as that of a judge.

I have thought about the subject, because obviously one wants very clear criteria and they do not exist. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe that there is a vagueness in the wording, but I do think that, in many cases, those will be matters of considerable political judgment as opposed to judicial interpretation. Therefore the decision to place the matter in the hands of the European Council, to allow the heads of state of every other member of the European Union to make these difficult assessments, probably achieves a balance in respect of such problems and issues. So I do not share the queasiness about the provisions of the article that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe feels.

I certainly thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman over-egged his case when talking about how one country can be left at the mercy of a random choice by other members of the Union. He should remember that a most elaborate procedure is involved. The decision must be unanimous; one third of the member states have to make an approach; the decision must be endorsed by two thirds of the European Parliament. So built into the article is a fantastic number of hurdles that must be crossed before any state charged with persistent breaches of human rights can be suspended.

Mr. Cash: Would the hon. Gentleman be good enough to bear in mind the fact that although the Union is founded on principles of liberty, democracy and the rule of law, if we dig a little deeper into the behaviour of current member states of the EU we find that "fundamental freedoms" and the rule of law do not apply with equal

[Mr. Cash]

validity to all member states? I am not even thinking of Greece at this point. It is not xenophobic to claim that there is a serious problem in the EU already.

Mr. Rowlands: I defer to the hon. Gentleman's more detailed knowledge of the political performance of members of the current Union. I cannot think of any immediate examples of member states seriously abusing human rights. If the hon. Gentleman can, perhaps he will list them in his speech. As I understand it, the safeguards will apply to current members as well. I do find it difficult to believe that the sort of breaches envisaged in this article are being committed by any of the present 15 member states—but if they are, we should be aware of them and should perhaps invoke a procedure to deal with them. There might be some virtue in that.

I certainly believe that the Union should uphold and stand up for these rights, and if there are any breaches of the kind the hon. Gentleman has in mind a power should be created to bring offending member states to book.

Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) rather wickedly suggested to me in conversation that some of the European Union's current institutions might not be up to the mark in certain respects. Certainly, no one can sack the Council of Ministers. One could play around with these arguments endlessly, but I for one do not share the qualms expressed by Conservative Members about the article. I just wanted to prise out of the Minister a better understanding of the context that gave rise to the article, and of the situations that might trigger its use.

When I entered the House in 1966, three of the current member states in the Union were then autocratically governed. That is why I believe it important to buttress the idea that the chief obligation on a joining state should be to uphold these fundamental rights—hence my support for the new article.

8.45 pm

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) has said, I deployed my arguments on this matter fairly fully last Thursday and I do not intend to go over the same ground again. I would like, however, briefly to respond to the points that the hon. Gentleman has just made.

We start from the common position of wanting to do all we can to safeguard and advance basic human rights. The hon. Gentleman says that the treaty may not contain procedures at the moment that would enable a country seriously and persistently breaching fundamental human rights to be expelled, which would be my preferred remedy if it ever came to it. My answer to that is to put such procedures in the treaty. Just as the Government have put procedures into the treaty of Amsterdam to permit this much more unsatisfactory course to be adopted—depriving a member state of its rights but continuing to subject it to its obligations—so it would have been possible at Amsterdam to deal with the problem in the way I think preferable: providing procedures for expulsion.

It is not right to say, either, that on this alternative approach there would be nothing between the first step and expulsion. It would be perfectly possible for the other member states to give measured warnings to the offending state and to make it clear that unless it mended its ways expulsion would follow. So there is no question of expulsion coming out of the blue.

I suggested last Thursday that it was difficult to identify any precedent for the procedures that have been put in to the treaty of Amsterdam. The Minister has not volunteered any precedent. I do think it extraordinary to say of a member state, however badly it has behaved, that it will continue to be fully bound by all the obligations of the treaty but deprived of all its rights under it.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) conceded in his speech earlier today, the procedure could be used and abused to take away the voting rights of a recalcitrant state. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney calls that a fanciful scenario. Perhaps so, but if this Committee is to carry out its responsibilities in relation to the scrutiny of a treaty, it is incumbent on us to identify scenarios that may not be very likely but which could be turned to the disadvantage of this country. It is also our duty to point out the dangers.

It is, after all, not entirely unprecedented for provisions in European treaties to which we have signed up and agreed to be used in a way that was never predicted at the time. One obvious example would be the way qualified majority voting procedures in respect of health and safety were used to introduce a 48-hour maximum working week. No one in the previous Government who agreed to QMV for health and safety measures at the time of the Single European Act ever contemplated their use to introduce a maximum length of working week. Indeed, none of my hon. Friends during the debates on that treaty made this point, to my knowledge. I have no doubt that had they made it that, too, would have been dismissed as fanciful or extremely unlikely.

The point is that we have a duty to examine the provisions of treaties such as this and to make sure that there is no scope for abuse or for their use in a way that may never have been intended or which might be to the disadvantage of our country. That is the basis on which I offered my observations on Thursday, and I remain unconvinced by the doubts expressed by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

Sir Raymond Whitney: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) is right, and we would all agree that the Committee has a duty to examine legislation such as this, especially legislation of an international nature, to make sure that there are no traps or hidden dangers or faint possibilities that might endanger our national interest. However, there is a danger of that awareness and alertness turning into paranoia. We can take matters so far that they verge on the absurd.

I hope that there is no dissension on either side of the Chamber from the view that article F.1 of the treaty of Amsterdam is well intentioned and necessary. It is directed not only at the potential new members of the European Union, but possibly at existing members. It started as an initiative at the Copenhagen summit, where all attention was focused on the enlargement of the European Union, to which my party has traditionally attached a good deal of weight.

We want to ensure, of course, that the character of the European Union does not fundamentally change. That is what the article is surely designed to achieve. As the

hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) pointed out, before any candidate member is accepted, there is a test to be passed. We must recognise the possibility that a country can be in a state of grace and pass the test one year, but—especially in the case of democracies that are not deeply rooted—a few years later the standards achieved to pass the test may no longer be met. Therefore criteria are required.

By their very nature, such criteria cannot be spelled out in every last detail. I believe that the drafting of the treaty is adequate. I shall not read the treaty out; the hon. Gentleman mentioned it and we went over this ground in the earlier debate. It is clear enough. We know what we mean when we say that human rights are persistently and seriously breached. It is chopping logic to suggest that we do not understand. Even if one nation did not know, the other 14 or 15 would surely get it right.

Mr. Letwin: All of us throughout the Chamber know what is meant, and we all agree that it is necessary to do something about a member state in such circumstances. Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that sometimes, regrettably, there has been a tendency for the European Court to apply interpretations of clauses in treaties that go far beyond the ordinary meaning of those terms, with a view to establishing certain patterns of integration? Does he agree that that could give rise to the problems to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) alluded?

Sir Raymond Whitney: No, I do not agree. I suggest that my hon. Friend read article F.1 of the treaty. He will see that, before the matter ever came near the court, it would have to be approved by unanimity minus one—that one being the state in the dock. It is for the Council of Ministers to make the judgment and activate the other criteria—one third of the Council to bring the charge and two thirds of the European Parliament to go along with the conviction, so to speak. At a subsequent stage, if the accused state wanted to apply to the European Court of Justice, it would have a right to do so.

My hon. Friend may fear what might happen to Britain, but that is another safeguard. There are so many hurdles in the procedure that we should rest assured. I am not saying, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made the point that one cannot say definitively, that the world will not go mad tomorrow, but compared with the prospect of no such provision being included in the Amsterdam treaty, and compared with the risk of the provision being absurdly abused, common sense would judge that we need the provision.

Earlier in the debate, some pretty rum options were offered to the Committee. We were told that the provision might be applied to a Communitywide minimum wage. Our minimum wage would allegedly be set at too low a level, and that might be interpreted—or misinterpreted—as a serious and persistent breach of human rights. Misguided as the concept of a minimum wage might be, the possibility that Greece would be in a position to vote with the rest of the Community and condemn us does not bear contemplating.

We were told about the possibility that if we had—or perhaps if we did not have—abortion on demand, that would be seen as further evidence that we were in serious and persistent breach of human rights. Another such possibility might arise if we changed—or failed to change—the age of homosexual consent from 18 to 16. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who, happily, is not in his place, even mentioned the risk of paedophilia. How crazy can we get?

It is fun to have an after-dinner debate, but this is a serious issue. We want to ensure that any criticisms of the Amsterdam treaty—the Opposition do indeed have some criticisms—are legitimate and well founded.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe wants the treaty to contain a mechanism for expulsion. There might be a case for that, or perhaps such a mechanism exists already. I look forward to the Minister of State explaining the exact legal position, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney invited him to do.

Perhaps there could be a sanction of total expulsion, but the suspension option strikes me as sensible. This situation is posited: a state passes the entrance exam; it would be up to snuff to be allowed in. A few years later, things go wrong—a military coup, or whatever. Surely the sensible approach would be for the other member states—14, 21 or however many there are—to say to the offending state, "You are suspended. All the rest of us abhor what you are doing, and you are suspended until you return to the paths of righteousness." That would be the common-sense approach.

I hope that we will not pursue any amendment that would expunge article F.1, which is a perfectly sensible and necessary element in the Amsterdam treaty.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) and I have been in the House of Commons for a very long time. That being so, it is only fair to tell my younger hon. Friends that, although we have great respect for my hon. Friend's sincerity, kindness, aptitude and integrity—I am sure that he is kind to animals as well—he has been wildly optimistic about all the previous treaties that we have signed. There are those of us who have said that it would all end up in a horrible mess, and we have been proved right.

My hon. Friend has said that he is rather worried about the attitudes of some of those who occupy the Opposition Front Bench, right hon. and hon. Friends whom I regard as having great integrity and wisdom. At the same time, there is a great danger of over-optimism. We hear it said that things will work out in the interests of the people and it is to be hoped that all will go well. I hope that, on reflection, my hon. Friend—and certainly newly elected hon. Friends—will bear in mind what has happened.

So many glorious opportunities have been offered to us—for example, signing the treaty of Rome, enacting and implementing the single Act and signing the Maastricht treaty. I am certain that they have all worked out terribly badly for the people of Europe. I am thinking not of big business but of the people and how they have suffered. I am thinking also about the abuse of public money, of which some of my hon. Friends and I warned.

9 pm

My hon. Friend said that we did not need to worry about that, but think of all the money that we are spending on, for example, destroying food. I wonder how my

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

hon. Friend can sleep at night while thinking about poverty in the world and misery in the United Kingdom against the background of the vast sums that are spent on destroying food as a result of the absurd policies that he and others are supporting.

Let us be extremely careful about agreeing to new and splendid sentences being written into treaties. Unfortunately, treaties are ratified and they look lovely—they state, in effect, that we are all in favour of nice things happening—only for the wretched European Court, or individuals, including some of the Euro-enthusiasts, to come along and to interpret legislation in a ridiculous way that causes us to wonder why we agreed to it in the first place.

I am sure that the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who has this moment entered the Chamber, will remember how we were passing rules to the effect that dumping would be handled by the European Union. We thought that that was all right because it was necessary only to prove conclusively that someone was selling something cheaper abroad than at home and that nasty commercial activity was taking place. We used to have a splendid organisation in this country that enabled us to take action if someone was dumping. There was an appeal process and it was necessary to provide evidence. What happens now? The Commission decides whether dumping has taken place. It comes to a conclusion and there is no appeal. No proof is required. Let us be extremely careful about approval, because things do not always work out as we would wish or think.

We must bear in mind the interests of big business. There are some who wonder why it is so enthusiastic about extending the powers of the European Union. It seems to me, however, that the reason is clear. Big business much prefers to deal with organisations such as the Commission and other non-democratic organisations than with democratic Governments.

Philips, for example, can obtain a far better deal for itself by involving itself with the Commission rather than trying to deal with a democratic process. That being so, I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will be extremely careful. I hope also that they will support the amendment and not agree to the insertion of the ridiculous article F.1. Surely we should not vote in the House of Commons for something that is completely nonsensical. Article F.1 states that the EU is a democratic organisation. Younger Members—apart from the old gentlemen, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe and me—should think carefully. If they do, they will find that the EU stands basically for the destruction of democracy. All the things that we fought to preserve in a democratic process will be undermined by the EU.

Democracy means that the people's voice should count. It means that people should be able to express opinions and that others should listen to them. It is sad that in the context of the EU people's views do not matter and public opinion is largely irrelevant.

I shall give some examples from my own experience. For some time, I have been a member—there was only a brief interruption—of the Conservative party. The party has an annual conference where many of its supporters come together. The Conservative conference this year was held in Blackpool. Apart from the wisdom that we heard from those who occupy the Opposition Front Bench in this place, delegates were handing out badges. That is one of the things that we do in the Conservative party. We tend to demonstrate our affiliation to something by wearing badges. One of the badges read, "Save Duty Free in 1999". That is something that some members of the Conservative party support.

In fact, democracy can do nothing about saving duty-free goods. Even if every Member in the House of Commons, including the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, said, "We want to keep duty free in 1999," nothing could be done, unless there was a unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers to allow Britain to preserve the duty-free system.

I fear that the Conservatives, most unusually for them, were misleading themselves by handing out badges about preserving the duty-free system. Another wee badge was handed out about saving Britain's fish. I should love to save our fish, and I think that most Members of this place—especially young Members—would support me. Unfortunately, given the wording of article F.1, there is nothing that we can do to that end. If the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and all Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members were to say, "We shall save Britain's fish," nothing would happen. Decisions are made by a majority vote of the Council of Ministers. Why put in the words supporting democracy? It is not democracy at all. The democratic process can do nothing whatever.

Mr. Martin, you are, as we know, one of the most conscientious Members of Parliament that we have, and you have a surgery just like everyone else. People come to our surgeries to complain. What do they complain to me about? A big deputation of 12 people, including a clergyman who brought a dog to show that he was fond of animals, came to see me. They asked me to vote to stop the export of live cattle. I had to tell them, "I am terribly sorry, but we cannot do anything about it," to which they replied, "Well, the Liberal Democrats support us." I said, "That does not really show anything. It is a sad fact that, even if you had a Liberal Democrat Government, which would bring many advantages, there is nothing you could do about the export of live cattle."

People complain to me about VAT, saying, "Why should we pay VAT on things that are wrong? Will you vote against it?" I have to say no. To that, some people might say, "Well that shows that you MPs are a useless crowd and you should have done something about it." But there is nowhere else to go.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the policies about which he is complaining were introduced as a result of the Single European Act, which was introduced by Baroness Thatcher and the Government whom he supported? Therefore, he should criticise himself rather than the European Union.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Younger Members who are conscientious and good attenders sometimes do not check their facts. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I voted against every single clause of the Single European Act. He is trying to make party political points when we are talking about democracy, and that is what is wrong with

these amendments. Instead of people talking about democracy, freedom and liberty, they try to make silly party political points. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has come to the debate, because quite a few newer Members do not bother, but please check up. Some of us have been warning and voting against this legislation time after time.

I also remind the hon. Gentleman that his Government are introducing this legislation. All Governments do this for the best of reasons. I knew Baroness Thatcher very well. She is a very fine woman who did great work, but she, like all Prime Ministers, started off saying, "Europe is in a mess. It is not going well. I am going to sit around the table and try to sort them out." She brought out what she thought was a very good treaty to try to improve free trade. In fact, it did not. The Prime Minister before her said that he was going to do the same.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going rather wide of the amendment. I note the examples that he has given. One or two examples are fine, but when he goes on at great length to give the Committee examples, he is going wide of the amendments before us.

Sir Teddy Taylor: You are absolutely right, Mr. Martin. I am sorry that I was distracted. This is what happens. We try to make a conclusive case, younger Members sometimes ask questions, which I am sure are well intentioned, and we get diverted.

The simple point that I should like to make is: how on earth can Members vote for a clause that is utter and complete nonsense? Can anyone say with any sincerity that things are decided in the European Union on the basis of democracy? Democracy means the rights of the people. What can the people do? Say, for example, Mr. Martin, your constituents said, "I am upset that £1.2 billion is spent on subsidising the growing of high-tar tobacco. I want to do something about it." I am sure that, with the splendid Member of Parliament that they have, they would ask, "What can you do about it?" The answer is absolutely nothing. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members might laugh, but I assure them that some people feel very sincerely about the issue of tobacco. They think that it is shocking to waste money on subsidising the growing of high-tar tobacco. They think that the health risks of tobacco should be taken very seriously. Some hon. Members might disagree, but for goodness sake do not forget that many people think that.

What can people do? For whom can they vote? The sad fact is that, under the European Union, the powers have gone. People's views are of no consequence whatever. By all means, if we are to have treaties, let us put in things that are sensible. Do not write into treaties things that are simply untrue. That is vital. Happily, I have never been on trial, but I should hate to be tried by a law that was nonsense. How would hon. Members like to be tried on the basis of a law that was a load of codswallop and nonsense? Some unfortunate country—perhaps Portugal, Greece or Britain—will be on trial, and liable to expulsion on the basis of a law that is utter nonsense, illogical and silly and does not add up. If someone is on trial, it should be on the basis of a law that is sensible.

I hope that hon. Members will think about my final point. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe and I know what goes on, because we have been around for a long time, but new Members may not be aware of it. Decisions are made in the European Union, not on the basis of what is right or wrong. The Council of Ministers is not like some of our splendid Select Committees with their excellent Chairmen. We ask what is right and what is wrong, what we should support and what we should oppose, whereas decisions in the European Union are arrived at by horse trading.

We may want to export beef because there is so much of it that we do not know what to do with it, and we may want the French and the Germans to support us. We would support them on one Council to get their support on another. That is worrying. Britain may do something that others do not like. Our splendid shadow Foreign Secretary is a man of integrity and toughness, but in government he may do something that others do not like. The danger is that we are creating circumstances in which we may be subject to such horse trading. It is a very bad thing indeed.

I hope that hon. Members will think carefully about the amendment. We have passed piles of laws, and we never know what we are doing when we pass these treaties, because the courts interpret them widely. We have some protection, because the courts would not take us up on the basis of this provision as they do with other provisions: we would have to have a vote beforehand. Quite honestly, it is silly to write something into a treaty that is nonsense. Any treaty that says that the European Union is founded on the principles of democracy is utter and complete nonsense. There may be good intentions, and those who support the European Union may think that it will do people good, although it has not yet shown that it will, but the plain fact is that we should not write into treaties provisions that are utter and complete nonsense.

Conservative Members have many attributes, but Labour Members in particular care about democracy. It mattered to the Labour party: people were prepared to be locked up and beaten up to protect the rights of working people. Sadly, the rights of working people are being undermined massively—in some areas, totally—by the European Union. I do not like it, and I do not think that the majority of people like it. We should not write nonsense into law, and those who argue that the European Union is democratic are misleading themselves. It is not true, it has not been true, and it never will be true. Let us get rid of this silly nonsense, and support this excellent amendment.

Mr. Swayne: I want to speak in favour of amendment No. 8. Several hon. Members have outlined the extreme unlikelihood of the provisions in article F.1 ever being brought into force. That begs the question: why is the article in the treaty?

This provision is difficult to oppose: after all, who could oppose the principle of human rights? However, there are widely differing conceptions of what constitutes a right and how it should be implemented. Those different conceptions arise from the different traditions and histories of member states. That is the proper way to implement such human rights.

The intrusion of the European Union into the realm of human rights in this article of the treaty is a retrograde step. As a consequence, because of differing national traditions, the form of human rights that is adopted will be diluted and remote from our view of human rights.

[Mr. Swayne]

The treaty states that the European Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. Those principles are common to all member states. They are fine-sounding words, but they bear only an approximation to reality.

Rights in England are usually understood as vetoes, such as the right not to be imprisoned without due process and the right not to have one's house searched or occupied. By and large, rights in the continental tradition have tended to be regarded as claims on the Executive, obligations that must be fulfilled. For example, such an obligation on the state might be the right to some form of social protection. It is precisely on the basis of that difference that my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) was wrong in not perceiving that there could be a dispute between member states on the basis of different perceptions of what constitutes a human right. It is all very well for my hon. Friend to rely on the good sense and fair play of other member states, but our experience in this matter bids us to be cautious.

My recollection of the case that we brought over the European working time directive is that the European Court ruled against us on the basis that what constituted a health and safety measure was what the Council of Ministers thought constituted such a measure. No protection is afforded by relying upon the words or their plain meaning.

It is questionable whether the member states even rely on any common understanding of the rule of law. Our understanding of the rule of law in England is based on the fact that the Executive are subject to the law because it makes the king. There is a different concept in some continental traditions. The treaty, which ignores the distinct European traditions and relies on the concept that is outlined in article F.1, is most definitely a step away from our tradition. What have we to gain from it, we who already have the advantage of habeas corpus and trial by jury? We have much to lose and little to gain. In that respect, it is instructive to note the way that article F.1, by being brought into the treaty, effectively demotes the old article F.1 which, of course, required the European Union to respect the different traditions of the member states.

9.15 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson: I have been called earlier than I expected. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) for moving the amendment in a supportive way. He often does that, although not always. As the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said in his short speech, there was much discussion on the issue to which the amendment relates during our debate on the earlier group of amendments. We are debating an important part of the Bill. The Government cannot accept the amendment, but I know that its purpose was to enable the Committee to debate the issues. I hope that my hon. Friend will eventually withdraw his amendment.

Hon. Members have asked about the expulsion procedures. They might find this strange, but there are no procedures for expulsion in the rules. As far as I am aware, there was no amendment to the draft documents that were circulated at the intergovernmental conference before 1 May. The previous Government did not table an amendment to insert an expulsion clause. I have checked with officials at UKREP in Brussels and as far as I am aware no amendment was tabled.

Where did the concept of expulsion come from? It came from the potential enlargement of the European Union. The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) asked what we had to gain. The answer is a constructive role in the EU's enlargement, to which the previous British Government were also committed and to which the Opposition, I think, are committed. It is an important issue, which we may discuss in more detail when we reach other clauses. We will certainly discuss it on Thursday in the debate in the House on the Luxembourg summit.

Enlargement is an important issue for Europe's future security and economic prosperity. We in democratic countries were the first to criticise the Governments in central and eastern Europe before 1988. Now we have to offer those countries the hand of friendship. We have to say that we want them to be part of our wider Community and that, if they can meet the conditions that have been laid down—we want to help them to do that—they can be part of the enlargement.

However, there has to be a little protection for the integrity of the European Union. That is why the provision is important. It is not so much that it is going to be used. I think that all countries would want to use it only as a last resort and after a serious and persistent breach of the regulations and repeated warnings that countries have to change their act. If they do not, the provision will be invoked. If, after all that, the nations of the European Union agree unanimously, except for the one country involved—at the moment, 15 minus one—and the European Parliament has its say, a country could be suspended.

We would have to be extremely careful about how an expulsion provision is drafted because being a member of the European Union is a privilege and obligation not only for the nation, but for its citizens. One part of a nation being in serious and persistent breach of the basic obligations of EU membership does not mean that other citizens, who perhaps have nothing to do with that, but who have contracts with other EU citizens, should be penalised. That serious question has to be investigated if we are to introduce an expulsion provision.

That point was discussed in the short time that I spent at the intergovernmental conference, when the original proposals were considered. It was felt that a suspension clause, which could become permanent for the nation, although its citizens might still have certain obligations and privileges, would be in place unless the wrong was put right.

Mr. Cash: Has the Minister given serious thought to the question that I tried to raise earlier about the common principles that apply to the existing European Union? Has some form of analysis been made, even within the existing EU, let alone with any prospective new members, of what the common principles are in relation to democratic procedures, accountability, trial by jury, habeas corpus and such things? Otherwise, simply stating

that there are common principles, which are supposed to be endorsed into our law as a result of these debates, is meaningless.

Mr. Henderson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has read the Commission document "Agenda 2000" on enlargement.

Mr. Cash *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Henderson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to it. In it, the Commission outlines the sort of tests that a country has to meet to gain admission to the European Union. Many of those principles, which are accepted without any serious doubt by all EU partners, are the ones that, at the minimum, would apply. However, in response to a similar question, which the hon. Gentleman asked me in the Select Committee, I said that those principles change over time.

There are fundamental principles such as habeas corpus and others to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but others relating to the interpretation of democracy, the relationship between the police and the justice system and so on change as circumstances change. I think that the nations of the European Union are sensible enough to interpret that fact. It is a political interpretation, which was an important point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I am satisfied on that point and I know that our partners in the European Union are too.

The hon. Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) put it as well as it can be put, if he does not mind my saying so, when he said that article F.1 is well intentioned and necessary. I hope and believe that it will be interpreted sensibly by nations. We are all clear about the reasons for it: when the new countries, which have changed a great deal over the past 10 years, apply to join the European Union and begin to meet some of the economic criteria, they know that they must enshrine in their democracy the political tests put to them. Their response must be lasting and sustained; if not, they would risk being caught under the article. The importance of the article is that it concentrates the minds of new countries and, indeed, our own on ensuring that we continue to meet those desirable standards. With that explanation, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Rowlands: On this occasion, I accept my hon. Friend's reasons for not accepting the amendment. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Howard: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 19)'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 4, in page 1, line 13, after '9', insert

'(except Article 2 paragraph 22)'.

No. 59, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'except Article 2(3)(c)'.

No. 34, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'other than in Article 2, paragraph 19)'.

No. 36, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'other than in Article 2, paragraph 22)'.

New clause 21—*Appointments to Employment Committee*—

'.—Pursuant to Article 2 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, Paragraph 19 (Cmd. 3780, page 31), Her Majesty's Government shall make appointments to the Employment Committee in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations.'.

New clause 27—*Social Chapter: Report to Parliament*—

'.—Her Majesty's Government shall make a half-yearly report to Parliament on the implementation of Article 2, paragraph 22 of the Treaty setting out the United Kingdom legislation and employment implications arising from the new Employment Chapter and Social Chapter as agreed in the Amsterdam Treaty which shall be subject to resolution by each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Howard: The amendments deal with European social policy, in particular the scrapping of Britain's opt-out from the social chapter, and the new employment chapter agreed at Amsterdam. Let me make it clear at the outset that the Conservative party is opposed to both. We believe that they will lead to more regulation, less flexibility and lost jobs. They are bad for Britain and bad for Europe.

In 1992, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) negotiated an opt-out for Britain from the social chapter. That was no mean achievement. It was a hard-won gain which was warmly welcomed by British business. Even Jacques Delors acknowledged that it was an excellent deal for Britain. The United Kingdom would, he said, become

"a paradise for Japanese investment".

That prediction has been amply justified.

Let us consider the facts. The United Kingdom is the No. 1 destination for inward investment. In 1995–96, Britain attracted a third of all inward investment into the European Union. That included more than 40 per cent. of all Japanese and American investment and more than half of all Korean and Taiwanese investment. With this investment have come jobs—British jobs.

The UK has a higher proportion of its working population in work than any other major European Union country and, unlike France, Germany or Belgium, our unemployment rate is well below the European Union average. The truth is that because we have a flexible labour market, excellent industrial relations and low overheads, Britain is a good place in which to do business.

Our strike rate has been lower than the European average for the past nine years and we have the lowest labour overheads of any member of the European Union. For every £100 paid in wages, employers must add non-wage costs—such as social security contributions and health insurance—of £32 in Germany, £41 in France and only £18 in the United Kingdom. It is those non-wage costs, not the level of the wages themselves, that do such damage to a company's ability to compete. By signing up to the social chapter, the Government risk having those burdens imposed on British business—burdens that will chip away at our competitiveness, destroying British jobs.

[Mr. Howard]

Ministers talk endlessly of the importance of job creation. The trouble is that they fail to understand how jobs are created. As the chairman of the German equivalent of the Confederation of British Industry has said:

"Excessively high German labour costs are costing more and more German jobs."

On another occasion, he said:

"we have too rigid labour laws. We have too high social costs and taxes. We have the shortest working week in Europe. The German Government spends 50 per cent. of GDP as opposed to 42 per cent. in Britain. No wonder we have a problem."

The chairman's assessment is backed up by *The Wall Street Journal*, which pointed out that

"Britain imposes a much lower burden of social charges on employers than any other European country. British social taxes were less than half those in Switzerland, 40 per cent. of those in Germany and 29 per cent. of those in France."

The French newspaper *Le Monde* has explained that

"if unemployment is dropping in Britain it is because they have done everything to deserve it. For several years, considerable efforts have been made to improve the workings of the labour market, thereby boosting job and new company creations".

What, then, are the benefits that our opt-out from the social chapter has denied us? What is the pressing need that has not been met since that opt-out was won? What is the injury, the damage and the detriment that the opt-in agreed at Amsterdam is supposed to remedy? The Government have never answered those questions. Why? Because there are no such benefits and no such need. There is no injury, damage or detriment. If there were, it would be perfectly possible for this Parliament to remedy it.

9.30 pm

I understand that the Labour party has different views on these matters from Opposition Members. No one who saw the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry reply to yesterday's debate on burdens on business could be in any doubt that old Labour is still alive and kicking. The Government have a large majority. If they take the view that further social legislation is desirable, they can introduce such legislation in the House. There is no need to make—and no justification for making—our economy vulnerable to measures imposed on us against our will by the European Commission and other member states.

The Prime Minister once pretended that such an imposition could not happen. He once claimed that we could pick and choose the elements that we wanted to accept. The Prime Minister and the Government would be powerless to prevent damaging measures being imposed on the United Kingdom against our will because, under the social chapter, so many subjects are decided on the basis of qualified majority voting.

The Government are keen, when it suits them, to pray in aid the views of the director-general of the CBI. They would do well to listen to him on this subject.

"If you sign up to the social chapter,"

he warned,

"you can't actually be sure that you'll have your way, because some directives will be covered by qualified majority voting. There is, however, a way to pick and choose, and that is available to the Labour party if it wants to have it as its policy. The way to pick and choose is actually not to sign up to the social chapter."

The President of the Board of Trade has already come up against the problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) pointed out in yesterday's debate, when the President of the Board of Trade—having told BBC television's "On the Record" that she did not support Commissioner Flynn's proposals for national works councils—was asked how the Government could prevent the proposals becoming law, as they would be introduced under qualified majority voting, there was a long pause and then she said:

"Well, er, we shall see how things go."

That is the clarion call of the President of the Board of Trade to British business.

Under the social chapter, legislation in any of the following areas can be adopted by qualified majority vote: working conditions, informing and consulting workers, equality between men and women in relation to work opportunities and treatment at work, the integration of people excluded from the labour market, and health and safety at work. The social chapter allows burdens to be imposed on business in virtually all areas of social and employment policy.

Already, two pieces of legislation have been introduced under the social chapter: the European works councils directive and the parental leave directive. The more profound danger of the social chapter, however, lies in the potential it provides for more far-reaching social legislation, such as the European Commission's proposal for national works councils. The existing works councils directive affects only large, multinational companies, but Commissioner Flynn has suggested that companies with as few as 50 employees should be forced to set up works councils. What is to be gained from agreeing to provisions that would enable British firms to be forced to do that? The Government are opposed to the proposal. A raft of further social legislation is currently under review.

The treaty also contains a new employment chapter. It makes member states' employment policies a matter of common concern and requires member states to co-ordinate their action in that respect within the Council. The European Council will consider the employment situation each year and adopt conclusions. On the basis of the European Council's conclusions,

"the Council, acting by a qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the Employment Committee . . . shall each year draw up guidelines which the Member States shall take into account in their employment policies."

Member states will also be required to submit an annual employment report to the Commission. Once again, the Council,

"acting by a qualified majority on a recommendation from the Commission, may, if it considers it appropriate in the light of that examination, make recommendations to Member States."

Employment policy will cease to be a matter for individual member states. Britain's employment policy will become a matter for all European Union members. Guidelines which "shall"—not "can" or even "should"—direct employment policy will be determined by qualified majority vote in the Council. If the Commission and the Council are not happy with a member state's efforts to harmonise employment policy, they can, again on the basis of qualified majority voting, make recommendations to that member state.

What repercussions could such a chapter have? What guarantees can the Minister give us that it cannot be used to impose on this country an employment policy that we oppose and which would destroy, not create, jobs? What assurances can be given that a British Government will not find themselves having to support and implement employment policies that may be wholly inappropriate or unrealistic? Is it not the case that the European Court of Justice could interpret the employment chapter as placing a duty on the British Government to pursue employment policies dictated by other European states—policies that could well be against Britain's national interest?

Under the new employment chapter introduced at Amsterdam, we can expect yet more interference and regulation. In particular, the treaty introduces a mechanism for so-called "incentive measures" which will be adopted by qualified majority vote. That is a potential source of expensive employment programmes for which we would have no need, but for which the United Kingdom would be expected to pay. Will the Minister explain the scope of the "incentive measures" that can be agreed by qualified majority voting under the employment chapter? Is it not the case that moneys could be voted under those provisions to finance worthless schemes in other countries despite the opposition of the British Government?

The future of our country and of all our fellow citizens depends on our ability to earn our way in a world that is more fiercely competitive than ever. In that competitive world, all the crucial decisions are made at the margin. Marginal differences in price, in quality and in delivery can make all the difference between winning orders and losing them, between creating jobs and destroying them and between building prosperity and undermining it. Over the years, Conservative policies have given this country a critical competitive advantage that has enabled the British people to win orders, to create jobs and to build prosperity.

The cumulative consequence of the Government's policies—of which their signing up to the social chapter is one of the most prominent examples—will be the destruction of that critical margin of competitiveness. It will happen throughout the country, particularly to small and medium firms. In the end, we shall see what we have seen under every Labour Government—newspaper headlines that read, "Unemployment up again".

That is the harsh reality behind the debate. It is why the Conservatives will continue to speak up for the men, women and children throughout the country who will lose out. There is only one sure way to protect the country from those unwanted burdens—to stay outside the social chapter. We should keep our opt-out and delete the provisions from the treaty. That is why I invite hon. Members to vote for amendments Nos. 3 and 4 and new clause 27.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): My background is in industry. I started on the shop floor at the age of 18 and eventually moved into industrial management. I have had many clients over the years and worked with many thousands of people. I have also been active in small business—it was getting smaller and smaller—for about 14 years. The nearer the election came, the smaller it got.

I have also been unemployed. I know how wasteful unemployment is of people's energies and talents. I know how hard it is for families. Unemployment is my main concern. The social chapter and a range of other measures from Europe will cause unemployment.

The social chapter does not contain a great deal at the moment. It is a procedure. However, that is what makes it dangerous. Not only could it grow to incorporate many things, but the countries involved in it could move on to the social charter. They have agreed to move towards it. That would involve many more measures than are contained in the social chapter. We should consider that carefully.

Europe has had employment regulations for many years. That is why growth in Europe has been comparatively sluggish. European countries have had low levels of job creation, particularly compared with the United States. My visits to the United States have shown me that, much though I like the country, it is hardly as efficient as Britain. However, it is less regulated. That is the difference between the United States and the European Union.

There is high unemployment in the European Union. Unemployment is lower in this country. That is not a coincidence. Our unemployment rate is approximately 7.2 per cent., as against 10.6 per cent. on the continent. Why is that? We have been doing well for some years, but we cannot be complacent. There are many threats to the well-being of our national economy, not just from Europe. Economies across the world are starting to challenge us. Those low-tax, low-spend economies are creating jobs and growth. They are a direct threat to employment in this country. We must be conscious of that.

How do we meet that threat and come out on top? We cannot do it through the old jobs-for-life syndrome. Those days are long gone, regardless of which party is in government. We have to do it through efficiency. Will the social chapter and all the regulations that are coming from Brussels help us to be more efficient? They cannot. It is no coincidence that we are doing so much better than other European Union countries. We do not have the labour laws that exist on the continent. We do not have the social chapter. We have better industrial relations and fewer add-on labour costs. In short, we are basically less European.

What do we mean by less European? It seems that we are attracting a great deal of investment into this country for one reason: we are so much better than the rest of Europe. If we were exactly the same as the rest of Europe, I should have thought that inward investment would have gone right to the geographic centre of Europe. It would make sense to invest in the very centre. The Japanese are not investing in the very centre of Europe, because it is not as efficient as this country.

9.45 pm

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, we must look at the add-on labour costs—the extraordinary amount that it costs to employ a person in Germany, and on the continent generally, compared with this country. The difference between what it costs to pay somebody and what that person takes home is crucial. In Germany, it costs a fortune to employ a worker, but that worker

[Mr. Laurence Robertson]

does not take as much home. That crucial difference creates jobs. Jobs are created not by Governments, regulations or even businesses, but by customers with money in their pockets.

The social chapter and all the employment laws that are coming forward will stifle business in this country. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, if the measures are so good, why cannot the Government introduce them in this country? When they are found to fail, the Government could repeal them in this country. If companies want to live by the rules and laws anyway, that is a matter for them.

The debate is about something more important than just the contents of the social chapter. I refer to a letter that I received only yesterday from a company in my constituency. It states:

"My company is a product of the Thatcher revolution. Founded in 1984 with just eight people, we now employ approaching 300. Our growth is directly attributable to changed attitudes in both the factory floor and management. We have built up a worthwhile export business. What I do not understand is why sensible British businessmen should see any advantage in belonging to such a high cost club."

That is the crucial point. The regulations have not helped that man to build up his business. He describes very well what has helped him to do so: efficiency.

The social chapter is bad in itself, but the issue goes an awful lot deeper. Taken with a range of other things, it is about who governs Britain. We have the social chapter and economic and monetary union, under which the monetary and fiscal policies of countries that join it will be determined not in each country, but in Brussels.

I am not frightened to address the issue of sovereignty. I know that we have had a little debate about sovereignty, just on Conservative Benches. We should not walk away from it. Sovereignty is not just some romantic theory. It enables us to create the economy that suits our own industry, our own businesses and our own work force. We should not be afraid to claim the right to govern ourselves in the areas of employment, monetary policy and fiscal policy.

We have done remarkably well in this country. I speak genuinely on behalf of people on the shop floor. I am concerned about their jobs. I see a great threat to jobs in this country. We need only look across to Europe to see the 18 million people who are unemployed. Do we want to join them and go along with the sluggish growth that we have seen in Europe for far too long, or go our own way and be able to compete with the Asian tigers and all the growing economies in the world?

Mr. Gapes: Listening to some of the Conservative Members' speeches has reminded me of the old saying, "Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they are not out to get you." Conservatives have the view that, as the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) said, we are less European. Geographically and culturally, people in the United Kingdom are European. We have been members of the European Community and then the European Union for many years. We have had a role and we have had an opportunity to shape the future of Europe and the European Union.

Anyone listening to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) would have assumed that he was making his speech in March or April of this year. The fact that the Conservatives went down to an election defeat and that the British people overwhelmingly rejected the party that was opposed to the social chapter seems to have escaped him. He did not seem aware of the fact that a majority of people in this country wanted us to join the social chapter. The majority wanted the right to consultation for workers and the right to parental leave. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter) is shouting from a sedentary position.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gapes: In a moment. I am addressing my remarks to the hon. Gentleman who is shouting at me.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is addressing his remarks to the Chairman.

Mr. Gapes: I apologise, Sir Alan. I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for South–West Devon if he wishes to make a point without shouting at me from a sedentary position. He obviously does not, so I shall give way to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

Mr. Swayne: Given the huge majority that the Government achieved, they could enact whatever social protection they wanted for the British people. What was to be gained by giving away our right to prevent social protection provision of which the Government might disapprove and which might cost jobs?

Mr. Gapes: Nothing has been given away, in the sense that the hon. Gentleman suggests. We have gained the right to influence discussion in a European Union with a single market containing multinational companies and transnational corporations that operate in this country. The largest of those had already started to apply the provisions of the social chapter to their work forces in the European Union single market, including those employed in the United Kingdom. Therefore, by signing up to the social chapter, the British Government and people have an opportunity to influence provisions that are already being applied and are indirectly influencing employment conditions for employees of British companies that are subsidiaries of European or multinational companies.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that the social chapter has remained a dead letter and has not influenced employment practices, because other member states were not prepared to disadvantage themselves through regulations that did not apply in this realm?

Mr. Gapes: The hon. Gentleman should consult some of the largest multinational companies that operate in Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom and ask them whether they had adopted different provisions that affected the way in which they treated their employees. In many cases, they had not.

Mr. Howard: If business is so keen on the social chapter, why has even the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry advised against doing anything about the opt-out, as I pointed out in my speech?

Mr. Gapes: This Government have to represent the interests of workers as well as those of big business.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) made disparaging remarks about big business, but business wants Britain to be at the heart of developments in the European Union. We have a responsibility not just to business, but to employees. The rights to consultation, paternity leave, paid holidays and, under other provisions, limits on the number of hours worked should be protected by a Government who care about the people as a whole. I am pleased to say that since 1 May we have had such a Government in this country.

Sir Teddy Taylor: What does the hon. Gentleman think is causing the horrendous level of unemployment, which is getting worse, on the continent of Europe?

Mr. Gapes: For the hon. Gentleman's information, unemployment in this country has fallen since the Labour Government signed up to the social chapter. Therefore, the argument that increasing unemployment is related to the social chapter cannot be used—it is palpably untrue. There are many complex reasons for unemployment. They include our position in the business cycle, which is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that we do not meet the convergence criteria for the single currency. The business cycle in different European states is at different points.

Other practices in European countries have not contributed to falling unemployment. They have older industries that have not shed employment as this country did in the 1980s. There are many complex reasons, but I suspect that I shall be told that I am drifting away from the subject of the amendment, so I shall not go down that line further.

It is essential that this country contributes to shaping the social and employment policies that the EU develops. If we are to do that, we need not only to build co-operation and partnership with other member states, but to bring into the domestic debate the important concept of social partnership. That is accepted widely throughout the rest of EU among Christian Democrats, Liberals and Social Democrats.

Mr. Swayne: Shame.

Mr. Gapes: The hon. Gentleman says, "Shame." The European People's party—the group in the European Parliament of which Conservative MEPs and their party are members—talks about the social partnership. It believes that it is important to have a dialogue and a relationship with both sides of industry, and that it is important to build consensus on employment legislation for the future of all the people of this continent. That European model—the Christian Democrat, Social Democrat and Liberal consensus on the social partnership—will lead to success in European economies in the long term.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has been extremely patient. Moreover, by sitting down for a moment, he may rescue himself from imminent explosion. How many years of persistent high unemployment on the continent of Europe would it take to convince him that there is a structural problem? Would 20 do, or 30, 40 or 50? At some point, presumably, his view of the economic cycle would collapse. Could he give us some guidance?

Mr. Gapes: I dealt with that point in my answer to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East. Regrettably, since 1945, living standards in this country have fallen below those of France and Germany. That is not unrelated to the fact that, for the bulk of that period, this country has, unfortunately, been under Conservative Governments. According to recent statistics, living standards in this country are below those of EU countries which, historically, were not as affluent as the UK.

In European countries, there are currently some problems with unemployment, which is unfortunate. That is why the EU summit at Amsterdam decided that we needed co-ordinated measures among the different states. That is why the Swedish Government—with the support of the British and French Governments—proposed that an employment chapter be contained in the Amsterdam treaty. That is a positive and important step. Last week, I said that the employment chapter was limited, and it does not go far enough. More work can be done in that area. The important principle is that there is a commitment that the European Union is about not only the single market but social aspects and employment.

We are trying to create a people's Europe, a Europe not only for those who can move money around and are in charge of big business but for those with economic and social aspirations and employment aspirations.

Mr. Swayne: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that large companies that can afford compliance favour the social protection legislation of which he has spoken, and that small companies, which cannot afford that compliance, are being driven out of business to the advantage of the large companies that increasingly dominate the market?

Mr. Gapes: If the hon. Gentleman studies the social chapter and the social provisions, he will notice that there are size limits in the regulations and that the smallest companies are not expected to comply.

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report progress and ask leave to sit again.*

To report progress and ask leave to sit again tomorrow.—[*Ms Bridget Prentice.*]

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Matthew Taylor be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr. Norman Baker be added to the Committee.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 9th December, any Consolidated Fund Bill ordered to be brought in and read the first time shall be proceeded with as if the Second Reading thereof stood as an Order of the day, and Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall apply.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. John Horam, Dr. Lewis Moonie and Mr. Peter L. Pike be added to the Liaison Committee.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Sir Alastair Goodlad be discharged from the House of Commons Commission and Dr. Lewis Moonie and Sir Peter Lloyd be appointed members of the Commission under the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Bird Reserves

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I am delighted to have secured a debate on the impact of coastal erosion, saltwater and flooding on bird reserves and wetlands. The matter is of vital concern not only to people living on the coast but to many bird watchers throughout the country.

It is difficult to imagine, when standing in the Chamber, what it is like to walk along the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk, with that wonderful Norfolk sky above one and the sea pounding into the beach. As one walks along the beach, one will see that there are very few cliffs, because all that separates the sea from most of the land is raised beaches, shingle and shingle banks.

In so far as there are cliffs, they are largely composed of clay and sand, and the coast is retreating all the time. At places such as Benacre and Covehithe in Suffolk one can see yards of land given up to the sea every year. I went to Cley in my constituency in February 1996, just after the main flood in that month. There was 6 ft of water across the Cley and Salthouse marshes, and much of the village was flooded. There were six breaches in that year.

I have since been back several times, once with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The ferrymen at Morston, the fishermen at Wells and Salthouse and the wildfowlers who operate along that part of the coast tell me that there are more ducks and geese now than there were 40 or 50 years ago. That is testament to the essential vitality of the habitat.

There are few more exhilarating sights than the Brent geese rising at Minsmere or sounds than the calling of widgeon at the mudflats at Blakeney or the boom of the bittern over the Cley marshes; but all is not well along that part of the coast. Sea levels are rising, partly because of climatic changes but also because of the long sink of the eastern part of the country, which has been in progress since the ice age.

The best guess of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is that, by the year 2050, sea levels will have risen by about 50 cm. What is probably worse for this part of the world is the growing unpredictability of the weather, with high tides and strong storms. Local people fear that Governments, regardless of their political persuasion, will take action only when it is too late, and that funds will be available to take action only when their houses and bird reserves are under water.

There are two essential habitats close to the sea that I wish to speak about. The first is the salt marshes, many of which have been squeezed between rising sea levels and coastal defences. It is estimated that about a third of the salt marsh in East Anglia has gone in the past 15 years.

The second—and much more important—habitat is the freshwater wetlands comprising lagoons, grazing marshes and reed beds. About 50 per cent. of the United Kingdom's freshwater reedbeds are located in East Anglia. Those important wetlands mainly shelter behind shingle banks, which have become weakened by constant breaches, by a diminution in the natural supplies of shingle and by constant bulldozing, which has reduced their integrity.

In Norfolk and Suffolk, we have three bird reserves of international importance, at Minsmere, Cley and Titchwell. They have their high-profile birds—we have 14 of the 20 known booming bitterns in this country, we have marsh harriers and we have bearded tits—but for the amateur twitcher such as myself, it is the great mass of pintail, mallard, widgeon, geese of all kinds, avocets, terns which nest on Blakeney point, snipe and lapwing that make that part of the country unique.

Those sites are recognised in the Ramsar convention and under the EU bird directive and habitats directive as sites of international importance. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Titchwell, Cley and Minsmere each year. Those habitats are at risk.

I should like to put three points to the Minister. First, we must have a national strategy for our coastline. At the moment, responsibility falls between cash-strapped district councils, the Environment Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Surely it would make sense to have one body to co-ordinate activities, to ensure that shore management plans are properly integrated, to pool expertise, to avoid duplication and, above all in the context of this debate, to ensure that environmental considerations are given a higher weighting.

Existing shore management plans assume that a further 770 hectares of freshwater reserves will be lost in the foreseeable future. I do not believe that that is acceptable.

Secondly, on funding, MAFF recently proposed a new funding formula, which North Norfolk district council believes will greatly discriminate against rural areas in favour of urban areas. It will do so because it is much easier to assess the economic benefits in an urban area than to assess the intangible value of environmental assets. Specifically, I ask the Minister to consider giving greater recognition to the value of wildlife habitats and adjusting the MAFF formula accordingly.

Thirdly, there should be effective mechanisms and financial incentives to create replacement habitats where existing sites cannot be maintained. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and I are not asking for existing sites to be preserved at all costs. Obviously, there will be times when the economics do not stack up or, for geological or landscape reasons, coastal defences do not make sense, but in those cases we should like new habitats to be established so that there is not a net loss of habitat in freshwater areas.

I recommend the Minister, if he is ever in north Norfolk, to spend a few minutes at Stiffkey, where he will see that Lord Buxton has recreated a new freshwater habitat designed to—

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Prior: Perhaps the Minister has been there. That habitat was created with the bittern especially in mind.

There is an urgency about this matter. It would be tragic if we had to have this same discussion in two, three or four years' time when these areas have been flooded. The Minister will know of the damage that saltwater can do to these habitats. Only this year, the bittern population at Cley has declined dramatically owing to the saltwater flooding of just a year ago. I would ask the Minister to consider a funded, comprehensive plan of action for the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts, giving greater emphasis to rural areas and wildlife interests; and where habitat loss is unavoidable, ensuring that it is replaced elsewhere.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I should like to add my support to virtually everything the hon. Gentleman has said. The wetland nature reserves of the Suffolk coast attract significant numbers of visitors, just as they must do in Norfolk. They are thus of economic benefit to my constituency and the surrounding area. While I support the environmental thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument, I would also point to the economic value of coastal protection schemes.

Mr. Prior: The hon. Gentleman is right. Tourism is a vital part of the economies of Suffolk and north Norfolk.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that only yesterday I opened a new visitor centre at Titchwell which already attracts about 140,000 visitors a year. As well as their international importance for wildlife, these unique places on the north Norfolk coast are also some of the jewels in our tourist industry—Titchwell is a good example. I hope that the Minister will take account of that when allocating resources to protect this sort of environment.

Mr. Prior: I agree. The three bird reserves, Minsmere, Cley and Titchwell, are unique assets that bring many visitors to Suffolk and north Norfolk.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I welcome the debate because I believe that an ecological disaster is waiting to happen, not just in Norfolk but throughout the world. Saltwater infusion causes the death of the freshwater fish on which the birds feed and breed. On the broads, the salination of the wetlands owing to higher sea levels is the cause of considerable anxiety.

The climatic research unit at our local university of East Anglia made the national headlines today for pointing out that there will be temperature rises—despite all the good work that we hope will be done in Kyoto this week. That will mean that the sea will rise, and these magical areas in Norfolk and the rest of the world will find that their habitats will be compromised—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat when I am on my feet. This is an Adjournment debate in which a short intervention is permitted, but not a speech—unless the hon. Gentleman has the prior permission both of the hon. Member who initiated the debate and of the Minister.

Mr. Prior: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. There is no doubt that a fundamental change which will affect sea levels is under way. There are limits to what Governments or anyone else can do to limit the implications. The difficulty for wildlife habitats is that there is, in a sense, nowhere for the sea to go because of developments along the coast. If the coastal roads and houses had not been built, the coastline would have found its own natural place. However, that is not the position.

If we want to preserve these habitats, some of them will have to be moved. The Minister will be aware of the claybank scheme at Salthouse, which is being proposed

[Mr. Prior]

with the general support of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and others. Even with that scheme, which is generally recognised to be a good one, we will lose one third of the grazing marshes at Salthouse. That is a price which we will have to pay.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid–Norfolk): I reinforce the comments of the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). There is a major impact not only on the north Norfolk coast, but on the whole of Norfolk and Suffolk and my constituency, which borders the Broads. All the people who live in the area feel that the environmental changes will have a major impact not just on the wildlife, but on the areas in which they live. As my hon. Friend said, unless action is taken soon, we will have to take retrospective action, when it will almost certainly be too late.

Mr. Prior: I thank my hon. Friend. We should pay tribute to the work being done by the Environment Agency in protecting the Norfolk Broads. The scheme at Sea Palling and Hattisburgh—the offshore reach—is remarkable. It is not yet a proven scheme, but it is a remarkable feat of engineering.

I know that the Parliamentary Secretary is a keen birdwatcher. I am sure that he has that at the forefront of his mind. In Norfolk and Suffolk, the issues that I have raised are crucial, and many people outside the area will listen carefully to what he says tonight.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on the way in which he has pursued this Adjournment debate. He has spoken with great authority and knowledge. The matter is important, and I am delighted to see so many hon. Members present for the debate.

I welcome the contributions of the hon. Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), of my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk (Dr. Turner)—I envy any hon. Member who has a place as marvellous as Titchwell in his constituency—of my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), who mentioned the similar problems and pressures experienced on the Suffolk coast, and of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who described the problems of global warming and rising sea level—an issue raised by the hon. Member for North Norfolk.

I am aware of the problems of habitat loss and the practicalities of recreating the habitat elsewhere. The hon. Gentleman painted a wonderful picture of the north Norfolk coast. It is an area with which I am extremely familiar, having gone there for many years. I know the Minsmere, Cley, Titchwell and Salthouse bird reserves very well, and have spent many happy hours there pursuing many different species—not always with great success.

In East Anglia alone it has been estimated that more than 770 hectares of internationally important wetlands are at risk from coastal erosion and saltwater flooding. The hon. Gentleman asked—quite reasonably—what is being done to protect them. I visited Cley, not while it was flooded, but shortly afterwards, and I saw the damage caused to the habitat there. I am aware of the understandable concern of local people.

The United Kingdom is playing a leading role in the protection of key habitats, birds, plants and animal species through the on-going programme of special protection areas for birds, special areas of conservation for key habitats and species other than birds, and Ramsar designations for important wetlands.

The SPAs and proposed SACs will form part of the largest Europewide network of Nature 2000 important wildlife sites. In Norfolk, two overlapping such sites are the north Norfolk coast SPA and Ramsar site, and the proposed Wash and north Norfolk coast coastal SAC. They encompass a number of habitats of prime importance including fresh and saltwater grazing marsh, reedbeds, salt marsh and shingle structures.

Those are among the 38 key habitats identified by the UK biodiversity steering group as requiring urgent conservation action. In addition, they are home to a number of rare birds, animals and plants. Action plans for coastal floodplain, grazing marsh and reedbeds were published, together with 12 other key habitats as part of the steering group's 1995 report.

Implementation of these plans has now begun and among the actions proposed are the conservation, creation and re-establishment of such habitat types. Action plans for the remaining key habitats, including salt marsh and shingle structures, are being prepared and we expect to publish them by the end of 1998. Such habitat improvement work is also being undertaken as part of the salt marsh option of the Ministry's habitat scheme. That has considerable scope for recreating habitat.

Over the past decade the Ministry has been developing an integrated and strategic approach to sea defence and coast protection. I shall deal with the questions raised by the hon. Member for North Norfolk on that issue. I shall deal also with shore management.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important point about the need for co-ordination, an issue that needs to be considered. I shall take it up with my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the funding formula for flood and drainage schemes. I can reassure him in that he is right in saying that a funding formula has been reintroduced. That is right and proper because if there are limited resources there must be a priority scheme. It is necessary to identify the schemes that must be given top priority in terms of Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food spending and capital grant. Within the new formula, for the first time, environmental factors are recognised. That will be to the benefit of many rural schemes as it will be to the benefit of important habitat areas such as those which have been discussed tonight. I shall deal later with the replacement of habitats.

In 1993 the Ministry published, with the Welsh Office, a strategy for flood and coastal defence. The strategy set out a comprehensive framework within which Government and the operating authorities can work. In particular, the strategy advocates that defence measures should be based on an understanding of natural processes and, as far as possible, work with those processes. It is for operating authorities such as the

Environment Agency and local authorities to assess what measures are needed to reduce flooding and coastal erosion in their areas, and to come forward with plans for dealing with those problems that are cost-effective and sound in engineering and environmental terms. For its part, the Ministry makes grant aid available for capital defence schemes which meet these criteria. They are now part of the formula.

As part of the strategic approach to flood and coastal defence problems, the Ministry encourages operating authorities to take and consider a wide range of possible options. It has also promoted the setting up of coastal defence groups, which provide a forum for discussion and co-operation and help ensure that coastal processes taking place within particular stretches of coast are taken into account.

To assist those groups in the strategic management of discrete stretches of coast, the Ministry has encouraged the preparation of shoreline management plans and has issued guidance on their preparation. The aim of the plans is to provide a basis for sustainable coastal defence policies and to set objectives for the future management of coastline, taking into account natural coastal processes, coastal defence needs, environmental considerations, planning issues and current and future land use.

Plans should be the subject of wide consultation with all bodies with an interest in the coastline and should take due account of other coastal initiatives. Coastal groups also play an important role in integrating SMPs with the work of local planning authorities with a view to avoiding problems in the future by discouraging inappropriate development.

Shoreline management plans are intended to be living documents and will need to be reviewed at regular intervals.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is my hon. Friend's policy on sand dunes and their preservation?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend raises an issue that is slightly beyond the scope of the debate. I know that he has raised it because sand dunes and sand dune stability are an important part of preventing coastal erosion. There are strategies for dealing with the issue that involve the planting of suitable grasses and vegetation, along with proper management plans. We listened to the advice of our statutory advisers—English Nature in England and the appropriate countryside bodies in Scotland and Wales.

We intend to have a timetable for reviews, which should be included in shoreline management plans. This approach enables evolving knowledge of physical processes, environmental issues and land use to be drawn into the planning process.

As our understanding of coastal processes has improved, we have seen attention turn to adapting and supplementing the natural processes with the aim of adopting responses to flood and erosion risk that are more environmentally acceptable and sustainable in engineering terms. By moving sea walls landward, we may be able to reinstate areas of valuable salt marsh and intertidal flat, and, by creating a new buffer zone seaward of the defended line, improve the defences. This "managed realignment" has been piloted at a number of sites in Essex by a series of joint projects involving the Ministry, the Environment Agency, English Nature and the National Trust. These trials are still in progress, but preliminary results suggest that good results can be obtained. A consensus is emerging that managed realignment will play a significant part in the future management of low-lying coasts, and a joint Environment Agency/ English Nature policy paper on the subject is in preparation.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I had a meeting earlier today on this very subject. We discussed the precise examples in Essex that the Minister has given. The creation of the new salt marshes conflicts to some extent with the water abstraction policy of some of the water companies. Does he have any view on that in respect of the trials?

Mr. Morley: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that in Essex that was not the case. When using that strategy, other considerations have to be taken into account, and water abstraction is one. We have to look at where it is most appropriate for such a policy to be implemented. That is part of the study that is taking place.

I am aware that some environmental and conservation bodies feel that the current initiatives do not go far enough. However, as the hon. Member for North Norfolk has acknowledged, these are very difficult and complex issues and their resolution is still very much in its infancy. That is why Ministry officials have already been involved in a series of discussions with colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Environment Agency and English Nature about how we might resolve them.

In some cases, the managed realignment of flood defences will be the best option in terms of sustainability and cost. In other cases, it may not be appropriate to spend large amounts of public money for little environmental gain. We do not yet have a full picture of what area of freshwater coastal wetland is at risk. English Nature, the Environment Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales have just commissioned a joint study that will assess the potential impact of coastal processes on internationally important sites around the coast of England and Wales by utilising shoreline management plans. The report, due next year, will give us a clearer picture of the extent of the problem. The sites that the hon. Gentleman has discussed tonight will be included within the management plan, and it will be an opportunity to look at the serious issues that he has raised. I am particularly pleased that the Ministry initiative—shoreline management plans—will allow a better understanding of the natural impacts in environmentally important coastal sites.

As I have said, there are no easy answers to these problems, but I am grateful to English Nature, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and other conservation bodies for their contribution to the debate in their leaflet entitled "Coast in Crisis". They, too, accept that it may not be possible or, indeed, wise to try to protect some sites from flooding. Building new sea walls or continuing to maintain existing walls may disrupt the natural processes of erosion and deposition of sediments and simply shift the problem—or create a new problem—elsewhere.

[Mr. Morley]

It is worth mentioning that the avocet—the symbol of the RSPB—has returned to Britain, and its habitat is the result of a breach in the floodbank due to the failure of sea defences. The point that I am making is that, sometimes, changes to the coast, to the wetlands, can have beneficial as well as detrimental effects in terms of wildlife.

The decisions that are taken must try to achieve a balance between the various competing interests. Although human health and safety must be paramount, it may mean that tough decisions will have to be taken in relation to the enormous investment and costs of flood defence and sea defence. I can assure hon. Members who have spoken so eloquently tonight and made so well the case for coastal protection that we will take into account very carefully the points that they have made in this short debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 December 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Defence Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I am grateful for the opportunity to lead this debate.

I welcome the Secretary of State's determination to move to smart procurement. The major review carried out over the past few years made depressing reading and it is vital that the Ministry of Defence moves away from an inevitably confrontational relationship with the industry, which unalloyed competition policy brings. It should form a partnership with the industry, which would be wholly in line with the competitive procurement policies practised in industry.

One of the keys to smart procurement must be the early resolution of industrial policy issues and the adoption of a procurement approach based on partnership between customer and supplier. Three programmes where smart procurement could be applied beneficially are the five-year ammunition purchase programme, the future large aircraft programme and the beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile programme. In each case, the MOD is currently holding a competition, the outcome of which could have potentially fatal consequences for the UK's industrial capabilities. Several key decisions on procurement will be made in the near future, and I call on the Government to support British firms in those major contracts.

Chorley holds an historic position in defence. It is the home of Royal Ordnance, where 40,000 people were once employed. Today, the factory employs only a few hundred. Nearby are other major defence contractors employing many of my constituents. Warton is one of the UK's principal aerospace locations where the Tornado and the Eurofighter are designed and built. As Lord Gilbert, the Minister for Defence Procurement, recently confirmed to me, Leyland Trucks manufactures many of the Army's heavy and light trucks. I urge the Government to give that firm every opportunity to tender for contracts in the future. Those vehicles are quality British products made by a quality British work force with a proven history in Bosnia and the Gulf.

Aerospace and defence account for more than 20 per cent. of Lancashire's manufacturing industry. Many other firms have business in the defence industry. Examples from my constituency include NIS Precision Engineering, Xelflex and the Computer Science Corporation, based in Chorley and Preston.

I shall concentrate today on procurement policy. Procurement principles are simple: the Government must give value for money; nothing must stand in the way of quality and suitability for job requirements; and if there can be spin-offs in terms of jobs, investment and technology transfer, so much the better. Our service people are our most precious resource. If we ask them to risk their lives on our behalf, they must have the best equipment, from aircraft to the tool box. We must give them the protection that they deserve by giving them the best.

I was fortunate to lead a debate in the House on 9 July when I stressed the importance of the Eurofighter project. It is a quality product. It was designed and built by Britain and Europe, and it represents a massive investment by our aerospace sector, both civil and military. It has also given a major boost to the associated industries, such as design, engineering and computing. Without their skills, the project would not have gone ahead and we would not have the success that has put us at the cutting edge of technology.

For example, the Computer Science Corporation might not have been sited in Chorley, if not for the proximity of Warton. Its IT know-how will now be transferred to other areas of the local, regional and national economy.

Other aerospace projects, such as the Airbus, benefit from the technology transfer—for example, in aerodynamics, avionics and navigation systems. That is especially true of the transfer of the FLA, which is a military project with a spin-off for civil aviation. The FLA is a military aircraft which easily becomes a civil aircraft for moving large amounts of cargo around the world. That is a massive market. The FLA has had some problems, but that is natural; it is still at the design stage. The flight control, engines and radar of the Eurofighter are all performing well and could easily be transferred.

The importance of air superiority to any campaign has been proved time and again in the Gulf and in Bosnia. Eurofighter is much cheaper to buy than the American F22, and is only marginally less capable. I congratulate the Prime Minister, the Government and the Opposition on their support on this important subject—the House has united for the benefit of Eurofighter, which would give us the technology to compete with the Americans.

I am delighted that the German Government have finally agreed to the project, ending years of doubt and speculation. At last, we see the green light. I look forward to the signing of the agreement to construct the aircraft, and to seeing it into service. We all look forward to that.

Like the Eurofighter, the FLA represents the future of the aerospace industry and can be developed for the dual use that I mentioned. Like Eurofighter, it has incidental spin-offs such as technological and engineering advances, which benefit the country. Like Eurofighter, it seems to be continually shrouded in doubt and subjected to unwarranted criticism.

For example, I was told that the FLA was deficient, because it cannot carry a tank; nor, however, can the C130J. The C130J cannot carry a Warrior infantry fighting vehicle, which is a crucial element of our infantry support and is being used extensively in the former Yugoslavia. The C130J is an updated 1960s plane.

The only transport aircraft that is capable of carrying the tank is the C17, which has 50 per cent. more capacity than the FLA, but is three times more expensive to buy,

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

and four times more expensive to run. It cannot meet the European staff requirement in terms of operation from short, soft or rough airstrips.

Other FLA advantages include twice the tonnage per day of the C130J, and 20 per cent. more types of equipment. It is more flexible and can be produced in transport, tanker or maritime patrol variants. It has 100 per cent. greater cargo box volume, 70 per cent. higher average payload per sortie and 20 per cent. higher cruise speed. It could bring up to £5 billion into the United Kingdom economy.

Those are the crucial facts. The global military transport market is estimated to be worth £40 billion. The FLA is a quality European product which has served our services well and would also be a big money spinner for us. The five European partners will now work together to assemble a proposal to define the FLA's performance, capability and production time scale.

Critics of the FLA and the Eurofighter do not seem to understand that, or perhaps they have a financial interest in competitors of British firms. It should be borne in mind that the transfer of technology to the next generation of Airbus will be considerable. The FLA will give us that crucial next generation of civil aircraft for Airbus. I believe that Airbus military will be the way forward for Europe.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's very interesting dissertation. I agree with many of the compliments that he has paid the future large aircraft, but it cannot carry a main battle tank, can it?

Mr. Hoyle: I shall help the right hon. Gentleman by repeating what I said. We know that the FLA cannot carry a main battle tank, but we are buying the C130J, which also cannot carry a main battle tank. The FLA can carry everything except the main battle tank, but, as we have noticed, the main battle tank is not needed by a fast reaction force. Unfortunately, the C130J cannot carry many tanks either, so we must make a choice. I believe that the decision lies with the FLA, because the C130J cannot carry the infantry Warrior, which is important.

The delivery date for the C130Js that the UK is buying has yet to be confirmed. Is it true that they are suffering from technical problems? Is it true that they are still awaiting a licence from the United States Government? According to press reports, the planes are 17 months late already. Is that correct?

Airbus has proved that it can make a quality product in the civil sector and that it is capable of the same for the military transport sector. As well as BAe, other firms such as Rolls-Royce and Shorts would be given a secure future.

The ASTOR programme will create several thousand jobs in the north-west—for example, at Raytheon Corporate Jets in Chester. More than 50 companies in the north-west would benefit from the ASTOR programme. In discussions with Raytheon, it seems that the Government have three options—Raytheon, Lockheed Martin or JSTARS, which is already in service with the US air force.

The original competition was between Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. JSTARS should be considered too big, too expensive to run and too old to be brought in. Recently, however, JSTARS was brought back into the competition, which I consider a retrograde step.

Defence firms hate such instability. They are spending millions of pounds on projects lasting many years and requiring the highest technological advances. If the Government are to run a competition, it must be a fair one with clear guidelines, which must be adhered to. There is too much at stake, and a quality product cannot be produced unless suppliers have the stability to develop and deliver it.

Will the Government consider changing the parameters, to ensure that they are clearly restated for the participating firms? Will the Government learn that if they change the parameters, there must be open and clear reasons for doing so? They must be up-front about that.

I shall now deal with munitions supplies. Chorley was once the home of Royal Ordnance, which has been making munitions there since the war. The headquarters remains at Chorley and there are a couple of hundred jobs on site. The ability to manufacture and supply armaments and munitions to our services is surely a key part of our defence procurement. To get rid of that, or to place it with another country, would threaten our ability to defend ourselves.

The previous Government have a lot to answer for. They closed plants throughout the country and left us in our present predicament of open tendering for munitions. Surely the provision of ammunition and the associated capabilities of propellant and high explosives are central to our strategic capabilities.

The responsibility lies with the Government and British Aerospace, as owners of Royal Ordnance, to preserve that capability. The Government should try to buy British first and foremost, rather than inviting tenders from other countries, even if they are allies or friendly states, such as the US, Germany, Italy, South Africa and Belgium.

BAe wants to move to a joint venture between Royal Ordnance and SNPE and GIAT Industries of France. That would effectively move production to France, and we would lose the capability to equip our own armed forces. Our armaments production would be based in central France. We would lose the high-explosive works at Bridgwater, on which we are dependent. To give up our own high explosives would be wrong, and would make us dependent on suppliers around the world.

We would depend on France for everything containing explosives—bombs, warheads, missile propellant and even some small arms and gun propellant. If we lose that capability, we shall never be able to regain it. It is easier to maintain a site on this island than on the European mainland, as history has shown, or as Belgium showed by not supplying arms in time of war.

The French always want to take the HQ of any joint venture to France, and especially to Paris. Most mergers with French firms tend to become takeovers, rather than partnerships. Competition in defence procurement that robs this country of key skills and strips us of a key strategic armament capability cannot be allowed to proceed.

The Government should immediately review their policy of competition in this area. British Aerospace must abandon plans to close the Royal Ordnance plant at Bridgwater. BAe is always ready to knock on the doors of Members and ask for support, yet it is threatening to close a BAe company. It cannot have it both ways. If it wants the support of the House, BAe must keep that plant open. Never mind the blackmail tactics; BAe ought to

be up-front, keep the plant open, and work with the Government, not against the Government when that suits it. BAe should learn that quickly.

How many other NATO countries have abandoned their munitions production capability? Not many—in fact, none that I know of. The local unions at Bridgwater have produced alternatives to BAe's current plans, which maintain viability and independence. The unions should be heeded. Will the Minister consider those plans seriously?

I believe that we all recognise the need for an aircraft carrier: 2010 will soon be upon us and we now have the chance to procure a 40,000-tonne aircraft carrier. That is where the future lies. However, it is crucial that we get it right: there is big money involved. We must produce the right class of carrier. There are many hot spots around the world and we will need to maintain a floating land mass from which to exercise our forces. Offshore protection is particularly important, and it can be provided by a huge floating land mass.

We also have an opportunity to develop a naval version of Eurofighter. We have a wonderful aircraft coming on stream and everyone is talking about joint-strike aircraft. What better time to develop for the next century a naval version of Eurofighter that can work from a big aircraft carrier? A 40-tonne carrier would give us the opportunity to begin a joint-strike fighter programme to meet future carrier-borne aircraft need. That is the direction in which we should move. I hope that the Government will consider my views.

I turn now to the beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile. The choice of the Matra BAe Meteor solution for the Royal Air Force's staff requirement Air 2039, the primary armament for Eurofighter, provides a European solution for that key requirement. It gives an opportunity to provide a common weapon across the Eurofighter nations and a further opportunity to drive forward the consolidation of the missile sector of the European aerospace and defence industry. Matra of BAe Dynamics has already formed a further relationship with Dasa's LFK subsidiary, and the adoption of Meteor will bring France, Germany, Sweden, Italy and Spain into the project.

During the 1996 missile campaign, BAe stressed that it was important for the company to win two or three competitions in order to retain critical mass in key technology areas. Only Storm Shadow was awarded, so Meteor remains vital to the future of the United Kingdom's missile capability and to the retention of long-term jobs at Stevenage and at Lostock, which is about one mile from my constituency.

Ammunition capability in the United Kingdom is dear to the House and to the hearts of all hon. Members. If nothing else, we shall at least generate discussion today about that topic. Procurement is about the future of our armed forces. They deserve the best, and we have a golden opportunity to provide that. Smart procurement by smart Ministers will be the answer.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is strategically important to ensure that work on the Al Yamahma contract, EFA, the Tornado, Hawk and other aircraft production continues in and around my constituency? It is also important to retain research and development skills in that area in order to ensure that we secure alliances with other European countries in the future to produce aircraft such as the European fighter aircraft. We must be able to look forward to whatever will replace EFA in 10, 15 or 20 years' time—we must remember that the EFA was 17 years in the making.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must look now to maintaining Lancashire's existing defence manufacturing capability by ensuring that good orders are given to British companies with interest in the EFA and other defence aircraft, ships and munitions in the next 10 or 15 years? That will enable long-term planning by companies such as British Aerospace, and will secure the future of smaller companies that depend on the existence of those larger firms.

Mr. Hoyle: I welcome the hon. Member's remarks—and I welcome his conversion to Labour's procurement policy. I take on board his comments. We have the research facilities, the skills, and the development in the north-west: it would be madness to move it elsewhere. The Government are planning for the future. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman supports that, and I look forward to his continuing support of the Government's policy. I cannot disagree with a word that the hon. Gentleman said.

9.54 am

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I commend the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) for seeking an Adjournment debate on this important topic, and for the lucid and comprehensive way in which he set out his case. This topic must be approached from several different angles, and I caution the House against treating the defence industries in isolation as an engine of employment. The real importance of the defence industries is their high-technology and research qualities and that aspect of their function that keeps this country at the leading edge of the various technologies associated closely with the defence field. Maintaining those industries as consistent laboratories of research is just as important as retaining them simply as engines of employment, often making products that are either obsolete or obsolescent.

Before I go on, I must congratulate the hon. Gentleman on drawing the attention of the House to the fact that we are divesting ourselves of the capacity to make high explosives in this country. We must put that issue in an historic context and consider the events of the whole century—particularly some of the tremendous debates at the time of Lloyd George's Government, and, to a lesser extent, during the second world war, about the shell shortage and the need to produce bomb, missile and shell warheads. The very idea that, at the end of the century, the House of Commons should submit meekly to the fact that Britain is totally divesting itself of the capacity to make high explosives and delegating it to the French—of all people—is utterly incredible; it literally passes credibility. It is a commentary on the fact that fashion in opinion is everything; no one seems even to have noticed what is happening.

The defence industries are part of the whole defence policy structure which, if it is to be credible, must have input from the Foreign Office, which determines our long-term strategic objectives; from the Department of Trade and Industry, which is concerned about industrial capability and determines what capacities we must retain

[Mr. Alan Clark]

at all costs in this country; and from the Ministry of Defence, which determines security requirements. The hon. Gentleman talked about buying British, and I endorse his remarks completely. However, one problem with competition and with foreign bids is that they never calculate the real costs—such as the costs of paying unemployment benefit in this country, the benefits of direct taxation levied on industrial activity in this country and so on. The costs are too net and they do not take on board the gross accounting. A responsible Government should consider those factors.

But it is no good buying British if the British are not producing what we need. Defence procurement projects develop their own momentum. Hon. Members on both sides of the House, such as the hon. Member for Chorley and my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), become greatly attached to such projects largely because of the employment implications for their constituencies. That is perfectly proper; it is how constituency Members of Parliament should respond to pressures. However, those pressures often become separated from the real consideration: the merit of the weapons involved.

As the hon. Gentleman and the Minister well know, MOD input in defence projects is driven by the Operational Requirements Committee, whose output has a very long gestation period. It comprises largely serving officers—who are often nearing the end of their careers and who are on secondment—and there is a perfunctory, and all too cursory, input from the chief scientific adviser. Broadly speaking, the Operational Requirements Committee conceives of weapons—it is a classic example of commitment to fight the next war with the weapons of the last war. The last war was the cold war, which we won—it was an almost bloodless victory. However, there is a huge time lag in which we become saddled with weapons that were conceived in a totally different context. At some point—I hope that this will be part of the review that the Secretary of State and his team are undertaking—there has to be a major strategic reappraisal of what our military function is meant to be.

As I understand it, the objective of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is that our military capability should carry sufficient weight to merit our place on the Security Council of the United Nations, and, deriving from that, our place on the various other bodies that determine world policy, such as the Group of Seven, and so on. If we are to maintain this, our defence industries and our strategic posture will need a totally different configuration from that still being carried through, which is part of the old cold war configuration. I am in total agreement with the hon. Member for Chorley that, essentially, it has to be naval in its bias. If we are to justify our seat on the Security Council of the UN, we have to be able to take part as primary partners in any intervention or peacekeeping in distant waters, and for that it is essential that we have, for example, a fixed-wing carrier. We have to reconfigure the whole procurement strategy.

I have a series of tables that are absolutely terrifying. They show the amount that has been spent in the past eight years or so on major weapons products. Leaving out the unit costs of purchasing, more than £11 billion has been spent so far simply on aircraft and associated systems. The amount spent on the Navy and on naval procurement is barely 15 per cent. of that. These are simply development costs and the very early stages of conception. The whole naval field has been completely neglected.

The House should remember that, at the time of our naval supremacy, when we really knew how to do it, and when there were a whole range of competing yards around the country, the building of the Dreadnought, which was the very first of its line—a completely revolutionary ship with turbine propulsion and heavy main armament—took exactly a year and a day from laying the keel to completion and commissioning. The tonnage was the same, and in many ways the throw power was the same, as a CVS carrier, whose replacement is a matter that the defence team now have to consider.

I hope that I can enlist the help of my hon. Friends and the hon. Gentleman to support a radical rethink by the Ministry of Defence about how we should restructure our strategic defence capability, and the direction in which we should focus our procurement. If some pain is caused—there may be job losses if we shift from one sector to another—the House has to accept it, providing that we retain at the backs of our minds always the need to keep certain capabilities in this country. I am particularly glad that the hon. Gentleman raised the extraordinary scandal of divesting ourselves of that very core element in our fighting capability—the ability to make high explosive.

10.3 am

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on initiating the debate. It is also a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark). Both my hon. Friend and the right hon. Gentleman spoke with a great deal of common sense.

I take much pleasure from the fact that there is an emerging consensus in the House about Britain's future defence requirements in terms of procurement and our longer-term strategic defence posture. I should point out to the right hon. Gentleman, who spoke very eloquently and with a great deal of knowledge, that, since the election of the Government on 1 May, we in this country are not suddenly divesting ourselves of our ability to procure ammunition. I am sad to say that it is a process for which the previous Government, in which he was a Minister, took a very significant responsibility. That leads me to make a wider point about procurement generally.

In shipbuilding, with which my constituency has a direct interest, the Government have inherited a pattern of defence procurement that worships dogma above common sense. Time after time, artificial competition exercises are manufactured between commercial entities to pursue what we believe to be value for money for the taxpayer. We all understand that value for the taxpayer is very important, but there are other ways of ensuring it than following a doctrine of artificial competition. The Ministry of Defence has evolved a sensible procedure to ensure value for money and state-of-the-art technology from the defence industry without the need to resort to artificial competition exercises.

I hope that the Minister will be able to say that the Government will explore seriously the benefit of widening the scope of the "no acceptable price, no contract"—NAPNOC—procedures. As the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea rightly pointed out, in many areas

of the defence industry there is no effective competition, because of the restructuring of the industry. Hundreds of thousands of defence jobs have been lost in the industry since the early 1980s. If we constantly look to manufacture these competition exercises, we not only increase expenditure for the taxpayer but can delay important procurement decisions unnecessarily and end up with not very good value for money.

I am not saying that in some cases competition and a competitive tendering exercise are not important. I believe that they are. However, we should approach all the issues in defence procurement from the standpoint of common sense. I hope that, in some cases, common sense will lead us to conclude that, by developing the NAPNOC procedures—this particularly applies to shipbuilding—we can get better value for money and develop a more coherent relationship with the defence industry, which needs firm guidance from the Government about their long-term procurement requirements.

That is why I endorse the right hon. Gentleman's implicit welcome of the Government's strategic defence review, which will be important not only for putting our defence forces on to a proper basis to meet some of the very difficult threats and challenges that we will face in the next century, but will help the defence industry to wake up to the challenges. The review will require the defence industry to negotiate with the Government over a longer term, and with more certainty and confidence, about their future procurement requirements.

One lesson that we all learned in the 1980s and 1990s is that, with the best will in the world, it is impossible for the defence industry to survive on a diet of hot air and promises. People have to make things. As the right hon. Gentleman made clear, we cannot use the defence procurement budget simply to manufacture jobs. We all understand that. It has to be for a purpose.

Often, the attitude and stance of the previous Government made it very difficult for companies to plan over the long term, which is the basis on which all successful companies have to operate. The constantly changing agenda, delays in procurement and ineffective management of the budget all contributed to a very serious state of affairs for Britain's defence industries.

I also welcome my hon. Friend's surprising support for aircraft carriers. Although I had not expected him to mention them, I am delighted that he did. When we talk about Britain's future defence requirements, it is important that we recognise the central role of the Royal Navy. I also welcome what the right hon. Gentleman said about that. The figures that he quoted were significant. I used them in debates in the previous Parliament. Defence spending over the past 15 to 20 years has largely been at the expense of the Royal Navy, notwithstanding the rundown of the Trident programme. It is clear that the Royal Navy has borne the brunt of many of the reductions in defence spending in the past 15 to 20 years. That is a serious mistake.

I do not have any illusions of imperial grandeur, but I want Britain to pull its weight in the international community. We should support the United Nations properly and effectively when required. If we are to do that, we must have the ability to project force around the world, not threateningly—I am not arguing for that—but to support our international allies and to protect our allies around the world.

Amphibiosity is important. In my constituency, the first deal is now being cut for the new assault landing ships for the Royal Marines. That is a very welcome procurement. For amphibious forces to be effectively and safely deplored around the world, they will undeniably require aircraft protection. We will not always be able to rely on protection from land-based allies: we may be able to do so in some operations, but not in others. We would jeopardise the safety of any deployment if we proceeded without the effective provision of air cover. Some people may argue that our allies could provide that, and of course the United States navy has a significant carrier force. However, with the benefit of hindsight and prudence, it would be a mistake to assume that that cover will always be available.

That leads me to conclude that we should consider a replacement for Invincible class aircraft carriers. That is what my hon. Friend has concluded, and I hope that it is what other hon. Members will conclude. My hon. Friend referred to a carrier capable of carrying 40 aircraft. That is probably what we should be considering. The Invincible class, which carries a maximum of nine Harriers, is not really designed to perform a full air cover operation to protect amphibious landings. That is probably the most expensive decision that the Government will have to make as part of the strategic defence review: it is one of the key strategic challenges.

We can argue the toss about whether it should be a vertical, short take-off or more conventional, assisted take-off and landing aircraft carrier. Those operational considerations are largely secondary to the important strategic issue of whether we want British forces to be able to deploy safely and effectively around the world. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain the Government's view on those important issues.

I broadly welcome the Government's commitment to the establishment of a proper policy for defence diversification. We argued in the previous Parliament that the then Government had a special responsibility to the defence industry, given that they were essentially its only customer, and that they should give the industry practical help to cope with the significant downturn in defence spending.

That was not an appeal for an interventionist industrial policy based on some ancient dogma: far from it. It was a matter of common sense, because the defence industry was one of the few areas in which British companies had a leading edge, a technological advantage, a proven record of innovation, markets abroad and a reputation abroad that was second to none. I am afraid that there are few such sectors left in British industry. We felt that the defence industry was not properly supported and was not being allowed to make the necessary adjustments in an era of significant reductions in defence spending, which fell by a third under the previous Administration.

This Government's commitment to consult industries and others about the establishment of a defence diversification agency is welcome. I do not believe that it is a panacea, or that an agency on its own will be able fully to compensate for the job losses, because hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost already due to the previous Administration's neglect. In my constituency, 10,000 jobs have been lost in the VSEL shipyard in Barrow-in-Furness since 1990.

[Mr. John Hutton]

However, evidence from successful practice in other countries shows that a defence diversification agency can help defence companies and others in a community affected by defence job losses to explore the best practical use of technology transfer initiatives. Some of the leading edge innovation in research and development that defence companies have undertaken can be transferred. We should explore the potential for commercial exploitation of those designs in the civil markets.

That will not be easy: I am not making false claims about what a defence diversification agency can do. However, it is completely unacceptable for a Government, who are the industry's only significant customer, to say to defence companies after years of an exclusive commercial relationship, "We're sorry, you're on your own now. We've decided to go elsewhere, and we're no longer interested in what happens to you." That is an unacceptable abdication of responsibility. I am delighted that this Government have broken with that neglect, and have taken a practical approach to diversification issues.

I made a plea earlier in this Parliament for a defence diversification agency to be based in my constituency. I know that the Minister will not be able to say anything about that matter today, but, with respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley, my constituency is the most defence-dependent area in the United Kingdom. We look to the Government not only to make early progress on the establishment of an agency, but to give favourable consideration to putting it in my constituency.

With the strategic defence review, we have a unique opportunity to put the Government's relationship with the defence industry on a secure basis for the future. Clarity of objectives is crucial, so that we know exactly where the Government want to take us. The defence industry needs clarity and clear direction to be able to make the necessary plans for the future. The strategic defence review is overdue, and it is welcome in my constituency and elsewhere. I hope that the Minister will say a little more about the progress that is being made and about what we can expect from the review in the future.

10.16 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words on a constituency matter. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing the debate. Two points that he made stand out and fit very well with the comments that I want to make.

First, I agree with him that we should support British defence jobs. I also agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) that that does not mean that we should buy equipment that is of no use to our armed forces. However, if the armed forces desperately need equipment, and there is a British product of the highest quality that is better than anything else in the world, we should seek to procure it. That is a wide-ranging issue. There is a wide definition of what constitutes defence equipment. It embraces the aircraft on which pilots in our armed forces learn how to fly. It may look like an aircraft that we could fly at Blackbushe airport, but it is military equipment.

The other point that the hon. Gentleman made was that air superiority has been paramount in recent armed conflicts, of which we have had experience. It is important for us to have the best fighter and combat aircraft. I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said about the European fighter aircraft: I have generally supported that project. It goes without saying that air superiority requires our pilots to have the best possible training. I have two interests in that. During my first 10 years in the House, the RAF base at Linton-on-Ouse was in my constituency. The initial jet pilot training for the Royal Air Force is now carried out there. Sadly, I lost Linton-on-Ouse to the Vale of York. None the less, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the tremendous work that is done there. It is the only major flight training school that we have, so it is important that it continues.

About two or three years ago, I took a small aircraft manufacturer in my constituency, Slingsby Aviation, to see the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, Mr. Roger Freeman. We put to him the proposition that it would make sense financially for the RAF to scrap the Bulldog aircraft, which is used by the University Air Squadron, when it came up for its midlife refit, and to replace it with the Firefly aircraft, which already serves 11 air forces throughout the world. In addition, our armed forces had already acquired about 17 and were about to acquire a further 25 for the joint elementary flight training scheme. We suggested that the Firefly was a better aircraft and that better value for money would be obtained if it replaced the Bulldog. I should add that it is manufactured by Slingsby Aviation in Kirkbymoorside in my constituency and that it has proved to be successful.

It is a matter of record that a review was undertaken, and a decision was made to scrap the Bulldog and to replace it with a new aircraft. However, as the hon. Members for Chorley and for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) have said, the system by which aircraft are procured is crazy. We go through this charade of competitive bids. The Ministry of Defence buys nothing. It asks a contractor to supply aircraft for so many flying hours. It does not say which aircraft it prefers and we get into a downward spiral of bids, underbids and further underbids: achieving best value for money for the taxpayer seems to be the only criteria that really matters. Perhaps I exaggerate, but the fact is that, a year ago, it looked as though a decision on which aircraft would replace the Bulldog would be made within a matter of months, and here we are a year later and no final decision has been taken.

As the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will know, the evidence that we are able to deduce from the confidential competitive bidding system is that two aircraft have been proposed by the two contractors who have bid for the contract. One is the Firefly and the other is a German aircraft manufactured by Grob, which is to use a factory that, I understand, currently has no work and is empty. There have been suggestions and innuendo that Grob has benefited from some hidden subsidy. I do not know. I do not make that allegation. I simply want to say this to the Under-Secretary of State for Defence.

Over the past year or so, the armed forces have taken delivery through FRA Serco Hunting of 25 Firefly 260 aircraft. They fly 90 sorties a day through the joint elementary flight training scheme and we understand that the aircraft is proving extremely reliable and an excellent elementary flight training aircraft for military pilots.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Is my hon. Friend aware that, last Monday, I had the opportunity of flying

the aeroplane at Farnborough? As a former University Air Squadron pilot, I am the sort of chap who will be flying the Firefly. It is an extremely good aeroplane. It is not viceless, but it is important that an aeroplane that is used for elementary flight training should give the student pilot the opportunity to understand that an aeroplane can, in some circumstances, be vicious.

Mr. Greenway: I was aware of that and I am grateful to my hon. Friend and other Members for their support.

The aircraft speaks for itself. Our armed forces' experience of the aircraft suggests that there is no reason why it should not replace the Bulldog.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the RAF is also happy with the Firefly? It has a proven record in the United States and it will support British industry and jobs. That is why the Minister should support the aircraft.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. He mentioned the fact that the United States air force bought more than 100 Fireflys five years ago, for which the company involved won the Queen's award for exports. There have been three fatalities involving the aircraft in the United States, but I understand that every one was due to a lack of proper training by the flight instructors at one air base in the United States. Where the flight instructors have been properly trained, the aircraft has proved entirely satisfactory, so no one should suggest that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the Firefly. It is proving to be an excellent aircraft in our armed forces.

There is also the jobs factor. Already Slingsby Aviation has had to lay off staff because of a lack of orders. This is a niche market. It stands to reason that air forces throughout the world will buy these aircraft only from time to time. As I have said, Slingsby Aviation has supplied to 11 other countries and there are potential orders in the middle east, but, not surprisingly, countries there are looking with interest to see what our Government do. If the RAF does not invest its confidence in the Firefly aircraft and place an order for the 60 that are needed through one of the two contractors, all under the private finance initiative, those countries are bound to ask: why should we? That is an important point.

I do not want to press the Under-Secretary of State for Defence too hard because Ministers both in the previous Government and in this Government have understood the job implications of the decision, but I want him to be in no doubt that, this week, Slingsby Aviation has announced a further 20 redundancies. If the decision is not in its favour, I guess that, within two months, a further 42 staff will be made redundant. That will mean that all the people that Slingsby Aviation needs to build the aircraft will have been sacked.

That is the key point that the hon. Member for Chorley made. We have to protect our capability. Whether it is in building and manufacturing armaments that are occasionally needed by our armed forces in conflicts throughout the world, or the basic equipment with which we train our pilots, the argument is precisely the same.

I hope that Ministers will take control of the situation and intervene. Let us have an early announcement in favour of Firefly because, if we do not, the factory, which has built an aircraft that is in service throughout the world, including the United States of America, will close and the capability will be lost. And for what? We might save a few pounds in the initial contracts, but I suspect that, over 25 years, the alternative would prove more expensive, not least because the Firefly is compatible with the joint elementary flight training scheme: it is used for all the elementary pilots trained in this country. That surely speaks for itself. I urge the Under-Secretary of State for Defence to take note of what I have said and to make an early decision in favour of Slingsby Aviation.

10.28 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on seeking and on being successful in obtaining the debate, which is on an important sector of the British export industry. I note with care not only what he said about Royal Ordnance, but his wise words about keeping peace around the world.

It would help us to debate this whole issue more deeply if we could strip away the secrecy from the strategic defence review. For example, it would help if we could hear a little more about the foreign policy base lines because, until we do, we cannot begin to speculate on the future of amphibious capabilities, anti-submarine weapons, warfare tanks, regimental systems or anything else. I know that the Minister wants consensus and I dare say that that would be a very good thing, but we cannot go that far until we know what is going on in his mind. It is good to see him here again for another debate on this important issue. I am sorry that he could not fit in a visit to the IMDEX naval exhibition at Greenwich where many British shipbuilders were exhibiting—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I must correct the hon. Gentleman. I did attend the exhibition and visited a number of stands.

Mr. Key: I am grateful for that information. Many people in the industry were not aware that the Minister had been there, and I was going to say that I know he has a tight schedule. I wanted to echo his colleagues who said that we must ensure that naval interests are not neglected. Thousands of companies which are members of the Defence Manufacturers Association and the Society of British Aerospace Companies keep hon. Members very well informed on these issues. They keep an eagle eye on what we do and say in the House, and rightly so.

Let us not forget that the industry is crucial, employing 415,000 people and generating more than £5.5 billion worth of exports. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) rightly said, we all have constituency interests in employment in defence, but that must not be the driving force. However, I pay tribute to the skills and experience of our world-beating British defence work force, to the scientists and engineers and to all the other staff behind them. It is easy to forget all those who make the industry tick, at whatever level they may serve. They have all created and assured the UK's dominant position in world markets. Their success is of direct benefit to the UK economy as a whole and to Britain's defence budget and defence capability.

What exactly is the Government's policy towards such a strategically and economically important section of British industry? I am concerned that there is a lacuna at

[Mr. Key]

the moment. I noticed that a degree of complacency was beginning to creep into this excellent debate. We will not be doing the defence industry a favour if our speeches become nothing but self-congratulatory eulogies.

The Foreign Secretary announced in a blaze of publicity the existence of what he claims to be a new ethical foreign policy which would result in tougher guidelines on the export of defence equipment. I remind the House that the UK has had an ethical foreign policy for 50 years, since the United Kingdom signed up to article 51 of the United Nations charter—and for many years before that, for that matter. The Foreign Secretary's announcement was a relaunch, to put it charitably.

By October, however, the Foreign Secretary was being told by the Prime Minister to lay off arms sales. I welcome the fact that the Labour party is coming to understand the importance of defence exports, but are the Government going to offer any recompense to companies that have lost orders or had their reputations damaged as a result of the delay in the issuing of export licences? An industry survey last month repeatedly found that there were still enormous delays in the processing of open individual export licences, applications and renewals as a result of the

"ludicrous over-bureaucratic requirements for end-user statements."

The situation has worsened noticeably in recent months, with desk officers rejecting end-user statements on grounds that the industry regards as farcical.

In case the Minister should think that I am a recent convert to these arguments, I must say that I am not. I have been pressing the issue for some time, including with my colleagues in the previous Government. I ask the Minister to consider what I said on 14 October 1996 in the debate on the defence estimates. I said:

"Subject to the usual inspection and audit, and to severe penalties, there could be a self-licensing system for some exports. A grading system could be introduced in which grade A would involve the sale of non-offensive products to non-offensive countries, such as smoke grenades to Norway, Denmark or Canada; grade B would involve offensive products to non-offensive countries, such as high explosives to NATO countries; and grade C would embrace the sale of offensive products to special countries, which would require special treatment. In none of those cases would licences be granted to prohibited countries such as Iraq or Iran."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c.542.]

It is time for another look at the matter. The Department of Trade and Industry claims to have been examining it for years, but nothing ever seems to get as far as Ministers' desks—it is time that it did. I hope that the Government will implement the Defence Manufacturers Association's suggestion that a standard end-user form should be introduced.

I hope that the Minister will pass on this information to the Foreign Secretary who amazed us on 25 November when he said in the House that he was not aware of any delay in the processing of export licences. On 28 October, the Minister warmly offered a generous apology to the House and to me because he had not heard about the increasing delays in export licensing. I understand that things are getting better, and I am delighted to hear it. However, a month later the Foreign Secretary had still not heard about the delay, although we are told that there is a foreign policy-led review. I also hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that additional manpower has been deployed to support the export licensing process.

We do not believe that the defence diversification agency is as necessary as the Government think it is. If it is to have any hope of success, the Secretary of State for Defence and the President of the Board of Trade will have to collaborate much more closely than they have been doing. It is important that we know—I should be grateful if the Minister could let us in on this—whether the Department of Trade and Industry has had a significant input into the strategic defence review. Has it submitted proposals? If so, how will they affect the defence industry.

It is tremendously important that we do not erode the defence science base in this country. I understand the concern felt by hon. Members of all parties who appreciate the need for the greatest technology to be moved into the civil sector as well the defence sector, but we must remember why that science and technology has been developed in the first place.

Our defence industry is being forced by the Government to ride out a period of unprecedented uncertainty. It started on 1 May and will not end until the Government reveal the results of the strategic defence review. In a written answer on 10 July, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces stated that

"procurement plans will . . . be considered as part of the Review, including projects already on contract."—[*Official Report*, 10 July 1997; Vol. 297, c.*531*.]

Where does that leave the companies that are considering laying down expensive production equipment? Are they to go ahead and see their project cancelled, or wait, and thus delay the in-service date of essential equipment which, as we know, is one of the major nightmares of the industry? Does the Minister believe that the payment of cancellation costs is an appropriate use of taxpayers' money? Would those cancellation costs come out of the defence budget or out of the contingency reserve of the Treasury? These are the questions being asked by the industry.

In addition, defence companies, like British industry as a whole, are labouring under the difficulties caused by the Chancellor's mishandling of the economy. The strong pound and rising interest rates make British exports more expensive to foreign purchasers, and our competitors reap the benefits. The changes announced to company taxation by the Chancellor in his pre-Budget statement last week also had a detrimental effect on financial planning and project management in the defence industry.

During the change-over period in the method of payment of corporation tax, British industry will have to pay £2 billion more in taxation. Defence companies in particular have long lead times on projects and large capital expenditure on equipment, an investment which in some cases is not repaid for a decade or more.

The Chancellor has shown what he thinks of the defence industry by switching funds from defence and nuclear programmes to other Labour ideological idols—all this before even stage 1 of the strategic defence review has been published. The Secretary of State for Defence has capitulated to the Treasury by admitting that

"we cannot realistically expect more funds for defence".

That leads one to question why the Government are holding a defence review at all if they have already decided that defence will not benefit from the comprehensive spending review.

The Minister without Portfolio said on "Question Time" recently that while the Government would stick to Conservative spending plans, they would be moving funds

from Department to Department—perhaps from vital national security programmes to his dome. Bearing in mind the fact that the Chancellor has already shown that defence is not one of his priorities, should we expect the Government to continue raiding the defence budget, as they did recently under the guise of a "fine" to pay for the Chancellor's 10p tax band? We then had "smart procurement", which I fear is another soundbite policy. I do hope, however, that the newly created National Defence Industries Council will facilitate new dialogue and not merely be another talking shop.

I realise that the important element of the new policy is to encourage further European collaboration on defence projects. Conservative Members fully support policies that will lead to more cost-effective defence products, but I am concerned that such a policy could result in a "buy European at any cost" policy and the erection of a fortress Europe in defence procurement. Have the Government taken note of the comments made by Terry Dambusch, the United States ambassador to the Netherlands, at a recent defence exhibition there? He expressed concern that the formation of a western European armaments organisation and the Organisme Conjoint de Co-opération en matiere d'Armamént signal the beginnings of projectionist national preference rules.

The result of such a policy would surely be to encourage isolationist sentiment on Capitol hill and damage attempts by United States companies, such as Lockheed Martin—a company with much investment in this country—to ease the American military's policy of buy American. A transatlantic defence trade war would put at risk international defence procurement partnerships, and it would result in higher prices for military equipment world wide and a lack of UK access to US technology.

We should therefore strive to include rather than exclude United States defence companies from the European defence market, especially when the United Kingdom is trying to become involved with the joint strike fighter project.

We should always try to involve potential partners at an early stage in the development cycle. International co-operation can be successful only if it is begun at the developmental phase. Too often, co-operation begun after that phase will generally result, as all hon. Members know, in a product that is delayed, expensive and unable to meet all operational requirements.

As we end this year, I look forward to the Government ending uncertainty in the defence industry by drawing their strategic defence review to a rapid conclusion and by promoting genuine international co-operation within that global industry. The United Kingdom defence industry is a great one. There is great support for it on both sides of the House, and I look forward to many more debates on the subject. The time is coming, however, when the Government will have to give some answers.

10.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing this debate and on his vigorously presented case on behalf of the defence industry and its employees, especially those involved in the Eurofighter and future large aircraft programmes and the aerospace industry.

As the United Kingdom industry's biggest single customer, my Department is acutely aware of how important our decisions are to our suppliers. As the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) rightly pointed out, the prime responsibility of the Ministry of Defence is to obtain equipment that is fit for its purpose at a proper price and is suitable for the operations of our armed forces. We must also be mindful, however, of the impact on industry and of industry's future ability to supply our forces. It is for that reason that we have instigated the widest possible consultation process with defence industry employers and trade unions, ensuring that they are fully aware of our needs, and we of theirs.

We are similarly very conscious of the fact that the British defence industry has to operate and be competitive in a contracting international marketplace, which is now dominated by vast American defence conglomerates.

Let us, however, be clear about the matter. Despite the reductions that the industry has faced, defence is still very big business. Nationally, the defence industry involves 11,000 companies that employ well over 400,000 people, which is 10 per cent. of the UK's industrial manufacturing work force. The industry exports some 30 per cent. of its total output. In 1996, it won more than 25 per cent. of the world market for defence orders, which was second only to the United States. That is a proud record of British achievement.

I very much took on board the points made by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and welcome his comments about improvements in the licensing system. The Government certainly understand companies' concerns. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry outlined in her written answer of 25 November 1997, every effort is being made to reduce the processing time involved in considering export licence applications. We are not being complacent about the matter, and we are in regular contact with industry to ensure that further progress is made and that British industry is not disadvantaged.

In the north-west, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley keeps reminding me, the defence industry is extremely important. It supports directly or indirectly about 70,000 manufacturing jobs, involving an estimated 600 companies. Although we rightly acknowledge the importance of prime contractors such as British Aerospace, with its major presence in the north-west, we must also stress the key role of the many subcontractors, many of whom are world leaders in their field.

Nevertheless, the big contracts are also extremely important. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley, I am delighted that, last week, the German Bundestag approved funding for Eurofighter production. The project will, of course, be an immense benefit to the UK defence industry, particularly in the north-west.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I very much welcome confirmation of the Eurofighter order. I wonder, however, whether my hon. Friend the Minister will be prepared to make a few comments about the links between the civil and military sides of much of the defence industry? In my constituency, for example, Leyland trucks—which is perceived as a civil manufacturer—produces military trucks and is partly dependent on defence orders. In British Aerospace, the links between the civil side—for example, vis-à-vis Airbus and the FLA—and the military side are also very important. Decisions made by the Ministry of Defence therefore have

[Mr. David Borrow]

important consequences for non-military industry. Those links, and the links between the MOD and the DTI should be emphasised in this debate.

Mr. Spellar: I thank my hon. Friend not only for his intervention but for the strong interest that he has taken in the subject since being elected to the House and for the strong way in which he has championed the industry. He is absolutely right that maintenance of the industrial base and supply chain and the interaction between the civil and military sides of many of those companies is an important feature of the defence industry. We are mindful of that feature, and we certainly take it into account in our deliberations—not least those on the strategic defence review.

In the more general context of the SDR, the House will be aware that, in May, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that we would be implementing an SDR—the major reappraisal mentioned by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea. I tell the hon. Member for Salisbury that, in the past few months, the Secretary of State has made keynote addresses—not least that at the Royal United Services Institute—that have clearly indicated the directions in which policy is going. I think that most hon. Members have welcomed such indications.

I hope that my hon. Friends are in no doubt about the importance that the Government attach, in the context of the strategic defence review, to improvements to our procurement processes.

In the defence policy debate, on 28 October 1997, I listed the goal of the smart procurement element of the review. We want faster, cheaper and better defence procurement through development of a range of modern, streamlined procurement techniques. Achieving our goal will allow us not only to keep up with technology but to work in a more integrated way with industry, to meet the requirements of modern armed forces.

As our work has proceeded, it has become very clear that we have to take a wide-ranging view of defence procurement. Procurement is not only about the way in which contracts are placed, but about the way in which requirements for equipment are drawn up, the way in which technology is harnessed, and the way in which the problems of maintaining equipment during its life are addressed.

We are examining how the MOD's procurement policies work, and I very much take on board the point made by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea about the need for interaction with the operational requirements side of the business. We must also, however, specifically tie in our policies with the part that industry has to play. A vital component of that work will be to re-examine the way in which the MOD and industry can work together to secure value for money and to ensure timely delivery of world-class equipment for our armed forces.

On 13 November 1997, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a further extension of that work, to examine more fundamentally the organisational structures supporting the totality of the procurement cycle, in which we are again working closely with industry. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Salisbury about the active role played by the National Defence Industries Council in the process. We will examine the smart procurement partnership—a section of the review that I am overseeing. That is further proof, if any were needed, of our recognition, in government as well as in opposition, of the benefits to the UK of a strong, capable and competitive defence industry. Ours is a commitment to deliver measurable improvements to our procurement performance and value for money to the customer, the armed forces and the taxpayer.

The key theme that is emerging is that, without in any way relaxing the necessary, tight commercial discipline of the relationship between the MOD and industry, there is a need to work together in a more systematic and integrated fashion. We need to see ourselves as partners, each with a stake in undertaking procurement better. The work that we have put in place will examine not only the roles that all relevant parts of the MOD play but the contribution that industry can make. I take the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) in that respect. It is essential that full account is taken of best practice across the international scene in industry and other procurement organisations.

This new and constructive relationship marks a step change in the way in which the MOD and industry work together, and will make an important contribution to tackling our procurement problems. As hon. Members have mentioned, it will enable industry to plan better on the basis of a more transparent approach and make a more long-term response.

Industry, for its part, has stated that, on the basis of such an approach, it can deliver considerable improvements in the cost of projects, especially in that vexed problem of the time scale required for bringing equipment into service. We shall work together to achieve the means of putting that commitment into practice. It is an ambitious agenda, but it underlines our determination to tackle hard problems in the strategic defence review.

I turn to industrial restructuring, which is in many ways at the heart of this debate. When winding up the defence policy debate on 28 October, I said:

> "On the future of the UK defence industry in the global marketplace, one of the policy principles underpinning the strategic defence review is the Government's commitment—previously made in opposition—to a strong, capable and competitive UK defence industry."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1997; Vol. 299, c. 806.]

A strong and capable defence industry is very important to the nation and our economy. Not only does it help to meet the nation's defence needs, but it employs hundreds of thousands of people, has a healthy trade surplus, as I have mentioned, and provides the sort of highly skilled, high-technology jobs that we want to encourage and which are the key to the Government's commitment to rebuild Britain's manufacturing base. The industry also has a commendable record of training at all levels.

We must widen the focus of the debate to consider the defence market in a broader context than just the United Kingdom. That has to an extent been forced on us by the creation in the United States of the defence giants, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, McDonnell Douglas and Raytheon Hughes. It is also a natural progression, as collaborative projects become much more common and technological demands of such projects increase. Europe needs internationally competitive companies to enable us to compete and collaborate with the American giants.

The Government have a legitimate interest in the future of the defence industry. As its principal customers, the decisions that we make inevitably have a considerable impact in shaping the marketplace in which the industries and companies operate. The failure to acknowledge that was one of the core weaknesses of the previous Administration's procurement policy.

We also recognise the evolution in the industry and the need to diversify. That was strongly brought out by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness, who went on to bid for the headquarters of the defence diversification agency to be sited in his constituency. I shall put that bid with the considerable number of others that I have received on each occasion that I have spoken about the agency. My hon. Friend made a strong point about Barrow's commitment to the defence industry and its strong reliance on it.

We said on diversification in our manifesto:

"We support a strong UK defence industry, which is a strategic part of our industrial base as well as our defence effort. We believe that part of its expertise can be extended to civilian use through a defence diversification agency."

In meeting the needs of our armed forces, the MOD has made a substantial and significant investment in advanced technology. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) represents a considerable number of personnel who have been involved in such investment through the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I thank the Minister for his comments. In considering the diversification agency, will he acknowledge that the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency is already very conscious that it is the possessor of much valuable technology that has application in the civilian field and that it is working extremely hard and producing results? In a sense, would not the defence diversification agency replicate what the DERA is already doing?

Mr. Spellar: I do not wish to pre-empt the outcome of the Green Paper on the defence diversification agency. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have already acknowledged the considerable role played by DERA and our intention to build in best practice in our application of the defence diversification agency. This is about applying the fruits of investment and technology in the civil sector of the industry, spreading the technological processes and skills that have been developed for defence into new civil markets, which can strengthen the industrial base—and, indeed, the defence industrial base—as well as contribute to Britain's improved economic performance.

The Government are obviously alert to the problems associated with broader restructuring. We want the process of restructuring to continue. After all, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said:

"Europe's defence industry must rationalise or die."

The shape of any restructured industry is a commercial decision for companies, but the role that the Government can and will play is to establish the necessary international framework and agreements to facilitate change. We can and will continue to establish a clear policy framework in which industry can make sensible decisions on how to restructure.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley is aware, collaboration between nations on major procurement projects, such as Eurofighter and the future large aircraft, will become increasingly important. In future, and in order to facilitate such collaborative projects, OCCAR—I am delighted that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) pronounced it in full, which spares me from doing so—the four-nation armament structure created by France, Germany, Italy and the UK, will offer a real opportunity to realise the long-term benefits of collaborative projects through improved management. We look forward to the excellent work that it will be undertaking.

Obviously and rightly, due to the interests in the north-west, my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley stressed the position on Eurofighter. The Government remain firmly committed to the Eurofighter programme and have made that position clear on a number of occasions in the House and elsewhere both before and since the election. I certainly recall the Adjournment debate that my hon. Friend secured in July, in which we said that Eurofighter would form the primary component of the RAF's fighting capability. We are all pleased to have heard the good news from Bonn last week that the Bundestag voted for the eurofighter programme. That positive development means that Germany is committed to future phases of the programme. We are now consulting our colleagues in Germany, Italy and Spain with the aim of signing the intergovernmental arrangements known as the memoranda of understanding for the production and in-service support phases of the programme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley mentioned the future large aircraft. As he knows, the Secretary of State announced on 31 July that we would join our partners in issuing a "request for proposals" to Airbus military company for the future large aircraft. Although the Airbus military company has not yet been formally incorporated, the request for proposals was issued on a provisional basis to the potential partner companies on 4 September. I should however stress that neither the UK nor any of its partners is at this stage committed to a purchase. Indeed, our decision in July made clear the need to maintain competitive pressures in order to ensure best value for money. The companies involved—Airbus and British Aerospace, which are world class and regularly compete successfully in the civil market—have a clear opportunity with the FLA to show that they can develop a world-class contender for the military market.

The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) mentioned the Bulldog replacement programme. He rightly pointed out that we are not buying new aircraft and plan instead to buy flying hours from a contractor. The contractor will provide the aircraft and be entirely responsible for maintenance and a range of other support services. As the hon. Member rightly said, the aircraft being considered are two variants of the Slingsby Aviation Firefly and the German Grob. The Firefly is a good aircraft. Slingsby Aviation has exported it to several countries, including the United States. The Ministry of Defence is strongly supporting those export efforts. The RAF is familiar with the Firefly, which is used by the joint elementary flying training squadron. The final decision has not yet been made, but I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley that the points that he has raised will be taken into account. I shall have to write to hon. Members about the points that have been raised about Royal Ordnance. Those considerations are part of our deliberations.

[Mr. Spellar]

I assure my hon. Friend and the House that the Government are committed to a strong, capable defence industry. Tomorrow's defence industry will be different from today's, but we are convinced that our world-class industries and their employees will be equal to the changes that they face. The Government will be backing them.

Inward Investment Policy

11 am

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): This subject covers a wide canvas. I shall concentrate on the real concerns of many people in Scotland that the Government's plans amount to the sabotage of the most effective inward investment agency in Europe. They are a betrayal of the spirit of the devolution process. I hope that that is an unwitting move by the Department of Trade and Industry. Perhaps the Minister will be able to put at rest some of our real concerns about the trend of events and the Department's plans on inward investment.

The starting point should be the existing arrangements. Some remarks on inward investment in recent months have suggested that there are no arrangements to cover competitive inward investment across the United Kingdom. That is not the case. Rules are in place to prevent the poaching of jobs from one nation or region of the UK and moving them to another. If an inward investor does not have a preferred site in the UK, the industrial development unit in the Department of Trade and Industry reviews the case and sets the level of regional selective assistance available for whatever part of the UK becomes the preferred site.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I should like to develop my points before I give way. I shall be fascinated to hear the Conservative party's position on this, as it seems to be going through a phase of development. The hon. Gentleman will have a chance later.

The only flexibility available to local bodies is in the package of site preparation, training and after care. There are European Union limits on the total value of any inward investment package offered. If those rules are broken, as has been alleged, the Treasury and the National Audit Office have the power to investigate, to monitor abuses and to do something about it. My first question for the Minister is whether she believes that the present rules are not working. If she does, what evidence is there and what have the Government done about those supposed breaches?

If an inward investor has no other preferred sites, the local agency, such as Locate in Scotland, acts directly with that investor, with the approval of the Government. There are strict financial limits to ensure that excessive grant packages are not offered.

I shall quote several authorities on the issue to show the range of concern in Scotland. The first is Neil Hood, a former director of Locate in Scotland. He pointed out the current situation in *The Herald* on 20 November:

"In effect the distinctive competence of bodies such as Locate in Scotland is less in differential financial assistance than in customer care and attention; effective co-ordination of resources; and high levels of after care for existing investors whose expansion projects now account for some 60 per cent. of total inward investment."

There is a concern that the concordat will restrict the independence and the ability of Locate in Scotland to do its job. What is wrong with the existing arrangements? Allegations have been made against Locate in Scotland by Sir George Russell, chairman of the Northern Development Company, also known as the chairman of Camelot, who was appointed by the Tories in 1995.

Sir George has accused Locate in Scotland of attempting to poach Interconnections Systems from Tyneside, saying that it was offered large sums to move its head office and other operations to Scotland.

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, who is present today, has denied the allegations and described them as "black propaganda" and has published transcripts of the dealings with the company to set the record straight. The second question for the Minister is whether she accepts her colleague's version of events or the version put forward by Sir George Russell.

There seemed to be a large streak of envy running through Sir George's evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee. Perhaps Sir George should understand that inward investment is not a lottery. It is a reward for those with the techniques and ability to seek out investors and to do the job properly. There is no licence to print money. Inward investment is a competitive environment, unlike the monopoly that Camelot enjoys. If the Scottish Office is correct in saying that Sir George's allegations are no more than "black propaganda", why has he, as a public official, not been censored by the Government? Why has he not been brought to book? Has the Minister had any conversations with Sir George, in the light of his evidence to the Select Committee, to ask him to mend his ways and not make unsubstantiated allegations against other inward investment agencies?

Other unsubstantiated allegations have been made. Given that Locate in Scotland attracts 20 per cent. of the investment coming into the United Kingdom, we must ask whether the allegations represent envy of Locate in Scotland's success and its ability to produce packages to encourage investment. Would it not be better if those in the various agencies in the north of England examined how to build organisations in their area with the same expertise and ability as Locate in Scotland? Government thinking appears to be to drag down Locate in Scotland's ability, autonomy and success.

I should like to examine the arrangements in the concordat between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish executive and its Welsh equivalent. I do not understand how a concordat, which was suggested in the devolution White Paper, can come into place before the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. The bodies involved have to come into being before the arrangements can be agreed. If the arrangement is to be imposed on the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, it is not a concordat, but a diktat. There cannot be negotiations to produce an agreement before one of the parties to that agreement exists. My third question is how it can be in the spirit of the devolution White Paper to have an arrangement between the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the DTI before the bodies have come into existence. Is there not a risk of the concordat neutering the effectiveness of Locate in Scotland?

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): The people of the west of Scotland want to ensure that the autonomy of Locate in Scotland is not diminished. I remind the hon. Gentleman that my constituency has benefited enormously from inward investment. The two biggest employers are National Semiconductors and IBM. The latter came to Greenock through the exertions of the Labour Member of Parliament, Hector McNeil.

Mr. Salmond: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern. It might be argued that my constituency is less directly concerned, because it depends, not so much on inward investment, as on resource-based industries, such as oil and fishing. However, in many constituencies in Scotland, inward investment is a very important part of the economic structure. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will also be concerned when he reads the concordat, two sections of which—10 and 12—cause me great concern about whether the autonomy and success of Locate in Scotland in his constituency and elsewhere can be repeated.

Section 10 of the concordat reads:

"national co-ordination of the promotion of the UK to foreign investors will be maintained and will continue to be the responsibility of the UK Government."

Is that really in the spirit of the devolution White Paper? It stated that

"inward investment including the functions of Locate in Scotland"

was a devolved matter for the Parliament to legislate on. There seems to be a direct contradiction between whether the United Kingdom will be marketed internationally as a single entity, presumably by the Invest in Britain bureau, and whether the ability of Locate in Scotland to identify specific investments and attract them to Scotland will be maintained.

Perhaps even more seriously, section 12 of the concordat seems to introduce binding cash limits across the United Kingdom, extending the present controls from regional selective assistance to include all elements of the financial package on offer, including site preparation, training deals and after care—in which Locate in Scotland specialises and is the reason for much of its success. Will that not undercut Locate in Scotland's ability to act as a one-stop agency in negotiations with inward investors? The concordat states:

"There will be common financial limits covering major schemes of financial assistance to companies administered directly by the UK Government".

Crucially, it states that those limits apply to

"the total of public sector assistance."

I intend to place a copy of the concordat in the Library, because it would be helpful if all hon. Members, from Scottish constituencies and elsewhere, could see the terms of the negotiations apparently taking place between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Office.

Alf Young is probably the most respected industrial journalist in Scotland. He has followed the activities of Locate in Scotland from its birth in 1981 and charted its success—not always uncritically, because he is no mere cheerleader for the agency. His bona fides as an expert commentator would be accepted. Therefore, when he describes the arrangements, as he did in *The Herald* on 13 November, in the following words, we should all be greatly concerned:

"At no time has the word veto appeared in any of the negotiating documents. What Mrs. Beckett, or, to be precise, Mrs. Beckett's officials have proposed, is a central clearing house for all major packages—by which they mean any offer where assistance is over £5m—based in her own Industrial Development Unit.

No Agency, not even Locate in Scotland after devolution, would be able to make its own approach to a potential investor and shape its own offer. That is seen by LiS and others, not as a veto, but as an attempt to shut them down."

[Mr. Salmond]

I know that the Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry have presented an entirely different picture. They say that the new arrangements have to be introduced because of the emerging regional development agencies in the United Kingdom. Would it not be better if the model for those new agencies—further details of which were, I understand, to be unveiled this morning—followed the successful model of Locate in Scotland. Ministers should ask why Locate in Scotland is successful and see whether the new agencies could emulate that success in the competitive environment of inward investment, instead of running the risk of neutering that very success by circumscribing the autonomy and ability of Locate in Scotland to negotiate directly with its clients.

Nor is it the case that the experts in inward investment believe the scare stories, emanating from people such as Sir George Russell, that huge evidence of poaching exists. Neil Hood has written:

"It would be perverse in the extreme to argue for some form of rigid pan-UK control of all inward investment attraction on this type of evidence."

Are not the Government's proposals an unnecessary reaction, using as an excuse a problem that does not really exist? If the Minister tells me that the problem exists, I expect her to examine closely the various allegations that have been made and consider whether they can be substantiated. The Minister should also say why the arguments of her Scottish colleagues—that descriptions of the problem are "black propaganda"—are not valid.

Other experts in inward investment have also made key criticisms of the concordat. James Scott was the last chief executive of the Scottish Development Agency, before it became Locate in Scotland and Scottish Enterprise. He points out that what is happening is not new but a recurring nightmare for Scotland. Attempts by the DTI to put the hems on Locate in Scotland date back to its inception in 1981—including attempts made under Lord Young and Lord Tebbit. James Scott argues that the concordat is unclear on whether investors interested only in a Scottish location in the United Kingdom will have to go through the Department of Trade and Industry. My fourth question to the Minister is a request for clarification of whether that fear is justified. Under the concordat, will an inward investor interested only in a Scottish location have to go through the Department of Trade and Industry?

Fifthly, there is no clear information in the concordat—I know that the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry is especially interested in this point—on whether reinvestment cases, which are about 60 per cent. of new investment coming into Scotland, would have to go through the DTI clearing house. The fear is that the arrangements and the concordat would place unnecessary additional bureaucracy on Locate in Scotland and could mean that it would lose out internationally.

Thus far, much of the debate has concentrated on the impact in the United Kingdom. It might be useful if we could raise our sights and see how the debate—and what is seen as an attack on Locate in Scotland and its ability to perform its job—is seen elsewhere by its real rivals in inward investment attraction in Europe. One of Locate in Scotland's key rivals is the Irish Development Agency, or IDA, which has a superb record of success in attracting key investments to the Republic of Ireland. The business section of *The Sunday Tribune* in Dublin last Sunday carried an article, headlined "IDA gains in curb on Scottish rival". The article stated:

"IDA Ireland is poised to gain a decisive upper hand over its main international competitor in the battle to attract foreign inward investment following an attempt by Margaret Beckett, the president of the British Board of Trade, to shackle the jobs agency of Scottish Enterprise, Locate in Scotland."

The article went on to quote Irish Government sources as saying:

"the implications for Ireland will be monitored by industry experts."

I bet they will. I am sure that the IDA and other sources in Ireland must be rubbing their hands at the apparent possibility that their main rival and competitor in Europe will run the risk that its ability to attract inward investment projects will be shackled by the DTI.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I have listened carefully to everything that the hon. Gentleman has said, but do not the new rules and concordat for Locate in Scotland issued by the DTI arise as a direct result of his support for the Government's devolution proposals? The hon. Gentleman should explain to the Scottish people why devolution will put Locate in Scotland at a new disadvantage.

Mr. Salmond: Unfortunately for the hon. Gentleman, I have a longer memory, having been in the House longer and having been involved in inward investment longer than he has. The attempt to shackle Locate in Scotland is nothing new for the DTI. It was tried at least three times in the 1980s.

Mr. Fallon *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I will come to the hon. Gentleman in a second.

The best example is 1981, when the Tory majority on the Scottish Affairs Select Committee suggested doing exactly what the Government propose now. Members of the Conservative Government, who are no longer with us, because they lost their seats—perhaps this is why—proposed in 1981 to do exactly what is being done now.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself, I want to cite a few more examples before giving way again.

The plan in 1981 was stopped by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Lord Younger, although it was supported by another former holder of that post, Ian Lang, who is now Lord Lang. What we are witnessing is nothing new. The DTI has tried for some years to put the hems on Locate in Scotland. The responsibility lies with Ministers, who have the ability, just as George Younger did in 1981, to stop this attempt if they so choose.

The argument that Scotland is getting an unfair advantage because Locate in Scotland is successful is advanced by Labour Members from the north of England and was urged on many occasions by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) himself, before he became parliamentary private secretary to the previous Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Conservative party's anti-Scottish reputation is at risk of being transferred to the Labour Government, and the result will be exactly the same: the demolition of Labour Members in Scotland.

Mr. Jenkin: Whatever tensions have existed within a Government about the rules constraining Locate in Scotland, they have always been contained and resolved within government, within the constraints of collective Cabinet responsibility, behind which some fudges and discretions can be allowed to a Secretary of State for Scotland, who has all the powers and responsibilities of that post and can answer for policy in Scotland. The rules are a direct consequence of a new locus of power created in the Scottish Executive, outwith the collective responsibility of the Cabinet. The hon. Gentleman cannot have his cake and eat it: Scotland is losing out as a result of the devolution proposals.

Mr. Salmond: The concordat makes proposals not for after the devolved Parliament is established but for now, while collective responsibility still applies and the Secretary of State for Scotland retains the whole panoply of his powers and ability to fend off such attacks from his colleagues. If the Government do not want to behave in an anti-Scottish manner, as the previous Conservative Government did, all that they have to do is to stop the attacks on Locate in Scotland.

Mr. Fallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: I have given way very generously to Conservative Front Benchers. If the hon. Gentleman is persistent, he will catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye, but for the moment I want to make some progress.

It is a poor allegation to make of the Government that their pattern of behaviour in this matter is exactly the same as that of elements in the Conservative party over the past 16 years. I have heard some remarkable statements from the Conservative party in recent weeks. For example, on benefit cuts for single mothers, the Conservatives' main argument is that it is outrageous that the Labour Government should be doing exactly what they wanted to do in government.

The real agenda is that there has been resentment of the success of Locate in Scotland since its inception. DTI Ministers say that the emergence of new development bodies in England makes new arrangements necessary, but the real agenda is a repetition of the DTI's attempt, made many times over the past few years, to gain control of key inward investment decisions.

The DTI objective, as reported in the press—perhaps the Minister can deny it—is to gain "proportionality" throughout the country in the number of jobs attracted by inward investment. In that case, Scotland would get only half the inward investment jobs that have been achieved over the past five years. Locate in Scotland has managed to attract about 20 per cent. of the total inward investment in the United Kingdom. Proportionality would have cost Scotland about 7,500 jobs in the past year alone and would cost us about 30,000 jobs over the next five years if Locate in Scotland maintained its success rate.

Scottish Office Ministers have been complacent. I do not accuse them, or even the incoming DTI Ministers, of knowing that a plan, now re-emerging, had been hatched in the past to threaten Locate in Scotland's ability to attract inward investment; but all expert opinion in Scotland, be it Neil Hood, James Scott or Alf Young, sees in the proposals a challenge to the success of Locate in Scotland.

Does the Minister—with the Scottish Minister for Education and Industry sitting beside her—believe that the allegations made about Locate in Scotland and the specific inward investment project in the north of England were no more than "black propaganda"? If so, what measures has she taken to bring the relevant people to book and to challenge Sir George Russell about statements that he made to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry?

Does the Minister accept that what I have cited is indeed a proposed concordat between the DTI, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly? Does she appreciate that it is difficult for us to understand how such a document can be produced before those bodies are established? There is an inconsistency in saying that an agreement will be made before the parties to that agreement have even come into being. Does she accept that that is a betrayal of the devolution process?

Does the Minister accept what I said about sections 10 and 12 of the document? Will Locate in Scotland lose the ability to promote Scotland directly to inward investors and will the responsibility be given in all cases, regardless of whether they are specific to Scotland, to the Invest in Britain Bureau? Does section 12 extend the present guidelines beyond selective assistance, to all parts of the package, and especially to those parts in which Locate in Scotland has been so spectacularly successful in recent years?

Does the Minister accept that there is a genuine reaction in Ireland from the Irish Development Agency, a body which Conservative Front Benchers might consider to be one of the most successful in Europe and that has at its disposal powers that Locate in Scotland will not have, even when there is a devolved Scottish Parliament? That reaction, as reflected in the Irish press, shows that Locate in Scotland's major rivals for investment projects see an opportunity in the DTI's plans.

Can all the concern in Scotland be based on nothing more than rumour and speculation or is there real concern in the inward investment agency itself that the DTI plans go far further than merely making agreements between Locate in Scotland and the new agencies emerging in England, and strike at the heart of Locate in Scotland's success in recent years?

Can the Minister confirm the existence of a letter from the President of the Board of Trade to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, laying out the plans in stark detail and making it clear that she expects the industrial development unit in the DTI to take control of key inward investment decisions?

If such a letter exists, will the Minister place a copy in the Library, as I intend to do with a copy of the concordat? Does she accept that there are real concerns in Scotland about a betrayal of the devolution process, amounting to the hamstringing of Locate in Scotland's ability to attract inward investment?

Has the Minister noted the delighted faces on the Tory Front Bench because her Government are apparently bringing into being something that many elements in the Conservative party, including many of the most

[Mr. Salmond]

anti-Scottish elements sitting on that Front Bench, wanted to do for many years? Does she not find it extremely ironic that her Government are introducing policies which even that anti-Scottish Conservative party were unable to push through in the past 18 years? Above all, can she not see that the opportunity to create new development agencies throughout England is an opportunity to release them from the control of the dead hand of the DTI and offer them the same success and opportunities that Locate in Scotland has enjoyed in the past 17 years?

In an attempt to reflect some of the attitudes that have prevailed in Scotland in the past 17 years, I should like the Minister to consider a report by Alf Young which appeared on the front page of yesterday's edition of *The Herald*. He wrote:

"Daewoo, the industrial conglomerate reportedly seeking a site for an 800-job glass plant in Scotland despite the economic circumstances engulfing its native South Korea, rejected Scotland as a location for the same project only last year.

Instead, after bungled negotiations by the Department of Trade and Industry's industrial development unit which infuriated senior players in the Scottish inward investment effort, Daewoo decided to take its planned investment to France."

If it is the Government's objective to neuter Locate and drag it down to the same level as the less effective inward investment agencies, is there not a real risk that the end result of that centralising process will not just be the loss of jobs from Scotland, or the transfer of them to the north of England and elsewhere, but the loss of jobs from the United Kingdom? The beneficiaries will be locations in France, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. That is what will happen if one of the major contributors to inward investment has its activities hamstrung by the misguided, anti-Scottish actions of the DTI.

11.31 am

Mr. Ian Stewart (Eccles): I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have been allowed to make my first formal contribution on such an important issue. It is sad to note that not a single Conservative Back Bencher has seen fit to come to the Chamber to take part in this important debate.

I believe that tradition is an important anchor of our culture and I am conscious of the fact that it is the convention of the House that hon. Members should keep their first contribution light and complimentary to their constituency and predecessors. I intend to adhere at least to the spirit of that convention.

The constituency of Eccles consists of seven areas—Swinton, Pendlebury, Eccles, Winton, Barton and Irlam and Cadishead. Each has its own distinctive history and features. My right hon. and hon. Friends will be relieved to know that throughout my speech I shall refer to all those areas collectively as the constituency of Eccles.

I am proud to make the first maiden speech for the Eccles constituency for 33 years. My predecessor was Joan Lestor, who represented the seat with distinction between 1987 and May 1997. She had previously represented the constituency of Eton and Slough between 1966 and 1983. After a four-year sabbatical, she returned to the House with her maiden speech well behind her, and she remarked that after 17 years of Mars bars—the factory that manufactures them is based in Slough—she hoped to have 17 years of Eccles cakes. She had 10 good years, and I hope that she thoroughly enjoyed our local speciality. I am pleased that she is now Baroness Lestor of Eccles, and I am confident that she will make a significant contribution in the House of Lords before she votes for that institution's democratic reform.

In her work with children, Joan Lestor epitomised the caring face of the Labour party and in her work for overseas development she represented our internationalist face. The Government's recently published, and welcomed, White Paper on overseas development bears proud testimony to her work as shadow Minister for Overseas Development before her retirement from the Labour shadow Cabinet in July 1996. I am pleased to say that, in common with Joan, I have an interest in both those subjects. Although I met Joan on only a couple of occasions before my selection, I have always held her in high regard and I am sure that the House will join me in wishing her well in another place.

The Eccles constituency is the geographic centre of the three seats in the metropolitan borough of Salford. The constituency is a suburban, industrial, working-class area on the north bank of the Manchester ship canal, due west of Manchester city centre. The boundary changes at this year's election significantly changed the shape of the seat. Its centre of gravity has moved outwards, south-west, away from the inner city, following the loss of the ward of Weaste and Seedley to the seat of my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears). It gained the more outlying wards of Irlam and Cadishead, where I have lived for 35 years, from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis).

My hon. Friend the Member for Salford has highlighted some of the rich heritage of the metropolitan district of Salford which is also shared by my constituency. In addition to the examples that she gave, I can tell the House that Eccles has been at the forefront of design and technological development. For example, at Barton in Eccles we had the world's first combined aqueduct and rail viaduct over a road. Now we have the largest area of development land available in Greater Manchester at the Barton special economic zone.

Eccles also has a proud cultural heritage. The artist L. S. Lowry lived in the town of Pendlebury in my constituency. His appeal as a graphic illustrator of the grit and wit of Eccles and Salford people endures today, as demonstrated by the record price paid last week for a Lowry sold at Sotheby's. It is well known that he painted matchstick men and matchstick cats and dogs. It is possible that, if he were alive today, an urban fox or two would make it into his landscapes, and in the Eccles constituency they would be well protected. It is definitely true, however, that, if he were painting the same landscapes of my city today, much of the heavy industry and mills would have disappeared, only to be replaced by derelict corner shops and holes in the road, the size of craters.

Hon. Members should be aware that the roads in my constituency are among the oldest and most used industrial roads in the world. I see it as part of my job to ensure that the Government understand the problems faced by areas such as mine, which have suffered horrendous industrial decline and job losses in the past 25 years or more.

Having said that, Salford and Eccles folk are resilient and fine people. They have had the wit and ingenuity to devise appropriate plans that will reverse the worst of the

industrial devastation and the resultant breakdown in social cohesion which we experienced under the Conservatives.

My city and my constituents need the Government to do what the previous Government failed to do—acknowledge our problems and offer encouragement and backing to the city council and other partners who are working so hard towards a better environment and a more secure future for all our people. I congratulate Salford city council on making job creation its No. 1 priority. I fully support its strategy of partnership and I am working closely with it to attract inward investment, particularly to the manufacturing sector.

In the past quarter of a century, my constituency has suffered many industrial closures and job losses. The British Steel works at Irlam, the Royal Ordnance factory at Patricroft, Agecroft colliery, the power station at Swinton, and many more have shut their gates.

The male unemployment rate is 6.2 per cent. and female unemployment is 2 per cent. One third of all households are council tenants. The level of car ownership is 10 per cent. below the national average, at 57.6 per cent. My constituents warmly welcome the Government's initiatives to improve public transport and implement an integrated transport service and they look forward to the extension of the successful metrolink from Manchester to Eccles. In the 1991 census, the proportion of residents reporting long-term illness was 15.9 per cent.—higher than the 12 per cent. average in England. The proportion of lone-parent families, at 24.3 per cent., is higher than the UK average of 19.1 per cent. I warmly welcome the Government's planned extension of child care, but I also want there to be adequate benefit levels.

In the statistical jargon, my constituency is under-represented in the professional, managerial and technical classes, but please do not think that we have placidly accepted that situation. Salford city council and other organisations have had some success in fighting back, with a strategy based on collaboration and partnership. In line with that, a key interest of mine is education and training, and I want to help the local authority, the Employment Service and other agencies to achieve their continuing aims of boosting the aspirations of the people of Eccles, raising their achievement levels and improving access to jobs and training. I am excited about the opportunities offered by the new deal and confident that my constituents will gain skills, confidence and real employment prospect from Labour's policies—by God, people in the disadvantaged areas of my community and in others parts of the country need a way out of what we, in a sanitised way, call social exclusion but is more commonly known as poverty. Those people need and deserve a measure of positive prosperity and a safe environment in which to live.

There are two main aspects to inward investment—macro-economic issues and micro-economic arguments—but we must also remind ourselves of the importance of generating indigenous investment. I shall confine my comments to the extent of my personal experience of and involvement in working collaboratively with my local authority, the Salford city council, Salford university, Salford further education college and other agencies to secure investment in our city in general and in my constituency of Eccles in particular.

The figures on inward investment provided by the House of Commons Library show that the north-west of England, together with some other English regions, has not gained any of the large-scale inward investment projects since 1993. In 1996–97, we had 40 projects, just short of Wales's total of 45; and the investment in those projects safeguarded 2,256 jobs in Wales and 1,929 jobs in the north-west, so the figures are similar. However, there is a crucial difference in the outcomes in the two regions. In Wales, the investment led to nearly 10,397 new jobs, but in the north-west it brought only 1,402. It is the quality and not the volume of inward investment projects that is vital to the development and reskilling of our industries and our work force.

That is not an argument to deprive any other region of its success, but it is a call for the Government to adopt a more sensitive and strategic approach to the needs of bodies in the English regions that are trying to do their best for their communities in the absence of a strategic tier of regional government. A north-west regional development agency will go some way toward helping my region to champion its attractiveness and strengths to potential investors. Having said that, I welcome the statement of the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), that the Government are working toward "common UK guidelines" for inward investment, which will

"address the concern that public money should not be used to finance competition between different parts of the country."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. *281*.]

I agree with that statement. I do not want a wasteful Dutch auction between regions—I just want a level playing field. However, I am keen to participate in the redefinition of the shape of the playing field, as I am a firm believer in the need for a strategic tier of regional government in England. Such an authority would draw down powers from Whitehall and would operate according to the principle that local services should be decided and delivered at the most local level possible. That would reinforce the role of unitary local authorities, but allow for a regional body with responsibility for strategic issues such as the environment, transport, economic development and, of course, investment.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have worked hard with Salford city council to generate and create "a Salford package" with other social partners. I have been negotiating with representatives of major international investors from one of the more stable areas of south-east Asia, with a view to arranging a trade delegation to Salford next spring. That early experience has taught me that English areas such as Salford are at a disadvantage when it comes to grant aid and assistance, which tends to negate any arguments about best quality. If the investor is enticed to an area that can offer more attractive and all-important start-up grants and packages, that might suck existing employment from the disadvantaged area to the more advantaged area. In the long run, that cannot be to the benefit of our country as a whole, as it raises questions of fairness, equity, waste, economic planning, social exclusion and social cohesion and, indeed, democracy and governance.

On an unusual, but related, matter, I am alarmed that few members of the business community or of the public have recognised the importance of addressing what has become known as the millennium time bomb. In simple terms,

[Mr. Ian Stewart]

that is the breakdown as we reach 2000 of current computer systems, because their processors cannot cope with dates falling after the turn of the century. That might lead to disasters throughout the world. I shall comment only on our Government's action in that respect and why it has potential implications for inward investment in the UK.

The Government are to be congratulated on taking prompt action to address the problem by setting up the Action 2000 initiative. I am sure that the Government understand that we have now passed the awareness-raising stage and that we must now move on to finding and delivering solutions. Although a Government's ability to bring about such solutions is limited, they could nevertheless give a lead in setting up geographically based groups of interested partners in which best practice and new thinking can be shared. The crux of my statement is that if the UK can become accepted throughout the world as "year 2000 safe", in addition to the obvious benefit to our society in general, it might be a tremendous incentive to inward investment.

In conclusion, I should say that this is not the first time I have attempted to make a speech in the House. I have made several such efforts—for example, I prepared a magnificent speech for last week's debate on hunting with hounds. If right hon. and hon. Members think that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made a fine speech in support of the Bill, I can tell them that mine would have been an exceptional and magnificent supporting effort. However, I was not lucky enough to be called and my speech ended up in the bin, as did all my previous attempts. As a result, the House has had to suffer my meagre contribution today. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your patience and I thank hon. Members for theirs.

Mr. Jenkin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. From his comments, it appears that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has been furnished with a crucial document relevant to the debate by the Scottish Office—an official document that is not available to other hon. Members. For the benefit of proper debate, will you consider a short adjournment so that we can be given that document? In view of the number of hon. Members who want to speak in the debate, will you seek an undertaking from the Government that they will give us the document, so that the debate can continue uninterrupted?

Mr. Salmond: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I regret that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) misleads the House. I most certainly was not furnished with the document to which he refers by any Department. I was asking the Government about its bona fides and if they would put it in the Library. I am not responsible for the Conservative party's lack of information sources.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The Chair is not responsible for information provided for the House. That is the responsibility of Ministers. We shall no doubt hear from the Minister in due course.

11.49 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Stewart) on his most informative maiden speech. What a shame it is that he threw his other speeches away. He could have placed them in the Library for hon. Members' enjoyment. Perhaps we can look forward to that in future.

There is a danger of the United Kingdom's success in attracting inward investment leading to a sense of complacency. We could spend all day discussing the squabbles between Scotland, Wales and the English regions about how investment grants are distributed, but that would be a distraction because the game is moving on. We have only to consider recent events in Korea to realise that.

We take great pride in the fact that we have attracted about two thirds of Korean global investment in the past three years, amounting to about £6.75 billion. But the bubble can burst as easily as it swells. Time does not allow me to go through the three disasters that we face; suffice it to say that some 6,000 jobs that we thought we had in Scotland, Wales and the north-west seem to be substantially at risk, with about £2 billion worth of investment now cancelled, delayed or in doubt. That affects the whole of the United Kingdom, not just one area.

The major threat to inward investment is not just the volatility of the Asian economies, but the growing competition for that investment from other parts of the world, particularly eastern Europe. For instance, the state incentives now on offer for inward investment in the Czech republic in some cases amount to funding 50 per cent. of a project. Compared with that, the sort of inducement that the United Kingdom can offer through Government grants is paltry.

Pursuing an international auction on ever greater financial inducements leads us up a blind alley. It is essential that we understand that financial inducements are only part of the equation. Potential long-term investors are more concerned about the quality and skills of the work force, the modern management techniques available, and the efficiency and productivity from which their investments will benefit. Turf wars between Scotland, Wales and the English regions are a bit of a smokescreen. The claims and counterclaims on financial packages that are available in Scotland or Wales compared with the English regions only undermine our overall inward investment performance.

I welcome the introduction of a concordat by the Department of Trade and Industry to resolve such differences and arguments, but it is essential to clarify the DTI's role in that. I hope that the Minister will do so today. What is the precise difference between the DTI vetting projects and the DTI vetoing projects? That is a question of semantics that I have yet to get to the bottom of.

The concordat should not become an excuse for smothering initiative in national and regional agencies. It must not introduce centralised, bureaucratic control from Whitehall. It must not be used as a way of delaying decisions through DTI interference in potential projects. It must not be allowed to breed indifference to the needs of Britain's potential and prospective clients.

Inward investment is a complex and varied process. For example, green-field development projects—new factories and manufacturing plants, the projects on which all the wrangling seems to concentrate—represent only some 5 per cent. of total inward investment in the UK. As Neil Hood from Strathclyde university has pointed out, the vast bulk of inward investment is through

mergers, acquisitions and alliances—projects which are not necessarily mobile and certainly not necessarily contestable by different regions of the UK.

Inward investment decisions are made on a range of issues. They can be summed up as bringing value for money to the financial investor. Financial assistance is only part of that process. It will be highly damaging if the concordat results in a rigid formula based solely on financial assistance and ignores the importance of all the other factors which will vary from one region to another.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is sensible that we should have discussions around the UK and achieve a concordat between the different nations and regions, but does my hon. Friend agree that there should be no dumbing down of the process with the high quality work being done by agencies such as Locate in Scotland being reduced to some lowest common denominator to suit the DTI?

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that it is completely inappropriate to seek a concordat in advance of a Scottish Parliament, to which the issues will be devolved and which must form its own view. In due course, when that Parliament is up and running, it should enter as a full partner into any concordat that is reached.

Mr. Chidgey: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. It is vital that we do not dumb down the process but learn from best practice.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that when the DTI talks about co-ordination it is Whitehall-speak for the dead hand of Treasury involvement?

Mr. Chidgey: I am surprised to find myself agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. It is vital—I hope that the Minister will respond to this—that we should use the DTI to boost best practice rather than to constrain and stifle it. The concordat's key role will be to promote best practice. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, Locate in Scotland has set high standards in diligent and patient company tracking. Again, Neil Hood's words are relevant. The Northern Development Company and the West Midlands development agency have all had major successes from which other regions can learn. The DTI has a crucial role to play in ensuring that best practice is promoted throughout the regions.

Today's announcement of the establishment of the regional development agencies is a good starting point. I welcome the Government's view that the RDAs should not be creatures of local and central government, but the Government must show that they mean what they say, because neither should the RDAs be glorified property managers.

The United Kingdom has lost out within the EU by not having strong, powerful and properly resourced regional organisations that can attract inward investment from the EU and provide the matching funds that such projects require. In that context, the RDAs' long-term success depends on adequate funds. I am disappointed that at present there seems to be no such provision. They need adequate funds and to be able to provide much more economic development stimulation than most regions have managed so far. It is far more important to direct Government assistance not to up-front grants but to inward investment projects which add further value to the economy in research, design and development.

A key role of the RDAs will be to foster value for money for investors. RDAs could and should play a major part in creating that added value in their areas. RDAs need an overarching role with the training and enterprise councils in tackling skill shortages. We do not want a return to that appalling and failed programme of training for work which was merely a device for massaging the unemployment statistics and added little to communities' skill base.

Most of all, we need to provide inward investors with a highly skilled work force on which they can rely and with high quality management. Only if the RDAs are given the resources and flexibility that they need to meet those challenges can we maintain the UK's inward investment performance.

11.58 am

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Stewart) on finally making his maiden speech. As he explained, it was through no fault of his own that he was unable to do so until this morning. He paid a generous tribute to his predecessor who is well remembered and well respected on both sides of the House. He gave us an interesting tour d'horizon of Eccles and, perhaps, a glimpse of a streak of independent-mindedness when he referred to the need to maintain the present level of benefits. I hope that that streak of independent-mindedness does not lead him too quickly on to the list prepared by the Minister without Portfolio, but we shall watch his progress with interest.

I should like not to congratulate but to thank the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) for initiating today's debate. He has exposed perfectly for the House the tensions that will arise directly from devolution, and indeed have already arisen from the devolution proposals in the White Paper. He sketched the anarchy that will result from establishing a separate Parliament and Assembly in Scotland and Wales respectively and separate regional agencies and assemblies in England.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Fallon: Today's debate is a direct consequence of the devolution Bill.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman did not give way to me, but, as I am more generous than he is, I will give way to him.

Mr. Salmond: From the intervention of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) in my speech, I gathered that he accepted that exactly those tensions existed within the Conservative party in their period of office and that Lord Young, Lord Tebbit and Lord Lang at one point supported proposals identical to those that the present Government are making?

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman is falling directly into the trap that we have set for him. Of course those tensions

[Mr. Fallon]

existed under previous Governments. They exist under any Government. The point is that those tensions were resolved within a collective, United Kingdom Government. A concordat would not have been necessary had the present Government not published their devolution proposals. They would not need a concordat to resolve the tensions that have been mentioned, were it not for the devolution proposals that the Government have published and the hon. Gentleman has championed for years.

By attacking serious English industrialists such as Sir George Russell, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is simply stirring up the anti-English sentiment which we have long suspected lies behind the agenda of the Scottish National party. The hon. Gentleman suggested that English regions should not have the freedom to fight their corner that Scotland had.

Today's debate would not have taken place were it not for the devolution proposals and the arrival of a Labour Government committed to them. The previous system worked. There was collective responsibility for all inward investment into the United Kingdom. There were rules that applied throughout the United Kingdom. The fact that Locate in Scotland, representing 10 per cent. of the population, managed to achieve 20 per cent. of inward investment shows how that success was managed in a United Kingdom system. We congratulate Locate in Scotland on that, but it was achieved under United Kingdom rules and collective Government responsibility.

The Invest in Britain Bureau was established precisely to take the lead in overseeing all inward investment promotion overseas for the whole of the United Kingdom and the handling of individual inward investment cases here in the United Kingdom. The result was an outstanding record in the quality and quantity of investment attracted.

The most recent Organisation for Economic Co- operation and Development report said that the United Kingdom attracted about 40 per cent. of inward investment into the European Union in 1996—about $32.7 billion of foreign direct investment. I will put that achievement in context by saying that France came second, with a mere 17 per cent.

The report of the Invest in Britain Bureau for 1996–97 showed a record 483 projects attracted to the United Kingdom during 1996–97, creating 46,000 new jobs and safeguarding about 47,000 existing ones. During 18 years of Conservative government, 4,700 inward investment projects were attracted to this country, creating or safeguarding about 800,000 jobs. That is a substantial record, and in July 1998 Conservative Members will look carefully to see whether the present Government have matched our achievement last year in attracting 483 projects.

It is no use telling us now that there have been difficulties in the far east. When I was in Korea in September, I heard directly from senior industrialists in Samsung and other companies that the strong pound encouraged by the present Government was already bringing into question the future development of their projects on Teesside and elsewhere.

That Conservative record has been deliberately placed at risk by the Government through their proposals to devolve power to Scotland and Wales, their plans for separate regional development agencies and their economic policies for higher taxation and more regulation.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): An Invest in Britain Bureau survey showed that 39 per cent. of companies suggested a location in Europe or the European single market as one of their main reasons for locating in the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree that the positive approach that the Labour Government have taken to Europe, as opposed to the very negative attitude taken by the official Opposition, will play an increasingly important role in encouraging companies to come to this country?

Mr. Fallon: I take it from that intervention that the hon. Lady expects Britain's percentage of inward investment projects coming into Europe to rise above 40 per cent. if she says that the present Government's European policy is more positive than ours was. In July 1998, we shall discover whether that is true.

Last year, a record was achieved. The Labour Government must show that they can improve on the record that they inherited. Conservatives say that, as a result of policies for higher taxation and more regulation and by deliberately devolving power to Scotland and Wales and setting up regional development agencies, the Labour Government will jeopardise the type of investment that we attracted into the United Kingdom as a whole.

The Scottish Executive will have power to attract inward investment and I suspect that, eventually, it will find the ability to subsidise that inward investment in the ways that it chooses and in the direction that it prefers.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: I have given way generously.

I believe that once that Parliament is established it will be difficult for the House to control the budget that the Scottish Executive takes over. Who knows? No doubt some of the additional funding provided under the Barnett formula for housing, for the Scottish health service or for policing in Scotland will soon find itself smuggled along by back channels into Locate in Scotland and other agencies that are established more locally. Why else would Ministers have been wrangling in the past three months about the concordat, of which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has received a copy?

Of course those tensions will arise and of course Scottish Executive will have money at its disposal. Unless checked and brought back properly within a United Kingdom framework, there will be little to stop Locate in Scotland breaking the existing United Kingdom rules with its own slush funds carefully garnered from housing and health budgets and outbidding the other regions for prestigious projects. That is exactly the kind of anarchy that will unfold as a result of those proposals.

As well as setting up a Parliament in Scotland and an Assembly in Wales, the Government will make matters worse still by setting up regional development agencies. We shall be getting fuller details on those this afternoon. The original objectives of the regional development agencies were published in the consultation paper in May.

Their first objective is to co-ordinate regional economic development, but their second objective is to help attract inward investment.

We are told that it is not envisaged that each region will have to conform to a specific prescriptive framework. On the contrary, the legislation will allow each region to have an agency, the organisations and activities of which fit the region's circumstances. The northern development agency may regard the funding of inward investment as a higher priority than the East Anglian agency does and may choose to allocate more of its resources to it. That is precisely what the Government are encouraging. We shall thus see an end to a United Kingdom approach to inward investment. We shall have fragmentation—one region or territory set against another, duplicating effort, budgets and resources. Ultimately, the United Kingdom as a whole will lose out and I suspect that, from next July onwards, that marvellous percentage—40 per cent. of all European inward investment achieved by this country—will start to decline.

That is probably what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan wants. He favours that kind of anarchy. Indeed, he suggested that Locate in Scotland should have complete autonomy and the ability to pursue the inward investment projects that he wants. I wrote down those words and I invite the hon. Gentleman to deny that he uttered them. I suspect that he wants no limits on Locate in Scotland's autonomy and ability to fight for inward investment projects.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the present position. To show his expertise in and command of the subject, can he tell me the percentage of inward investment to Scotland where the first contacts were with Locate in Scotland and the percentage where the first contacts were with the Invest in Britain Bureau?

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman tries to tempt me, but it is not my job to answer questions about percentages; it is the Minister's job when she replies to the debate. I notice that the hon. Gentleman does not deny what I said: he wants no cap or restraint on Locate in Scotland's autonomy and ability to subsidise—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's speech, but he was turning his back to the Chair. That is not the done thing in the Chamber, so perhaps he would address the Chair occasionally.

Mr. Fallon: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was wrongly tempted by the Scottish National party to turn to my left.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has not denied the fact that he wants no restraint on Locate in Scotland. He wants the Scottish Executive to be fully free to compete for any subsidy for inward investment projects that head towards the United Kingdom.

It is for the Government to answer for the mess that they have created. I wish to put some key questions to the Minister. First, why has the concordat suddenly become such an issue? It cannot be because of the new regional development agencies, which will be quangos for the next five years. There will be no assemblies before the next Parliament, so that cannot be the pretext. Is not the reason simply the emergence of the Scottish Executive?

Secondly, can the Minister explain why a concordat has not been necessary in the past? Locate in Scotland, the Northern Ireland development organisation and the Welsh Development Agency have been powerful magnets with powerful budgets. They have good records, but they have always co-existed happily in the past. Why has such a concordat not been necessary before?

Finally, has the dispute between the Scottish Office and the Department of Trade and Industry—and, indeed the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions—been truly resolved? If not, and if it is to become a running sore between London and Edinburgh—between this Parliament and a new Scottish Parliament—we shall simply play into the hands of the Scottish National party, which supported the Government's devolution proposals precisely to foment the kind of dispute to which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has drawn the House's attention today.

12.15 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): We have had a good and interesting debate and I am delighted to have an opportunity to respond. First, however, I pay tribute to the excellent maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Stewart). He showed that he will be an articulate representative of his constituency. He dealt with health, transport and an issue dear to my heart—the century date change problem. I am grateful for the backing that he has given Action 2000 under the chairmanship of Don Cruickshank. It may interest my hon. Friend to know that I raised the problem at the Telecommunications Council on Monday and there was great support from other member states for what the United Kingdom was doing.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House appreciated my hon. Friend's warm tribute to Joan Lestor, who is now Baroness Lestor. On a personal basis, I look to her as a role model and friend. We would all want to emulate her fine record of work. I thank my hon. Friend and warmly congratulate him on his tremendous speech.

A number of important points have been raised, but I take this opportunity to emphasise that the Government strongly support inward investment and want to see it grow. Indeed, it was a Labour Government who had the imagination, vision and foresight to set up the Invest in Britain Bureau some 20 years ago and to set up the Scottish Development Agency, which had inward investment powers right from the beginning and which led to the creation of Locate in Scotland. I pay tribute to Locate in Scotland's professionalism, dedication and commitment.

The Government recognise the importance of inward investment to the UK economy. It needs a properly co-ordinated national effort to market the UK's attractions as an investment location. The IBB is now a jointly managed operation between the DTI and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, reporting to Ministers in both Departments. That recognises the fact that successful promotion of inward investment requires an integrated worldwide team.

Our commitment to inward investors remains solid, and is long term. We remain committed to ensuring conditions for their success in the UK and Europe. Of particular concern to inward investors is our

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

relationship with the European Union. The Government recognise the importance of the European Union and the need to promote the UK as a leading player in the single market. We have already shown that we will work with our European partners, not against them, as our predecessors were prone to do.

Mr. Chidgey: In that context, will the Minister explain the role that she sees for regional development agencies in securing more funds from the EU, especially matching funds, which will require some financial stream through the RDAs?

Mrs. Roche: We have always recognised that regional policy can play a great role. There should be a voice for the regions. That is why the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will produce his proposals.

Mr. Godman: I welcomed my hon. Friend's comments on the origins of Locate in Scotland. It came from a Labour Government, by way of the SDA. I seek from my hon. Friend an assurance that there will be no reduction in the role or the autonomy of Locate in Scotland.

Mrs. Roche: The role of Locate in Scotland is extremely important. The scaremongering that we heard is entirely inappropriate. I regard the dedication and commitment, and the track record, of Locate in Scotland as being of a very high order.

Last year, the UK recorded some 492 inward investment successes, involving more than 94,000 associated jobs. The UK stock of inward investment is now more than £154 billion. Of those, Scotland had 76 successes—

Mr. Fallon: Who does she think did that?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman asks from a sedentary position who did that. I can tell him who started the process: a Labour Government who had the imagination and the foresight to set up the programme. Not for the first time, the Labour party is showing that it is the best party for business, in contrast with the tired diatribes that we so often hear from the Opposition.

Of those inward investment successes, Scotland had 76, resulting in nearly 12,000 jobs. That is a tribute to all involved.

Recently, the IBB was named as Europe's best investment agency by the international consultants Coopers and Lybrand and *Corporate Location*, in recognition of the bureau's role in attracting foreign direct investment projects to the UK. That is warmly welcomed.

Inward investment has been a catalyst for change throughout the economy. It has meant introducing world-class management standards and has challenged established UK companies to improve their own performance. It also encourages supply chain developments, creating new regional supply opportunities for British firms, which we warmly welcome.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) was not looking for praise of Locate in Scotland, I think, although that is welcome; he was looking for reassurance. May I give the Minister the opportunity to offer such reassurance? Will projects identified by Locate in Scotland continue to pursue negotiations as they do at present? I refer to projects that are interested only in Scotland. Can she also give us the assurance that reinvestment cases, which are 60 per cent. of total inward investment, will continue to be handled by Locate in Scotland as at present? After her praise of Locate in Scotland, she is surely not saying that such projects would have to be handed over to IBB or the industrial development unit.

Mrs. Roche: Yes, of course. I hope that, as I go on, I will be able to reassure the hon. Gentleman further. With the greatest respect, his contribution was a rather sad one, which led to scaremongering and undermines the very organisation that he seeks to promote. We are in favour of Locate in Scotland and what it wants to do. Contributions such as the hon. Gentleman's do not help Locate in Scotland to deliver to its customers.

The record on inward investment has been very good indeed.

Mr. Fallon: It is all ours.

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman claims the credit for his party, as though it were all due to the Conservative Government. Does he not realise that business wanted that inward investment because of the work force? One of the reasons why investors come to the UK is because of our language and tradition. For the Conservatives to try to take credit for that is beyond belief. One of the interesting lessons of the past few months is that the Opposition have learnt nothing from their defeat.

We want to encourage competitiveness, and we are doing all that we can to create a stable business environment in which we can go forward. We shall not rest on our laurels. We know that we must go further.

In encouraging inward investment projects, I am determined that we should ensure value for taxpayers' money across the UK. The President of the Board of Trade was asked by the Prime Minister to develop a system to address understandable concerns that public money might be used to finance wasteful upward bidding between different parts of the country. As my right hon. Friend told the Trade and Industry Committee in November, she is working on detailed proposals with her Cabinet colleagues.

It is essential that sensible arrangements are agreed, based on co-operation, partnership and transparency, in order that we can ensure that offers to inward investors represent value for money for the UK taxpayer and are fair to all parts of the UK.

Mr. Fallon *rose—*

Mr. Alasdair Morgan *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: No. I do not have much time and I am anxious to make progress. I apologise to the hon. Gentlemen. If I had time, I would take interventions.

We have heard speculation, founded on rumour. It was raised by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and compounded by the hon. Member for

Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). Not for the first time, we see a linkage between the Conservative party and the Scottish national party. It was said that the DTI seeks centralisation or a veto, contrary to the proposals on devolution. That is absolutely not the case.

It has also been rumoured that the new arrangements are bound to be bureaucratic. That was suggested by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). Again, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman and the House that that is not the case.

There has been much interest in the press, all of it speculation, and we have heard some of that in the House today.

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, put the case well. He is reported in *The Herald* of 29 November as having said that there has been

"tedious scaremongering by people whose politics depend on all news being bad news."

On that occasion, the Government were reported properly. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend.

We are seeking simple, transparent arrangements, based on co-operation and partnership, which may simplify consideration of new projects.

The Government's devolution programme is a key part of our comprehensive programme of constitutional reform. Devolution will provide a strong, democratically elected Scottish Parliament and national Assembly for Wales, within a strong United Kingdom.

The new bodies will reflect the needs and circumstances of the people in Scotland and Wales, working within a UK framework, so that matters that are best handled on a United Kingdom basis will continue to be dealt with at that level.

Those are basic democratic reforms that will strengthen and modernise Britain for the benefit of everyone living in this country, but it is essential that devolution should not undermine the UK's position in the wider world. It is the positive factors shared by every part of Britain that we must thank for our success in attracting more foreign investment than any other developed country in the world, apart from the United States.

The world looks to Britain as a whole for profitable investment, and anything that undermines our united promotion of UK plc overseas can only harm our international image in the long run.

The Scotland and Wales White Papers on devolution indicated that there would be a concordat on financial assistance. We are now looking at how the concordat should be drawn up.

Inward investment is all about partnership: national, regional and local organisations and individuals from private, public and central Government organisations working together to provide a quality service for inward investors. We shall hear later today about the proposals and the important contribution of the regional development agencies in that regard. The White Paper will set that out in more detail. Inward investment takes place in a fiercely competitive world, and our performance must be judged on that basis. We shall build on our record so that we have a competitive economy with competitive companies in a competitive United Kingdom.

Dr. Fox: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were not in the chair when this point was raised earlier. There are a number of written questions on the Order Paper regarding the timing of the publication of the concordat on inward investment. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) claims to have a document showing that discussions about that matter are now well advanced. Either the Government have not yet drawn up the document or the hon. Gentleman has useless information—both scenarios cannot be correct.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter of Government responsibility and not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Member may wish to raise the issue through the usual channels, but it is not a point of order.

Meat and Bonemeal Storage

12.30 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): This debate concerns the storage of meat and bonemeal potentially infected with BSE that the Government has to store as part of its cull of over-30-month-old cattle. That meat and bonemeal is in storage until incinerators are available or until other methods are found to dispose of the material. The matter is of interest to my constituents as a planning application has been made to store large quantities of this meat and bonemeal in Wroughton in my constituency.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate this issue, which is causing grave concern to many of my constituents. I know that it has also become a concern in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), so I am glad to give him some time to speak in this debate and represent the views of his constituents. I have brought with me just some of the huge amount of correspondence that I have received on this subject. I have a pile of correspondence comprising thousands of cards from my constituents who wish their voices to be heard and heeded.

I raise the issue not only on behalf of my constituents in the villages of Chiseldon and Wroughton but on behalf of the many other people who are potentially affected by the storage of meat and bonemeal. I know that the new Labour Government want to minimise the risk to the public, but the current scheme involving the sites for storing meat and bonemeal is not achieving that aim.

I am acutely aware that responsibility for the scale of the problem lies firmly at the door of the previous Conservative Administration. However, it is now the responsibility of the Labour Government to sort out the problem while minimising the risk to the public. I shall raise three main questions in the debate: first, whether the Government can reduce the need for storage sites by increasing the capacity for incineration; secondly, and most important for my constituents, how the Government will ensure that essential storage sites are located in areas and buildings that minimise the risk to local communities; and, lastly, how we will ensure that storage sites are run in a way that minimises the risk to the public.

To amplify the first question—whether the storage needs of potentially infected meat and bonemeal can be reduced by increasing the volume incinerated—my constituents want to know whether all incinerators that could be used for the over-30-months scheme are being used, and whether the incinerators that are operating are doing so at full capacity, 24 hours a day. We urge the Minister to look into that matter. The costs of storing meat and bonemeal must be increasing. If so, increased incineration capacity could reduce costs and the risk to the public.

I recognise that even if the volume of meat and bonemeal incinerated can be increased, there may still be a need to store some of that material. If so, we move to my second area of discussion. I urge the Minister to re-examine the way in which decisions are made regarding storage sites. At present, it seems that private companies have a free hand in deciding where they would like to store the material. Those companies do not need to apply for planning permission to store meat and bonemeal if the site is already approved for storage. They must apply to the Environment Agency for a waste management licence—but not for 12 months. So unlicensed, potentially infected meat and bonemeal can be stored in unsafe circumstances, as is proposed in my constituency.

In South Swindon, the proposed meat and bonemeal storage site is on raised ground at RAF Wroughton. The proposed storage buildings are 50-year-old aircraft hangars, which have not been maintained since their service during the second world war. The hangars are home to rats and pigeons, which previous users of the buildings have failed to get rid of. Those animals and birds could carry potentially dangerous particles from the meat and bonemeal throughout the area, and would thereby increase the risk of infected waste material re-entering the food chain.

No part of the hangars is properly sealed. The floors are cracked and would allow any liquid waste to soak into the ground, and thus move into the local water supply. The hangar roofs are structurally weak, and local people tell me that they may not withstand a heavy winter snowfall. The hangars are situated on top of a hill. Such a position would undoubtedly add to the likelihood of infected waste making its way into the water supply on which local businesses and homes rely. What is more, the location is windswept, and dust particles could be blown from the site not only into Wroughton but onto the rest of Swindon below.

The situation is of real concern to Swindon people. For example, they have heard that Professor Richard Lacey of Leeds university has stated that there is no data to show that the new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, which is linked to BSE, cannot be acquired by inhalation—that is, that the disease cannot be spread by air particles. Unless it can be shown that there are no risks, it is not sensible to store the meat and bonemeal in hangars that are full of holes in an area that is close to a large population on a site where it is sometimes hard to stand still because the wind is so fierce.

If the hangars themselves do not present enough problems, the site is also difficult to access. It is proposed that there will be up to 20 heavy goods vehicle movements every day to transport the meat and bonemeal, with each lorry weighing up to 38 tonnes. The lorries would have to use steep and narrow access roads through the villages of Chiseldon and Wroughton—roads on which children travel to and from school and where elderly people go about their business. Those roads are unsuitable for such large vehicles and the road network is inadequate for such journeys. So my constituents face the added risk of accidents involving those large lorries.

I want to help the Minister in what I know is a very difficult task. The solution may be found in the answer to my first point. If it is not, I ask the Minister to consider another option: rather than leaving storage sites to the vagaries of the markets, the Government agencies involved—the Environment Agency and the Intervention Board—should be given a proactive, rather than reactive, role in considering storage sites. Those agencies should seek out, or insist that the businesses involved seek out, the best sites in the country that will minimise the risk to the public.

I should like the Minister to learn the lessons that the previous Government did not learn. A couple of years ago, unknown to most local residents, meat and bonemeal

began to be stored at RAF Quedgeley near Hardwicke in Gloucestershire. Unsuitable hangars were also used there, but the public were not aware of the storage until it started. The local residents rightly protested about the unsuitability of the site and launched such a concerted attack that the project was driven away, causing the company considerable trouble and cost.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I confirm my hon. Friend's tale. The people had no knowledge of the storage until the material started to arrive. In the end, the Intervention Board decided to move the material on the basis that the hangars were neither watertight nor secure from wildlife. Would my hon. Friend care to comment on that?

Ms Drown: That is my point exactly. I warn the Minister that the Quedgeley fiasco will be repeated in Wroughton if the current plans continue—but the situation will be even worse. Wise film producers usually decide not to make a sequel to a movie that has flopped: Quedgeley I was a disaster; Quedgeley II in Wroughton should be avoided by Government, the local authority and by the company involved.

At this point, the Minister must be thinking that I am being too negative. Where, he will ask, is the equivalent of "The Full Monty" for storage sites? There are examples of better, successful sites, and such examples should be used to set minimum standards for the future.

The buildings at Wrangaton in Devon are strong and well built, and are made from brick, with sound roofs. There has been no opposition from the local community, because the risks have been minimised. The buildings are solid, well maintained and are some way from any large population. The contrast is there. When there are suitable sites in the country, surely it cannot make sense to pursue unsuitable sites such as that in Wroughton. It is not good enough for a company to say, "This will do." The Government must be able to say, "We have found the safest storage sites, because we want to minimise risk to the public."

I turn to the licensing arrangements for storing meat and bonemeal. Will the Minister review the regulations that allow companies to operate sites for 12 months without a proper licence first being issued?

There is no point in issuing licences if the companies are not monitored. A number of my constituents visited meat and bonemeal storage sites to smell the unpleasant smells and to see how the licensing system operates. They read how the waste management licence application sets down a number of strict requirements. These include keeping waste material dry and unheated, ceasing operations in wet weather, ensuring that site operatives always work in pairs and wear suitable protective clothing and masks, and not allowing the doors to the store to remain open unnecessarily.

However, when my constituents visited a site in the south-west, they exposed violations of the licence. The operatives were not wearing any special protective clothing. The owner of the company freely admitted that operations continue in wet weather. Operatives were working alone, and the doors to the store were allowed to stand open, even during unloading. I am sure that the House will understand how those findings add to the concerns of my constituents.

I have posed a number of questions to the Minister from my constituents. I appeal to the Government to take a proactive approach to storage sites for potentially infected meat and bonemeal, to find the best sites in the country—sites that will minimise the risk to the public. Storage buildings should have a sound and sealed structure free from vermin or birds, preferably away from heavily built-up areas. The storage company should receive a licence from the Environment Agency before operations begin. Safeguards should be adopted on the site and in the transportation of the meat and bonemeal, which should not be transported on unsuitable roads.

I hope that the Minister will provide a timetable to ensure that all available incinerators work at full capacity, a timetable that shows us when no further storage sites will be needed.

I hope that I have made it clear today that the hangars at Wroughton cannot be the best place to store this potentially infected material. The risk may be small, but a risk there is. I know that the Government wish to minimise that risk. The thousands of people in Wroughton and Chiseldon know that their site is not suitable.

I wish to prevent any more time, energy and money from being wasted on the Wroughton proposal by the Government, my constituents or the company involved. I trust that the Minister will, in his answer today, be able to outline a way forward that recognises the inadequacy of the current plans in Wroughton, and in the current decision-making process on meat and bonemeal storage in the United Kingdom.

As I said at the start, this is not only about the safety of my constituents; it is about minimising the risk for everyone.

12.42 pm

Mr. Michael Wills (North Swindon): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the speak in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on bringing this important matter to the attention of the House, and on her cogent analysis of the issues.

The storage of meat and bonemeal in my hon. Friend's constituency has become a matter of intense worry and concern to her constituents. It has now become a matter of some concern to mine, too, since I learned on Monday that the Intervention Board is considering storing meat and bonemeal at Sevenhampton, in my constituency. Already, my constituents are expressing their disquiet.

I recognise the enormous problems caused by the tragedy of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. I also recognise that there is not the capacity in this country to incinerate all the meat and bonemeal immediately. That raises difficult questions of what to do with the material in the meantime. My hon. Friend pointed the way forward today with some very positive and constructive proposals.

I also recognise that the Intervention Board does not propose to store at Sevenhampton meat and bonemeal from animals showing any clinical signs of BSE, but I am dismayed at the apparent lack of concern for public sensitivities over this matter. The desperate plight of the victims of Creutzfeldt-Jakob, and the economic crisis that BSE has created for British farmers are well known. I am sure that everyone in North Swindon wants to support all the efforts that are being made to deal with the tragedy. However, we all must recognise that the general public remain understandably worried about the consequences for them.

[Mr. Michael Wills]

It is not adequate for experts simply to satisfy themselves that there are no public health risks. The public need to be reassured, and in detail, that that is the case. I do not find it acceptable that the only public discussion of the storage of such material in my constituency appears to be a brief letter from the Intervention Board to Swindon council, which states that only meat and bonemeal from healthy animals will be involved, and that the Intervention Board will seek a waste management licence exemption from the Environment Agency.

In that short communication, the Intervention Board seems to have overlooked the fact that the animals in question are being slaughtered precisely to restore public confidence, and that their storage prior to incineration involves questions of public confidence and reassurance. I shall be grateful if the Minister will reassure my constituents by taking the following three measures. First, he should require the Intervention Board to explain in detail why the storage of meat and bonemeal at Sevenhampton would pose no—I stress the word no—public health risk, including a full description of the security of the storage facilities, to answer the points raised by my hon. Friend. If the Intervention Board cannot provide such an explanation, I hope that the Minister will halt immediately any plans to store the material at Sevenhampton.

Secondly, I ask the Minister to require the Intervention Board to apply for a waste management licence from the Environment Agency before any meat and bonemeal is stored at Sevenhampton. That would enable the arrangements to be scrutinised by independent experts. At the moment, the Intervention Board is considering an exemption from such a licence. Whether or not it is technically entitled to do so, such a move is hardly likely to encourage public confidence in the proposal. I urge the Minister to ensure not only that adequate precautions are taken, but that they are seen to be taken.

Thirdly, I ask the Minister to confirm that there has been a full investigation of all the available alternatives to the lengthy storage of meat and bonemeal before incineration. I shall be grateful if he will reassure my hon. Friend that the measures that she proposes are being fully investigated. Has any consideration been given to shipping some of the material overseas for incineration where there is available capacity? If no such investigation has been carried out, I shall be grateful if the Minister will confirm that one will be launched immediately. If there is any practical alternative to the lengthy storage of this material at Sevenhampton, which would allay public concern, I ask him to confirm that it will be adopted.

BSE and all its dreadful consequences have been a national tragedy. If we are ever to emerge from it, it is vital that the Government recognise the full extent of continuing public anxiety about BSE and do everything in their power to reassure the public about everything connected with it. They should provide full information about what is being done; actively seeking measures to incinerate immediately all relevant meat and bonemeal will be central to that process. I very much hope that the Minister will be able to respond positively and constructively to the debate.

12.47 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on securing the debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on their assiduous concern for their constituents. It is right and proper that they raise the matter in the House. I shall do my best in the time available to answer some, if not all, of their points.

I was at the Dispatch Box almost a week ago making the same points. I make no apology for repeating some of what I said then regarding the operation of the over-30-months scheme. Many misconceptions and fears about safety need to be addressed. We must put them into perspective. We need to address them, not dismiss them. I shall return to the advice that is given by the Government's independent scientific committee, and explain the results of the risk assessments carried out by the Environment Agency, which were published in the summer.

I spoke briefly on this matter last week, and understand the special concerns that have been expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon regarding the proposal to store meat and bonemeal at Wroughton airfield. I know about the public meeting that was called and the strong concern that has been expressed by residents. I did not know in detail about the visit that her constituents made to storage sites in the Exeter area. I hope that all the alleged breaches of the licence will be fully investigated, because it is no part of the policy of the Government or the Intervention Board to have meat and bonemeal stored in such massive quantities in breach of any of the licensing arrangements, any of the agreements with planning authorities, or any of the arrangements entered into with the Environment Agency. Those matters will be fully investigated.

I know from my correspondence that many people think that the over-30-months scheme cattle have BSE. That is emphatically not the case, although I acknowledge that studies carried out by Professor Anderson and others at Oxford have shown that a very small percentage of those cattle presented for slaughter may be incubating the disease, because it takes many years. The selective cull scheme addresses that problem, because it involves the lengthy operation of tracing the birth cohorts of confirmed BSE cases and removing them from the national herd.

I shall explain briefly the background to the over-30-months scheme and the rationale behind current policy. The scheme provides for the slaughter and destruction of cattle aged over 30 months. Its origins lie in the previous Government's decision to prohibit the sale of meat from over-30-month animals. That decision went beyond the independent advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee to debone cattle intended for human consumption in licensed plants supervised by the Meat Hygiene Service. There were contributory factors: retailers and catering establishments were reluctant to sell over-30-months meat, and farmers' representatives were keen for the Government to intervene.

Compensation and disposal arrangements were established in European Union regulations in April last year. Maintenance of the over-30-months scheme—and

whatever we do to change it—is a pre-condition of the Florence agreement on the lifting of the export ban on beef and cattle. The rules do not allow for cattle that display clinical symptoms suggestive of BSE to be purchased under the scheme. The number of confirmed BSE cattle has declined rapidly since it peaked at some 36,000 cases in 1992. Fewer than 100 cattle a week are found to be suffering from BSE. Suspected cases are slaughtered on the farm, and are promptly sent for direct incineration. They are not stored as meat and bonemeal: they are completely incinerated. There are also stringent ante-mortem checks at abattoirs to look for the disease in animals presented for slaughter.

European Union rules require scheme carcases to be incinerated or rendered and destroyed. At the outset of the massive slaughter programme, incinerator capacity was insufficient to deal with the large number of cattle carcases. The Intervention Board executive agency has conducted tender exercises to increase the disposal capacity available to the scheme, but use of new incinerator capacity for carcases and meat and bonemeal remains subject to the necessary planning and environmental consents being obtained.

No operator can build an incinerator to burn meat and bonemeal without the approval of the planning authority and the Environment Agency: my Department is not involved in the planning process. It is not possible, in those circumstances, to produce a timetable for incinerator capacity. Such a timetable is not easily available, because every application is carefully analysed. There may sometimes be local opposition, which may or may not be justified. We rely on science, and we operate on the precautionary principle. We take stringent measures to protect public health.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon that all authorised incinerator capacity is being used, mainly to deal with casualty animals. We are hopeful that more will come on stream shortly, but it depends on local decisions by planning authorities and the Environment Agency. Some meat and bonemeal is burned in appropriately authorised, high-temperature waste incinerators, but no decisions have yet been taken on other major disposal options, including the option to burn meat and bonemeal in power stations. Full weight will be given to the protection of the environment and human health in making any decisions. The Government will not cut corners in this exercise.

In the absence of sufficient incinerator capacity, the majority of carcases are being rendered to meat and bonemeal and tallow, which is stored in its most manageable form. Any further treatment prior to final disposal would add significantly to costs.

There is an added complication to the storage problem. The number of cattle presented in the first eight months of the scheme was double that in a normal year, which has put enormous pressure on storage capacity. So far, 1.9 million cattle have been slaughtered under the scheme. They were perfectly healthy cattle which showed no signs of BSE. As a result, there are 150,000 tonnes of tallow and 280,000 tonnes of meat and bonemeal in stores around the country awaiting disposal, and stocks of meat and bonemeal are growing at a rate of about 2,000 tonnes a week.

Last week, to give hon. Members some idea of the volume, I told the House that it was the equivalent of 32 Big Bens. But that was in September, and I am informed that the present pile is the volume of about 36 Big Bens. That is a considerable volumetric amount of meat and bonemeal.

I visited one of the stores in Chorley to see the position for myself. It was not in any way, shape or form on a par with what my hon. Friend's constituents saw in Exeter and the breaches of the rules there.

The Intervention Board will need more storage space for meat and bonemeal and tallow. In the first instance, all offers are evaluated by the board's technical officer, and many are rejected at that stage. If a store seems suitable and in the right area, the board will write to the local authority and to the local Member of Parliament informing them of its interest. It adopts an open approach to this issue, although I acknowledge that that has not always been the case.

My hon. Friend mentioned the problems at Quedgeley in the early summer of last year. I understand from officials that, owing to the need to find storage quickly, there was no time for consultation. There is no excuse for such a problem to arise now, because the board has time to plan ahead and give notice of its intentions, which is why it has written to both my hon. Friends. The Environment Agency is also contacted to discuss the suitability of the site and the practicalities of the operation, including the issue of the required waste management licences.

My hon. Friends have referred to waste management licences, but I do not have time to go into detail. There are difficulties with applications for such licences, because storage is not the final disposal of the waste: it is prior to final destruction, and no final decisions have been taken. Waste can be stored for up to 12 months without a waste management licence, but it must be stored under licensed conditions. It cannot be stored in unsafe conditions: that would be a criminal offence.

As with incineration contracts, the Intervention Board will not enter a contract with a storage company unless it has obtained the necessary planning and environmental consents. That is absolutely crucial. Health and safety legislation also applies to those sites. The Health and Safety Executive, in keeping with Government policy on BSE, adopts an ultra-precautionary approach, and has issued generic guidelines to occupational groups that have contact with over-30-months scheme material. The position is closely monitored so as to protect the workers who are involved in storage.

There are specific instructions on rodent control, because that problem must be dealt with. Odour does not seem to be a significant problem at other sites, and it should not be a problem at any site once people are outside the building. Unloading of meat and bonemeal must take place within the store with the doors shut. There is a whole host of restrictions on the unloading of lorries.

We must be assured that human health and the environment are safeguarded. We are greatly encouraged by the results of risk assessments carried out by independent technical consultants on behalf of the Environment Agency into safety aspects of disposal. We will not cut corners; nor will the Intervention Board or any other authority.

The risk assessments endorsed the advice given by SEAC last year. It considered current and proposed methods of dealing with scheme waste material, and advised that they were safe. The Government are

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

operating strictly on the precautionary principle. We have always made it clear that we will accept SEAC's advice on the BSE crisis. Sometimes, advice will be based on the most minute risk that can be measured, but we will take precautions that others may think are over the top and cost more than is necessary. We are not prepared to cut corners in respect of BSE.

This is an emotive subject. There is no prospect of catching new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease by inhalation, as has been mentioned in some quarters. SEAC advises that the most likely cause is exposure before the introduction in 1989 of controls on cattle offals.

I have not been able to address all the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon has raised, or indeed that the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) raised last week. We are not masters in the matter of disposal, which is set out in EU regulations. I reiterate my assurance to hon. Members on both sides of House who are involved: I and my ministerial colleagues are actively considering all the options for safe disposal, although none offers a quick fix. So far, no one has proposed that we should export the meat and bonemeal for destruction, and I doubt whether the EU would allow that.

Longstone Edge

1 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this matter today. It may seem that, whenever a planning application comes up, there are always people with a local interest who say that it should not go ahead. It was described by the late Nicholas Ridley as the NIMBY syndrome—not in my backyard. I hope to show that, although, obviously, we do not want a new quarry to open, it is not a matter just of the NIMBY syndrome.

Longstone Edge is a beautiful hill ridge in the heart of the Peak district national park, which is unlike any other national park in the United Kingdom because no other has so much local authority involvement, or covers the region of so many local authorities. Longstone Edge is criss-crossed by delightful paths and is easily seen from surrounding villages. It also lies in direct view of the most popular walks along Froggatt Edge, Calver and Baslow Edge. That is why people have called on me to ask the Government to call the application in, if it is at all possible.

The Peak district is within an hour's travelling distance of some 15 million people. I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that it is the lungs of England. It lies within an hour's drive of Manchester, almost in the backyard of Sheffield and not far from the west midlands conurbation. It attracts many visitors annually. It is estimated that, last year, some 22 million day visits were made to the national park. It has outstanding natural beauty.

I do not want to leave the Minister with the view that this is a matter just of NIMBYism, because the Peak district accepts that quarrying is an important activity in the national park. It is estimated that, last year, some 7 million tonnes of limestone were quarried from the national park, and quarrying represents about 1,000 jobs overall there, so we do not take the approach that no quarrying should take place in the national park.

I have been in correspondence with the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning on the matter. During the summer, he responded to me in some lengthy correspondence, for which I am grateful and which set out some of the earlier considerations that had to be taken into account. However, I was sorry to read a letter from the Minister dated 19 September, which stated:

"You will by now have received my reply to your earlier letter, dated 30 August, which I trust you found helpful."

Indeed it was. The letter then goes on:

"As my letter indicated, the main responsibility for this type of development rests in the first instance with the Peak District National Park Authority, as the mineral planning authority. The Secretary of State is generally very reluctant to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities and will normally only intervene if the matters concerned are of more than local importance. Whilst it is clear that the issues in this case are of considerable importance to local residents, they seem nevertheless to be essentially of local significance and the Secretary of State's intervention in this instance would therefore seem to be unwarranted."

That was met with a fair amount of disbelief, to put it mildly, by my constituents. The very fact that the site lies in the heart of a national park, which was designated because of its natural beauty and is an area that people visit, means that it is of national, not just local, significance.

I have received many letters on the matter. In response to the Minister's view that the Secretary of State's intervention was unwarranted, one letter stated:

"This is an extraordinary position to take. Firstly, this proposed development is in the heart of the National Park. This area attracts a vast number of tourists annually. The majority of them do not visit to see a quarry the size of Bakewell disfiguring a prominent skyline. The fact that the development is in a National Park surely lends the issue more than local significance. If it does not, the number of tourists who flood the area suggests that there might well be more than a local interest in the careful preservation of the essential character of the area."

That is one of the many letters that I received along similar lines once I had sent the Minister's letter to constituents.

I am not the only one who is concerned about the issue. It is not party political. All the people concerned with the national park—the local authority and parish council representatives, as well as the Secretary of State's own appointees—are concerned not just about this individual case, but about the wider context in which it has to be judged.

I was one of those who were pleased when the Environment Act 1995 was passed. It went through the House under a Conservative Government without a Division, because most of it was generally welcomed as a move in the right direction on this issue.

I am the first to accept that it is not easy to deal with the issue that I am raising because it concerns some old mineral rights. Schedules 13 and 14 to the Act cover the review and updating of old mineral planning permissions. The initial review is concerned with mineral sites where the main or only planning permission was granted between 1948 and 1982. Schedule 14 provides for the periodic review—every 15 years—of all mineral sites. That review involves a submission for approval of modern operating conditions, covering a wide range of environmental matters, together with plans for the working and restoration of the site.

Longstone Edge is a good case, in particular the area known as Backdale quarry. The site lies about 5 km from the centre of Bakewell, in the heart of the national park, which was designated in 1951 for its valued characteristics.

Longstone Edge is extensively covered by several planning permissions, principally for the extraction of vein minerals by opencast and underground mining methods. They were issued in 1949, 1951, 1952, 1971, 1977 and 1978. The veins have been extensively worked in the form of substantial underground workings and surface workings going down a few metres only. That work has been in parts of the site where the veins have been known to exist and has not resulted in substantial removal of limestone. The underground workings have resulted in significant subsidence of some of the surface, so that deep trenches now exist along large stretches of the Edge.

The Backdale area of Longstone Edge has an extremely complex site history, arising primarily from a single ministerial consent for underground, opencast and surface working of vein minerals granted on 24 April 1952. In 1989, it was noted that limestone was being removed and processed at a crushing and screening plant installed at Backdale. The operator claims that at the time the removal of limestone was permitted in accordance with the terms of the permission issued in 1952.

In July 1996, RMC confirmed that long-term development of the Backdale area was being considered in the context of the review of permissions in accordance with the provisions of the Environment Act 1995. However, no working, landscaping or restoration details have been submitted by the operator for the remainder of the area—some 143 hectares. We are talking about a huge area of land. The operator claims that the provisions of the Environment Act 1995 allow for phased submissions, but that is disputed by the mineral planning authority. That highlights one of the many problems with the legislation.

One of the other problems is the time in which the MPA has to respond to applications made to it. That is a particular problem when dealing with an area of such a size. I would be the first to say that planning authorities should try to turn applications round quickly, but when we are talking about a planning application not for a building but for a permission that could last for some 45 years, more time is needed to ensure that the MPA makes the correct judgment.

The authority considers that limestone extraction on the scale proposed in the Environment Act scheme was not envisaged by the Minister in 1952 and substantially exceeds the terms of the Minister's consent. This problem comes up time and again. In 1952 when the vein extraction was granted, it was for the extraction of minerals 1 m to 2 m from ground level. We are now talking about a wholly different application from what was initially envisaged.

I know that the Minister will probably say that the Peak park, or the MPA, can place certain restrictions on RMC, make certain recommendations or go to court, but RMC would also be able to take the matter to court. If RMC won, the Peak national park might have to pay the compensation, but it does not have the money to do so and therefore has to consider very carefully before entering into any legal process because of the possible drain on its resources. The problem is not one for a local authority to take care of. The Peak national park was originally set up because of the national significance of the area.

Several people have written to me to make representations about the proposed quarry. The Government talk regularly about an integrated transport policy, so I hope that the Minister will consider the problems of transporting goods from the proposed site. The roads being considered for access to the quarry are wholly unsuitable for lorries.

The other day, Sheffield council issued a statement saying that if the proposal was to go ahead, it would want a rail link to be used. I shall be interested to see Sheffield council's plans for a railhead in Backdale quarry, because it will first have to build a railway. That might be difficult, not least in view of the time involved.

I received a letter from the Curbar, Calver and Froggatt Women's Institute, which states:

"The roads being used to gain access to and from the mining site are not in good condition. Hassop Road and Froggatt Road in particular are not in any fit state for heavy vehicle use.

The traffic on the A623 is already very heavy, and many fatal and near fatal accidents are occurring, particularly in Stoney Middleton and Baslow.

The vehicles used for transport, particularly when empty, also constitute noise pollution and . . . the traffic starts before 5 am now".

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

The road that many of those vehicles would take out of Froggatt to Sheffield passes very close to some houses, which would cause considerable damage.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will accept that this is not a case of being anti-quarry or against the extraction of minerals. We acknowledge that that already happens in the park. However, we are now talking about a new huge quarry being opened. The Minister may say that it is not really new if there has been extraction there since 1952, but the kind of extraction being proposed by RMC is new. That is one of the reasons why I believe that the application merits being called in.

I do not write to the Minister on every controversial planning matter and say that it must be called in. The records at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will show that it is very rare that I have said that. However, we are talking about a huge application beyond anything that I have dealt with before in my constituency. It is in the heart of the national park. I do not agree with every decision that the park has taken, and I have been critical of it in the past. I was pleased when parish council representatives were allowed to serve on the park authority, so that an elected element was included. I shall not go over the arguments, but I welcome the changes that have been made.

A bizarre aspect of the problem was highlighted by Julian Tippett of Stoney Middleton. He wrote to me:

"it is bizarre that a consent given in 1952 can rule what is done 45 years later"

without a planning inquiry of the kind that I think necessary for this application. I hope that the Minister will be able to deal with some of the points that I have raised.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on his success in obtaining this Adjournment debate and on his speech on the future of quarrying at Longstone Edge. He is lucky to have such magnificent countryside as that part of the Peak district in his constituency. It is right that he should be extolling its beauty and defending its interests. He has raised a very important issue.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I must of necessity avoid commenting on the particular circumstances of an individual case, as it may come before the Secretary of State on appeal. Should an appeal be lodged with my Department on any planning matter, Ministers have a legal responsibility to all parties involved to act impartially and with an open mind.

As has been drawn to our attention, the Peak district national park authority, which is the mineral planning authority, is also considering enforcement action against the operator. I understand that it centres on the interpretation of the original planning consent to which the hon. Gentleman referred and the extent to which that consent allows for the removal of limestone. The enforcement process, too, involves a right of appeal to my Department and adds to the circumspection with which I must address the case.

I do, however, want to make it clear to the House at the outset that the Government recognise and understand the very real concerns raised locally about quarrying and its impact on the environment. Successive Governments—not least those formed by the hon. Gentleman's party, as well as the current Government—have sought to respond to those concerns and to achieve a sensible balance between the interests of the economy and the construction industry on the one hand and the environment on the other. That is reflected in primary legislation. I shall return to the legislative aspect in detail later in my speech, as it is important to set out clearly the purposes of the reforms of recent years.

I must emphasise that the task of reviewing mineral planning permissions and of monitoring how they are worked and restored throughout their lives is one properly for local government to perform. It is the local mineral planning authority—in this case, the Peak district national park authority—and the quarry operator, in this case, RMC Roadstone Ltd., to which both government and local people rightly look for improvements.

As I said, the Government recognise and understand the passions that quarrying raises. As the hon. Member will know, in recent years, successive Governments have accorded the reform of old quarrying permissions considerable priority. I should like to remind the House of the progress that has been made.

The modern reform of the mineral planning system began as far back as 1976, with publication of the Stevens committee report. The committee's recommendations formed the basis of the Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981, which is now consolidated within the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and is the cornerstone of modern mineral planning legislation.

The 1981 Act introduced a duty on mineral planning authorities—which, in current terms, are the counties, unitaries and national park authorities—to review and make orders updating mineral permissions, and established that the minerals industry should itself bear part of the costs under the "polluter pays" principle. However, the 1981 Act's provisions for review and updating of conditions did not work well in practice.

Mineral planning authorities were reluctant to risk incurring compensation liabilities that were difficult to assess in advance of using their order-making powers. The shortcomings of the 1981 Act were recognised. Consequently, two further pieces of legislation were enacted to address those shortcomings.

The first measure was the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. In that Act, the then Government legislated to reform interim development order planning permissions. Those are the earliest remaining mineral permissions in the United Kingdom and were granted under interim development orders between 1943 and 1948, chiefly to meet wartime needs and the demands of post-war reconstruction. Those permissions had few, if any, planning conditions attached to them, and in many cases records of their existence had been lost. Under the 1991 Act, IDO permissions had to be registered with local mineral planning authorities and then submitted to those authorities for updating of their working and restoration conditions.

All IDO permissions remain valid and cannot legally be revoked without compensation, which is consistent with the wider general principles of planning and property law. There is no compensation for the cost of complying with new conditions, but our planning guidance makes it clear that conditions imposed on active sites should not

"fundamentally affect the economic structure of the operation."

For dormant sites—a site where there has been no substantial working for two years between May 1989 and April 1991—full modern conditions may be imposed without compensation. Full planning guidance is given on the operation of the 1991 Act in mineral planning guidance notes 8 and 9.

The reforms have worked well over the years, and they are delivering real benefits as older quarries are brought up to modern environmental standards.

The Environment Act 1995, to which the hon. Member referred, built on that earlier success and made provision for similar reforms to deal with permissions that were granted between 1948 and 1982. Those are known as old mineral permissions, and the Longstone Edge complex of quarries comes into that category. All OMPs are subject to initial review and updating of conditions. I am sure that the House will agree that it is important that, once modernised, mineral permissions do not slip back again. That applies to all permissions, not only to IDOs or OMPs. I am sure that no hon. Member would like to be confronted continuously with the issue.

The Environment Act 1995 therefore provides for periodic reviews—at 15-year intervals—of all mineral permissions, irrespective of the date on which they were granted, to ensure that, once modernised, they are kept in line with current environmental standards and best practice. That is a particularly important aspect of the reforms, and one that has clear benefits.

The initial review task for OMPs granted between 1948 and 1982 is much more substantial than that for pre-1948 IDOs, as the 1995 legislation covers permissions granted over nearly 35 years. Therefore, to spread the work load in bringing the old permissions up to date, the review of active sites is taking place in two consecutive phases, each of three years.

Phase I, which is now in progress, deals with sites where the predominant permission or permissions were granted before 31 March 1969. Phase II, which is due to begin in October 1998, will deal with sites where the predominant permission was granted after that date, but before 22 February 1982. However, all sites wholly or partly within national parks, sites of special scientific interest or areas of outstanding natural beauty are treated as phase I sites. That means that the most environmentally sensitive sites should have the protection of new conditions in the first half of the review programme.

Clearly, a number of old mineral permissions were granted on terms at least as broad as IDO permissions. Their lack of detail and limited operating conditions would not be allowed if they were being granted today. However, the permissions remain valid.

In the case raised by the hon. Member I well understand how frustrating it must be to residents of the area that old mineral permissions are, by today's standards, so loosely worded. That is why the review process is so necessary—to ensure that active sites, such as Longstone Edge, are worked under proper modern standards.

I emphasise that the review's purpose is certainly not to allow operators to exceed the terms of their original permission. On the contrary, the purpose is to ensure that old permissions are subject to modern-day operating and restoration conditions. For active sites, owners or operators must submit new schemes of working and restoration conditions for the mineral planning authority's approval, by the date that it specifies.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire asked about phased restoration. All reviews should impose proper restoration conditions, but the level of detail appropriate will vary according to the circumstances of the particular case. More detail should be provided for sites with a short life—for example, for sites where mineral operations will cease, or restoration is due to start, within five or 10 years of the review. For sites that will continue for a longer period, it may be preferable to have conditions that require the mineral operator to submit detailed schemes for final landforms and contours, and for the necessary aftercare when a particular operational phase has been reached, or by a set date.

There should also be provision to ensure that the mineral operator will propose and implement a scheme for final restoration and aftercare arrangements should the site cease operation for any reason before the end of the time limit. The precise details of the conditions are, of course, a matter for the mineral planning authority to determine in the first instance.

There is no compensation for new restoration and aftercare conditions, or for conditions that do not restrict working rights. Those include, for example, modern environmental conditions—such as wheel-washes and sheeting of lorries to provide for the cleanliness of roads leading to and from the public highway and of vehicles leaving the site.

The aim of the review process is to ensure environmentally sound outcomes while not prejudicing economic viability. Traffic conditions could therefore include control of access to and from the highway, display of on-site signs showing recommended vehicle routes and improvement of visibility where access roads join the public highway. Where such problems cannot be resolved, it may be appropriate to impose conditions limiting the rate of output, to preclude substantial future traffic increases, or prohibiting night-time working. Such conditions must be used flexibly. Those that significantly restrict the rate of output in such a way as to prejudice the quarry's economic viability to an adverse degree would give rise to liability for compensation.

The point on compensation is important. For modern conditions that restrict working rights, compensation will be payable only if, in the opinion of the mineral planning authority, the effect of the restriction would be such as to prejudice to an unreasonable degree either the economic viability of the operation or the asset value of the site. As ever in planning, the test is one of reasonableness.

Some quarry sites are dormant under the 1995 Act. They are sites where no substantial mineral working or substantial depositing of mineral waste has occurred between 1982 and 1995. Work cannot restart until a new scheme of full modern operating and restoration conditions has been approved by the mineral planning authority. There is no compensation for the cost of complying with conditions imposed on dormant sites.

The Department has published full guidance on how to operate the 1995 minerals reforms in mineral planning guidance note 14. That document was published after extensive consultation with industry and local authorities, and copies were supplied to all mineral planning authorities. It is a material consideration which must be taken into account when old permissions are reviewed.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning has made clear in correspondence with the hon. Member about the case that he has raised, the Peak district national park authority, as the mineral planning authority, is directly responsible for making progress on the matter. I hope that it will do so with application and imagination.

The 1995 Act seeks to maintain an equitable balance between the rights of those who hold long-standing valid planning permissions and the proper protection of the environment and amenity. In the Government's view, the way to proceed is for the Peak district national park authority to complete its review of the Longstone Edge permissions under the 1995 legislation and ensure that they conform to proper modern conditions. That would involve neither revocation nor payment of compensation, provided that the authority did not seek to impose conditions that restricted working rights to such an extent that the economic viability of the operation or the asset value of the site was prejudiced to an unreasonable degree.

I want therefore to make it clear that the Government stand by their decision not to call in this case, as the hon. Member requested. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning made it clear that the Secretary of State's call-in powers are used only sparingly. This is not a case where we believe that call-in powers are appropriate.

I also want to make it clear that the intrinsic landscape quality of any individual site does not justify the Secretary of State substituting his judgment for that of the local planning authority. Otherwise, the Secretary of State would end up determining every planning case in environmentally sensitive areas. The fact that the site is in a national park is not in itself a justification for call-in—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We must move to the next debate.

Private Care Agencies

1.30 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am grateful for the opportunity to put on the official record my deep concerns about the regulations surrounding private care agencies, which have grown in number in recent years and are of a weird and wonderful variety.

I was alerted to the problems to which poor regulations can give rise last year, when I received a petition from the residents of Eskbrook in Skelmersdale who were protesting about what they called "a reign of terror" that had been introduced into their quiet area by problem teenagers housed with their carers in a normal family home in their midst. The residents accused the youngsters of openly vandalising cars in the street, incessant abusive language and excessive noise in the early hours of the morning. In general, the residents described a lack of control being exercised by the carers.

I believed at the time that that was a very usual reaction to neighbourhood nuisance, which is a common complaint, and I took the usual steps of making inquiries of the police and the council. During the year, as I investigated the problem, it became obvious that it was much larger and had many more sides. It became clear, too, that the difficulties faced by the authorities, the company and the community had national implications.

The house in question is owned by a private company, Care Afloat, which operates from unit 3a, TPT Training, Railway road, Skelmersdale. I hasten to add that TPT Training has nothing whatever to do with this debate. The company buys or leases relatively cheap houses and advertises itself as

"Specialists in emergency/respite care and personal development at sea".

It secures contracts with local authorities to care for young people with extreme behavioural problems.

The problem is that, under current regulations, there is no effective supervision or inspection of such homes by social services or other relevant regulatory bodies. Most, if not all, the young people are from other local authorities—sometimes a long way off. The social services department in the contracting authority cannot or does not effectively monitor the progress and condition of the young people for whom it should be responsible; the local authority in which the home is located does not have powers effectively to deal with the situation that it discovers is growing in its bailiwick. Mr. Danny Curran, who runs Care Afloat, says that he has to request the placing authority to visit or inspect, or it does not do so.

I have to hand a despairing memorandum from St. Helens social services—the neighbouring authority to my constituency—referring to another Care Afloat home in Cross Pit lane, Rainford. It says:

"The latter address is a leased property accommodating up to three young people and as such falls outside the children's homes registration criteria. St. Helens Inspection Unit has been in contact with Care Afloat about a number of matters, but the home in Rainford is not registered with this local authority. Responsibility for checking the suitability and the safety of placements at Cross Pit Lane, therefore, rests with placing agencies."

I believe that Care Afloat is operating similarly in Trafford, Salford and Tameside.

Lancashire county council was not informed of the company by the placing authority, but the children and young people have come to its notice following

involvement of the police or me on behalf of affected constituents. The concern of Lancashire social services department has been communicated to other social services departments. Lancashire did at one time use Care Afloat but no longer does so. I know that there are substantial files on the problem at county hall in Preston, which are not accessible to me, but would, of course, be to the Minister.

Care Afloat is, I am quite sure, not alone in the United Kingdom in slipping through the net of care for young people. It generally caters for fewer than four young people in any one home and therefore falls outside the children's homes registration criteria and under the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991, which put the onus for checking the viability and safety of placements and responsibility for the supervision and welfare of the young people concerned on the placing agency. Care Afloat wants to open a house for four or more children and thus fall, as it were, deliberately into the ambit of inspection.

It is clear that local authorities that are a considerable distance away from—in this case—west Lancashire cannot supervise the home. They may be guilty of an out of sight, out of mind attitude, but whatever is the case keeping a firm grip on such arrangements presents an immense communication problem for the local authorities concerned and there is no doubt that young people can be very much at risk.

My hon. Friend the Minister will want to know why I am making a song and dance about this particular company. I have had substantial correspondence from and conversations with people who have worked for or worked close to Care Afloat. None wishes me to identify them, because they are frightened, so the evidence that I shall present on one side of the argument must be anonymous and anecdotal. Nevertheless, I know some of the informants well and believe that the allegations should be recorded.

I have had conversations with Mr. Danny Curran who runs Care Afloat and will refer to his arguments as I go along, but I must say that the allegations made against Care Afloat—whether exaggerated or not—must be listened to because, at the very least, they demonstrate what is possible under the current regulatory system.

Most of the children with whom Care Afloat deals have extreme difficulties. They are often the victims of abuse of one kind or another, which is presumably why their local authorities are happy that they are lodged as far away as possible. It follows that most of the children under 16 years old do not attend school, although I know of one child who attended a local school where considerable trouble was caused. The school could not deal adequately with the child because nobody was acting in loco parentis. In another case, a child with psychiatric difficulties was placed in the psychiatric ward of Ormskirk hospital. There was trouble and costs to the local authority, which were eventually recovered from the placing authority—in that case, Gloucester.

The young people are placed away from home without any reference to their health needs, which leaves the host health authority to pick up the consequences. Many accusations have been made about Care Afloat. I shall select one or two. There have been accusations of drug taking and of children being taken to parties and getting drunk in public. I must say that Mr. Curran denies that. There have been accusations that one of the carers is a cocaine user. I must say that Mr. Curran vehemently denies that, but the lack of inspection and control leaves the organisation open to such a charge.

Worries have been expressed about the seaworthiness of the boats that Care Afloat uses. One boat is used to sail the Irish sea and was at one point demasted off the Isle of Man. Mr. Curran tells me that the boats are regularly spot checked by the Royal Yachting Association. The placing authority and Lancashire county council have no locus in that.

I have a list of faults with another of the boats, drawn up by a boat builder and repairer. After 17 or 18 complaints, it concludes:

"it is my opinion that this boat is unsafe to operate . . . I would strongly advise that the rest of the boat is examined by a qualified surveyor or boat safety examiner with a view to such points as ventilation, labelling, fire extinguisher type and the location and storage of the petrol generator and the full gas bottle—currently to be found in the shower!"

Challenging young people through boating or sailing is an excellent idea in principle, but the inherent dangers are obvious. The care and inspection of that part of the enterprise should be very tight.

The greatest concern is the fact that a substantial proportion of the staff have no qualifications or experience. Mr. Curran says that the figure is 25 per cent. and tells me that Care Afloat has put together a training programme to put that right. I spoke this morning to a woman who, as a student, started as a voluntary helper with Care Afloat. From the first day, she was put in charge of a young sex offender who was under a specific work order not to be left with a single carer. She was left alone with him and her complaints were ignored.

In fairness, Mr. Curran has told me that he is entirely in favour of his houses being properly regulated and inspected by the local authority. Furthermore, he believes that the service should be in the public sector. He has represented those views to Lancashire county council. However, the allegations laid against Care Afloat illustrate what is possible, or even likely, in the private care system. It is wrong that any local authority should place its problem children a long way away and neglect proper, regular monitoring. It is wrong that the host authority has no role in checking what goes on in those houses if there are fewer than four children. It is wrong that, if a private care company asks for voluntary registration—as this one did—local authorities cannot undertake that responsibility.

I do not suggest that Care Afloat wishes to damage the children in its charge, but, given the absence of proper controls, it would be remarkable if staff who intended harm did not appear in private care companies. We know how difficult it has been to keep them out of the regulated sector, never mind the non-regulated sector. Those shortcomings must be put right before there is a horrible calamity somewhere.

Care Afloat's case must be heard. It says that it would welcome registration and inspection, which would bring structural support to the business. It has constructed a management strategy emulating the terms of formal registration. The changes to regulations that I seek would help such organisations to discipline themselves properly and become acceptable to their communities.

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

I note the agenda for action proposed yesterday or the day before by the National Association of Inspection and Registration Officers. It says:

"Arrangements should be made to extend the remit of social care regulation to include vulnerable service users of: small children's homes, domiciliary care agencies, day centres for adults and supported housing schemes."

Quite so. I could mount a similar Adjournment debate about private domiciliary care in west Lancashire. NAIRO goes on:

"Clear and consistent guidance must be given on whether the role of regulation is simply to 'police' minimum standards, or whether it has a wider role to develop quality of care and quality of life."

The latter should surely be the goal of this Government of all Governments.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing time to debate this important issue. The provision of good-quality social care in the public or the private sector is a priority for the Government. We shall take forward that agenda through the promotion of good practice and by challenging poor practice. We look to the joint reviews of the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate to assist us in taking forward that important task.

My hon. Friend has raised concerns about the role of private care agencies, referring specifically to Care Afloat, that are worthy of careful consideration. We shall ensure that they are given that careful consideration. Those who have responsibility in county council social services departments will be apprised of my concerns through Her Majesty's chief inspector. We shall also ensure that a record of those concerns and my hon. Friend's speech is forwarded to the director of social services and to those charged with licensing adventure activities.

There are two parts to my hon. Friend's concerns. The greater part relates specifically to the quality of residential and social care provided to the young people placed under the responsibility of Care Afloat. The other relates to the operation of its adventure activities, its vehicles and the training given to those who use them to provide such challenging care. It is vital that both those concerns are considered by the appropriate authorities.

My hon. Friend brings considerable experience to the topic as an active constituency Member of Parliament and, importantly, having spent a professional lifetime in education, concerned intimately with the welfare and care of young people. That lends added weight to his concerns, as does the care and attention that he has clearly applied to gathering his evidence and to testing out those concerns with the proprietor of Care Afloat.

In due course, the Government will bring forward a series of measures designed to take forward the three important areas that my hon. Friend has mentioned. The first is the need for proper regulation. The second is the need for the statutory authorities to pay particular attention to the services that they provide for children in their care. When the state has responsibility for the care of children, it has a particular responsibility to be a good parent. As my hon. Friend has highlighted, many of the young people subject to care orders have been the objects of abuse and neglect, and they need concerted remedial action if they are to be brought to maturity with the benefits of the stable and secure upbringing that they ought to have.

The third area my hon. Friend mentioned was how services could best be provided and how standards could be improved. We believe that the current system for regulating social services does not adequately protect the interests of people who rely on social care. We will set out a new system for regulating social care in a White Paper in the spring and we will introduce a system that is tough, transparent and accountable. The new regulatory arrangements will be independent of local authorities and health authorities and remove any possible conflict of interest with in-house provision and the commissioning of services, and allow greater confidence in the system.

The new system will be comprehensive. It will tackle domiciliary care, which my hon. Friend touched on in his closing remarks. That, too, is currently outside the ambit of regulation, but that should not be the case. My hon. Friend also mentioned the particular instance of children's homes with three or fewer residents. It is vital that they are included in the statutory arrangements. Had that been the case with Care Afloat in Lancashire, the organisation would have been subject to regular and proper inspection. As it is, it has not been.

We will also bring local authority provision within the ambit of statutory regulation. In both the public and private sector, abuse has unfortunately been a fact of life for all too many young people. We must ensure that all young people have the full protection that the law and proper regulation can afford.

We must also ensure that we identify good practice, challenge poor performance and offer assistance in achieving good quality, where the knowledge and skills of the Department of Health and the social services inspectorate can be of assistance. The White Paper will also set out our proposals for a general social care council. We will consult widely on that, and work has already begun in preparation for the White Paper. The exact remit of the council is yet to be decided, but it will set standards for conduct and practice for people working in social care. It will also have responsibility for improving standards in social care services and for ensuring that those services enjoy the confidence of our most vulnerable fellow citizens. We must ensure that the concerns of users, carers and the wider public—not simply those of narrow professional interests—are taken on board by the council.

Children in public care, whether care is provided in the public or the private sector, need to rely on the context in which that care is provided for their safety and security. Sir William Utting's report on safeguards for children living away from home has recently been published and, on 19 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made a statement in the House on the Government's approach to it. Under my right hon. Friend's chairmanship, a ministerial task group has been set up to prepare the Government's detailed response to the Utting report. The task group will be concerned to ensure that high standards are set and met.

My hon. Friend made clear in his speech the urgency of the work that the Utting report has set in train; we cannot be complacent about the number of children and young people who are currently at risk. That is why we shall drive the agenda forward, especially with regard to the regulation of small children's homes.

Statutory responsibilities already exist under the Arrangements for Placements Regulations 1991 and the Review of Cases Regulations 1991 for placing authorities to ensure that the placement is appropriate and that regular reviews are carried out. The authorities should satisfy themselves that the home will meet the full range of the needs of the child, including health and education arrangements, and that police and other checks have been carried out on staff in the home.

I have in mind especially the concerns that my hon. Friend raised about the alleged abuse of drugs by at least one staff member of the home that he mentioned. If that has resulted in a criminal conviction, it is a serious matter and those who have a responsibility for placing children and young people with any such organisation should fulfil the requirements placed on them by the regulations I have mentioned. It is a matter for the gravest concern if that has not been done. Out of sight, out of mind is not an acceptable approach for any local authority to take when it places vulnerable children and young people with an organisation. If that has occurred with Care Afloat, it is a serious matter and I will ask the chief inspector of social services to look into the matter in conjunction with the relevant county and district councils to ensure that there has been proper compliance with the regulations.

In conclusion, I shall make one or two remarks about the provision of high-quality services by social services departments, because they often have the most vulnerable children in their care. We are concerned to ensure that high-quality services are provided cost effectively. We have no problem with a mixed economy of care. The issue is whether the service meets users' needs and is an effective use of the resources available to social services departments. We are concerned about the organisation that my hon. Friend mentioned because it currently runs outside the regulatory structure. We want to address that. That is our concern—not the fact that the organisation works in the private sector. Some good, innovative work is being done in the private sector and we value its contribution to the care of children and young people.

We are also committed to the principle of providing care of the highest standard in a context that addresses the concerns raised by my hon. Friend about the distance of homes from the original homes of the young people involved. My hon. Friend is fortunate in representing one of the most beautiful parts of England which has a challenging environment in which it is possible to provide a specialised service for children and young people. Having said that, it is wrong to remove children and young people from the structures that would support their development and important to ensure that they are not out of sight, out of mind.

My hon. Friend has done his constituents a service in raising this issue. I hope that he is satisfied that the Government will act on the concerns that he raises. He has enabled the House to address one of the most important areas of its responsibilities—the social care of children and young people, who are the very people who make up the future that holds out the best hope for this country and us all. For that, the House owes him a debt of gratitude.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

BILL PRESENTED

Scottish Agricultural College Order Confirmation

Mr. Secretary Dewar presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to the Scottish Agricultural College: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered on Tuesday 9 December, and to be printed [Bill 93].

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Welsh Assembly

1. **Mr. Forth:** What representations he has received regarding the establishment of a Welsh Assembly. [17470]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): I have received numerous representations in the form of letters both to myself personally and to the Welsh Office, many telephone calls to the Assembly information line and e-mails to the Assembly website. We did of course have a referendum on 18 September, and I am pleased to remind the right hon. Gentleman that the people spoke for themselves when they voted for the creation of a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Forth: Now that the city fathers of Cardiff seem to have lost interest in having the Assembly in their city, what reassurances can the Secretary of State give to the nervous taxpayers of Wales that, in his increasingly anxious search for a location for the Assembly elsewhere in Wales, they will not be expected to pay ever-increasing amounts to prop up his incompetence?

Mr. Davies: I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that there is no question of such a thing happening. The financial memorandum attached to the Bill that was published last week made it absolutely clear that the Government intend to stick to the pledges given in the White Paper. There is no anxious search for an alternative location. The right hon. Gentleman will be pleased to receive tomorrow a copy of the consultation document that I intend to produce to make clear the Government's options.

Mr. Alan Williams: Will the Secretary of State give full weight in his considerations to the fact that he could come to Swansea at a fraction of the cost of staying in Cardiff? Will he bear in mind the fact that it is a matter not only of property values but of the fact that the guildhall in Swansea needs absolutely no refurbishment and could literally be moved into at a week's notice? Will he further bear it in mind that we in south-west Wales welcome the chance to benefit from the one piece of inward investment that is completely within his personal control?

Mr. Davies: I am sure that my right hon. Friend and I both appreciate the delicious irony in his arguing the case for the Assembly to be located in Swansea. I was pleased to receive a letter from him in which he said that the people of Swansea wanted an Assembly—to be located in Swansea.

Swansea has made a powerful case. As I said a moment ago, I am about to issue a consultation document; Swansea features prominently in it and I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend, his colleagues, the people of Swansea and the local authority will continue to make their own powerful case.

Mr. Livsey: How many representations has the Secretary of State received from the farming communities—I am sure that he has received some—in favour of a Welsh Assembly, and what does he intend to do about the current crisis in agriculture, which I am certain—

Madam Speaker: Order. We are dealing with the Welsh Assembly. The hon. Gentleman is bringing up a totally different matter.

Mr. Davies: I have received many representations from the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales in favour of a Welsh Assembly. I believe that they understand that, when we have our own democratic form of government in Wales, we will be able to address the problems that beset all those who live and work in the countryside. It might be of interest to the hon. Gentleman to know that I will meet representatives of both the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales later this afternoon; I am sure that we will discuss the impact of the Assembly, among other matters.

Mr. Barry Jones: My right hon. Friend has let the names Cardiff and Swansea cross his lips this afternoon. May I mention Alyn and Deeside and invite him to consider seriously locating the Assembly in my constituency at the new, large modern offices at Ewloe, owned by Flintshire county council? Such consideration would be most gratefully received.

Mr. Davies: It is certainly the case that Ewloe was one of the locations which we considered in the initial search for a suitable location for the Welsh Assembly. I must disappoint my hon. Friend because it is not the firmest of favourites in the consultation document. I understand the concern that the people from the north of Wales have expressed, and it is my intention to make it clear in the consultation document that there will be an opportunity for the people of north Wales, in common with people throughout Wales, to have access to the Assembly.

Mr. Shepherd: Surely the greatest representation that the right hon. Gentleman has received in respect of such matters is the decision of 75 per cent. of the Welsh electorate who did not support the Welsh Office proposals. Would not the best solution be to consign the powers that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to use to Welsh elected Members of Parliament, who could discharge those responsibilities without any further burden being placed on the taxpayer of Wales?

Mr. Davies: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong—75 per cent. of the people of Wales did not oppose the creation of the Assembly. If we were now to set aside those proposals, the Labour party and the Government would be breaching their election manifesto and we would be breaching the commitment given by the House when we passed the referendum Bill to introduce a Bill to provide for the democratic settlement of government in Wales. We would thus betray the people of Wales who fought and voted for a referendum on the basis of the regulations laid down by the House.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: Can the Secretary of State confirm that the essential nature of the choice before him and his opposite number, the Secretary of State for Scotland, is between a high-tech, palace of technology Parliament in a brand-new building—free of VAT,

of course—or a Parliament converted from an historic traditional building, such as Cardiff city hall? Perhaps in the hearts and minds of the Welsh people, and even perhaps in the heart and mind of my right hon. Friend, that building is the nearest thing that we have in Wales to Big Ben and this Palace.

Mr. Davies: As I have said publicly before, and I repeat to my hon. Friend that Cardiff has always been the obvious choice for the location of the Assembly, and city hall has always been my preferred location for it. I am determined that if we acquire city hall, it must be at the right price and not at any price. I can assure my hon. Friend that the case that he has put has been considered. Indeed, I will answer his question tomorrow when I produce the consultative document to which I have already referred.

Mr. Ancram: Will the Secretary of State confirm that any additional cost of establishing the Assembly arising from the incompetent way in which he and his colleagues have handled the project, not least by failing after 18 years to find a home for the Assembly, will come out of the Welsh mainstream budget, which would otherwise be spent on important sectors such as housing and education? Indeed, the Welsh section of the Confederation of British Industry fears that the cost will be met out of money that might otherwise go towards economic development. Should not the right hon. Gentleman apologise to the people of Wales for not having resolved such problems before the referendum, and thus for having sold the referendum to them on a false prospectus?

Mr. Davies: I really do not understand the case that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to put. I fail to see how the present Government are responsible for the sins that his Government and his party visited on Wales in the past 18 years. It is a travesty for him to talk about the time scale when he had the opportunity to preside over a change in democratic relationships not only in Wales but throughout the United Kingdom when his party enjoyed power in the House of Commons.

I have already made it absolutely clear that the financial memorandum attached to the Government of Wales Bill spells out the cost of providing a home for the Assembly. It is my determination to keep within that financial limit, which subsequently led to Cardiff city council rejecting my offer to acquire city hall. Is the right hon. Gentleman now suggesting that I should acquire that building at a price greater than the independently assessed market value reached by the district valuer? Is that what he is suggesting? Would that be equivalent to safeguarding public finances?

Mr. Ancram: Does not this indicate that it would be a far better use of the Secretary of State's time if, instead of dogfighting with his socialist colleagues on Cardiff county council about Cardiff city hall, he explained to the people of Wales how an Assembly might in future be able to help the hard-pressed farmers of Wales, who are suffering grave dangers to their livelihood and who need more than the patronising arrogance that they have had from him over the past three days?

Mr. Davies: I fail to see how my statement condemning the illegal actions of farmers from Wales and anywhere else in this country in seizing and dumping legally transported goods is patronising arrogance. Is the right hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that the illegal action taken by people in Holyhead and elsewhere in Wales over the past two or three years is action that he defends? The fact of the matter is that the Government are prepared to sit down and listen to the farmers of Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and that is precisely what I shall be doing at 3.30 pm today. The right hon. Gentleman is betraying the interests of this country by stirring up the sort of illegal action that he is now suggesting he supports.

Child Care

2. **Ann Clwyd:** What actions he will take to develop a child care strategy following the Utting report. [17471]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): In addition to work already under way involving the Adrianne Jones report, the Welsh Office and the Department of Health will be developing a full programme of policy and management changes in the context of a strategy for residential child care to ensure that children living away from home are properly safeguarded. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health set out the Government's initial response to Sir William Utting's report in a statement to the House on 19 November. That outlined the action that is already under way and announced our intention to consult widely and establish a ministerial task force that will prepare a full Government response.

Ann Clwyd: I am glad to hear that news from my hon. Friend, especially after 18 years of inaction by the previous Government on this issue. There were 12 internal inquiries in one county alone, yet no action was taken by the Welsh Office, so I am pleased to hear that such vigorous action is being taken now. Many of my constituents who were abused in north Wales have given evidence to the inquiry. The alleged abusers have been kept anonymous within the inquiry. Can my hon. Friend give an assurance that none of those people who have been named at the inquiry but whose names the public do not yet know are currently working with either children or young people?

Mr. Griffiths: As far as I know, that is the case, but I shall double check given the real concern expressed by my hon. Friend about that issue. I assure her that, even while the inquiry is going on, we are looking very carefully at all aspects of children's services. We realise that this is a serious and important problem, which has been left to lie unattended for far too long.

Welsh Assembly

3. **Mr. Ruffley:** When he plans to publish the Bill setting up an Assembly for Wales. [17472]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Government of Wales Bill was published on 27 November. The Second Reading debate will take place next week and I hope that Royal Assent will be granted by the summer.

In the interim, I have decided to appoint an advisory group to consider the standing orders and other procedures of the Assembly. We want a dynamic,

modern and inclusive institution, fit for the new millennium. I am pleased to announce that John Elfed Jones, a distinguished figure in Welsh business and public life, has accepted my invitation to be the chairman of that advisory group.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Secretary of State explain why he believes that the bulk of the Committee stage of the Bill should be taken away from the Floor of the House? Does he stand by his earlier comments to the effect that Members of Parliament would not be interested in the detail of the Bill?

Mr. Davies: The handling of the Bill is a matter for the Government's business managers and I understand that the usual channels are now considering the matter.

Mr. Bercow: Oh?

Mr. Ruffley: Are they?

Mr. Davies: Perhaps the hon. Gentlemen should discuss it with their own usual channels. It is and always has been my view that adequate time should be provided on the Floor of the House to debate, not only Second Reading, but key contentious clauses. It is also my view that many matters of detail in the legislation will be of particular concern to Welsh Members and would be best discussed in Committee. I should point out that, were the Bill to be referred to a Standing Committee of the House, inevitably Members of Parliament representing English constituencies would have to sit on that Committee, because there are no Conservatives representing Welsh constituencies.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Will my right hon. Friend advise whether there is a Welsh word for Bourbon, since the Conservative party appears to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing since it emerged from the election with no Members in Wales and also suffered a defeat in the referendum? Will he assure the House that he will consider seriously the Swansea, Aberystwyth, Mold option for the site of the Assembly, which would not only avoid the centralisation of Cardiff but reflect the diversity which is part of the joy of our Wales?

Mr. Davies: Many Welsh words readily come to mind to describe Conservative Members, but I must confess that my knowledge is not sufficiently comprehensive to give the Welsh translation of Bourbon. However, I can assure my hon. Friend that his proposition, and that for Swansea, are in the consultative document which I shall publish tomorrow.

Mr. Llwyd: Now that the Bill has been published and we are aware that agriculture will be one of the core responsibilities of the forthcoming Assembly, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that there is a huge crisis in Welsh agriculture, so when he sees the unions this afternoon, will he not rule anything out? In particular, will he urgently consider agrimonetary compensation and hill livestock compensatory allowances? Surely now is the time to act, not listen.

Mr. Davies: We have to listen, of course, as the hon. Gentleman will understand. Everyone understands the particular difficulties that face the agriculture industry. There are problems that are associated with the high level of the pound at the moment and there is the backlog following 10 years of Conservative failure to deal with the BSE crisis. That has undermined the domestic market and is leading to imports on an unprecedented scale and the inability of British agriculture to compete by exporting its products. Those are matters which I shall be discussing with the representatives of British agriculture. I understand their concerns and I shall listen carefully to what they have to say. Any response will have to be made between the respective Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries of Food in conjunction with the Treasury. However, I shall most certainly listen carefully to the case that is put to me later on today.

Mr. Wilkinson: In the consultative document that will help those who are involved with the legislative process of the Government of Wales Bill, will the right hon. Gentleman consider locating the Assembly on two sites on the European model, one in the north to please the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and one in the south to please the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), and perhaps, on the Luxembourg model, with a secretariat in mid-Wales in between?

Mr. Davies: I have never identified the hon. Gentleman as a particular advocate of things European before, so I take the suggestion that he is now making with a pinch of salt. Propositions in the consultative document will show that it is possible to create an Assembly with one permanent home but accessible and available to people wherever they live throughout Wales. I trust that when the document is published tomorrow the hon. Gentleman will go to the Library, get a copy and let me have his response.

4. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** What estimate he has made of the costs of the proposed Welsh Assembly. [17473]

9. **Mr. Paterson:** If he will make a statement on the cost of the Welsh Assembly. [17479]

Mr. Ron Davies: The costs of setting up and running the Assembly are set out in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Government of Wales Bill, which was introduced in the House on 26 November.

Mrs. Winterton: Last week, the Secretary of State described Cardiff's Labour-controlled city council as "profoundly wrong and misguided" in declining the financial package on offer to base the Welsh Assembly at Cardiff city hall. However, is it not the right hon. Gentleman himself who is profoundly wrong and misguided in creating a situation where Cardiff and Swansea are at each other's throats by foisting on the people of Wales a job-destroying and expensive bureaucracy which at least three quarters of them did not support in the recent referendum?

Mr. Davies: With the greatest respect to the hon. Lady, I think that she fails to understand the issues. No one has foisted an Assembly on to the people of Wales.

In the general election in May 1997, the people of Wales rejected the Conservative party in its entirety. Only the Conservative party stood for the status quo. Every Member of Parliament elected for a Welsh constituency in May 1997 was elected on the basis of supporting constitutional change. In September, in a referendum, the people of Wales had the opportunity, very specifically, very directly, to approve those proposals. They did so, and it is my responsibility to ensure that that legislation passes through the House of Commons; I will fulfil that responsibility.

Mr. Paterson: The referendum showed that an overwhelming majority of Welsh people do not want the Assembly. Will the Secretary of State please explain why £100 million over four years is better spent on a talking shop for superannuated county councillors than on front-line services such as health, schools or—topically this week—Welsh farmers?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman's comments are as offensive as they are irrelevant. In September this year, the people of Wales had the opportunity to vote on the Government's proposals. The rules for the referendum were laid down by Parliament. The people of Wales followed those rules, the referendum was won and, on that basis, the Government of Wales Bill will pass through Parliament.

Inward Investors (Jobs)

5. **Mr. Hanson:** How many jobs have been announced by inward investors in Wales since January 1996. [17474]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): Since January 1996, the Welsh Development Agency has recorded inward investment projects which promise 21,678 new jobs and 6,890 safeguarded jobs.

Mr. Hanson: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming inward investment since the general election in Flintshire, in Wrexham and throughout Wales, which has been proved a tremendous success for our local economy? Will he take it from me that Labour's positive attitude in Europe has helped inward investment, while our policies on a minimum wage, on devolution and the social chapter have not proved the deterrents that Opposition Members believe them to be?

Mr. Hain: Indeed, as the record of inward investment since the general election shows, the debate on this matter has been divorced from reality. The real competition is not internal, with the rest of Britain, but external, with the rest of Europe. I invite those critics, including Conservatives, to join the Government and the Welsh Development Agency in batting for Britain instead of seeking to promote a squabble within Britain.

Mr. Bercow: Does the Minister believe that 60 additional politicians in a Welsh Assembly will help to bring a single inward investment project to Britain that would not in any case have been secured?

Mr. Hain: The answer is yes, and the people of Wales—and Welsh business—agree with the Government in that answer. The Welsh Development Agency and Welsh business, including the CBI, wants an Assembly to give Wales a platform and a voice in Europe and internationally, to win jobs for Wales.

Mr. Rowlands: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the most important sources for inward investment has been south-east Asia? Given the economic problems arising in south-east Asia, will my right hon. and hon. Friends take time to try to safeguard the investments that are vital to jobs in all our communities?

Mr. Hain: The answer is yes. The developments in south-east Asia have been extremely troubling and we are taking every action that is needed.

Mr. Evans: Britain has always done well out of inward investment and Wales has done especially well, attracting into the Principality one fifth of inward investment. However, has the Minister estimated how many extra inward investment projects will need to come about to make up for the loss of jobs in Welsh farming? Irrespective of what he and the Secretary of State for Wales say, many jobs will be lost. One commentator says that Welsh farming is bleeding to death. That is a result of the policies of the Minister and of the Government; high interest rates are sucking in cheap imports. With their policies, the Minister and the Government are helping to kill off Welsh farming. What are they going to do about it?

Mr. Hain: The Conservatives attacked Welsh farmers year after year. They failed to deal with the BSE crisis and to provide a platform for Welsh farming. We are dealing with the consequences of their dreadful and shameful record.

Mr. Öpik: Does the Minister agree that the agricultural elements of Wales are suffering desperately due to the Conservative legacy of BSE and the export ban? Does he further agree that the Government must now reinstate proper funding and finance to reinvest in the ailing agricultural industry in Wales?

Mr. Hain: Much of what the hon. Gentleman said is right. That is why my right hon. Friend is meeting the farmers' leaders this afternoon to discuss their concerns and to see whether we can find a way forward.

Housing Developments

6. **Mr. Clappison:** What plans he has to ensure that housing developments in Wales are restricted to brown-field sites. [17475]

Mr. Win Griffiths: "Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy" of May 1996 stresses that full and effective use should be made of land within existing urban areas. The use of appropriate vacant land within urban areas for housing development can assist regeneration and relieve pressure for development in the countryside.

Mr. Clappison: I hope that the Government will not aggravate their problems with Cardiff city council by seeking to locate the Welsh Assembly on a green-field

site. What proportion of new housing in Wales does the Minister think can be built on previously developed brown-field sites? What is his target?

Mr. Griffiths: At the moment, more than half of all housing being financed by Tai Cymru—Housing in Wales—is being built on brown-field sites. Earlier this year, I asked local authorities in Wales to consider creating green belts where they had particular evidence of urban sprawl. We are doing everything possible to ensure that brown-field sites in Wales are utilised to the full. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I hope that hon. Members are sitting comfortably. I was watching what was going on.

Spending Levels

7. **Mr. Flight:** If he will make a statement on per capita spending levels in Wales. [17476]

Mr. Hain: In 1996–97, control total expenditure within the Welsh Office's area of responsibility was £2,348 per head.

Mr. Flight: How does that compare with spending per capita in England? If, as I suspect, it is some 25 per cent. higher, will there be a fair apportionment of spending between the people of England and of Wales when the minority of Wales has its Assembly?

Mr. Hain: Talking about fair comparisons, the hon. Gentleman's constituency in south-east England receives 14 per cent. more than the average GDP per head for England. In Wales, GDP is 18 per cent. less than the English average and the figure has got relatively worse over the past 20 years. Personal income is 17 per cent. lower and has got worse. Unemployment, poverty and health are all worse. In view of the shameful Tory record, the hon. Gentleman should be grovelling instead of griping.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend agree that the establishment of a Welsh Assembly provides a much-needed opportunity to formulate an economic strategy for Wales and to address the prosperity gap to which he referred?

Mr. Hain: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. For the first time, a Welsh Assembly will be able to address the real needs of Wales—north and south, east and west; in both poor and well-off areas—to develop a coherent economic strategy for Wales. Some weeks ago, I published a document on that matter, setting out the basis for a debate so that we can progress to a high-quality, world-beating economy in Wales.

Regional Economic Development

8. **Mr. David Heath:** What discussions he has had with representatives of local government in the south-west of England concerning regional economic development. [17477]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have had no such formal discussions myself. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will, however, be announcing later today the Government's proposals for regional development agencies in England. I am an enthusiastic supporter of that development. I hope that they will be as successful in England as the Welsh Development Agency has been in Wales. I know that the hon. Gentleman will want to join me in congratulating the WDA on its latest success in getting a multi-million-pound investment in Ebbw Vale by Yuasa Battery, which will create a further 148 new jobs.

Mr. Heath: Given that, on our side of the Bristol channel, we do not have the advantage of a Secretary of State, or of a new assembly, or yet of a regional development agency, will the Secretary of State give me an assurance that he would not countenance any inducements being given to move companies from areas of high unemployment in the west country to areas of low unemployment in Wales?

Mr. Davies: There is no suggestion that this Government would ever be party to such a development.

Mr. Llew Smith: I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about new jobs in the Ebbw Vale community. Does he recognise that the Welsh Office's preferred option for the A465 Heads of the Valley road will run through the Rassau industrial estate and could affect the future development of that factory? Would the Secretary of State or one of his Ministers be willing to meet and discuss the matter with the local authority?

Mr. Davies: I have already had meetings with Yuasa Battery and with representatives of my hon. Friend's local authority. I am aware of the difficulties that the company perceives, but it is my understanding that the present development can go ahead, with the aligned road proceeding as planned.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [17499] **Dr. Tonge:** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 December.

Does the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with Cabinet colleagues and others. Later this afternoon, I shall have a meeting with the Prime Minister of Italy.

Dr. Tonge: I apologise to the House, Madam Speaker.

Does the Prime Minister accept that yesterday's local government settlement will inevitably mean that local councils will have to take money from the elderly and the disabled, and that next year's council taxes will be the highest on record?

The Prime Minister: Under our proposals, an extra £1 billion is going into education—more than the hon. Lady's party sought—and an extra £350 million for community care. We are making the funding of councils

fairer, but yes, there is a limit on the amount of resources that we are able to put in. The hon. Lady and her party call for more money for health, education, local government, the coal industry, transport and the environment, and all that is to come out of 1p extra on the standard rate of tax. They also want the programme for the young unemployed, but they do not want the windfall tax. All I can say is that it must be the longest "p" in history.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does my right hon. Friend share the anger of my elderly constituent, Mrs. Goldsmith, whose husband is in a coma in hospital, as a result of suffering a heart attack brought on by the distress caused to him by bricks being thrown at his window by young people, some of whom were as young as nine or 10? Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reaffirm to the House and to the country, as well as specifically to Mrs. Goldsmith, that his Government will do everything in their power to reduce the time that it takes to bring young and persistent offenders to justice?

The Prime Minister: Certainly, I can confirm that to my hon. Friend. The Goldsmith family have my deepest sympathy, and the sympathy of all in the House. They are, unfortunately, not alone in the plight that they suffer, which is why the Government are determined to take action not just in cutting the time that it takes to get persistent young offenders to court but in dealing with the fact that youngsters, sometimes under the age of 10, are out late at night with no proper parental supervision. We are determined to put an end to that, in the interests of our elderly people and safety in our communities.

Mr. Ashdown: Leaving aside for a moment the fact that the Prime Minister seems to be as good this week as he was last week at misrepresenting the Liberal Democrat position on the basis of what he well knows to be an inaccuracy, I turn to a different—and perhaps even more serious—subject.

I have no wish to anticipate the details of the statement to be made later on bovine spongiform encephalopathy, but will the Prime Minister at least confirm that he knows and understands that a decision to ban beef on the bone at this stage will come as a bitter and terrible blow to a beef industry that is already reeling from recent events? Will he confirm that the paramount necessity to take whatever steps are required to preserve public safety will be applied equally not just to British beef but to imported beef?

The Prime Minister: I understand the plight that the beef farmers face at the moment and how great a blow this must be to them. However, when we receive scientific advice and the chief medical officer makes certain recommendations, we feel obliged to follow them. We shall do everything we can to mitigate the problems that farmers face. I confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that we would expect the same conditions to apply to any beef that is imported into this country.

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that reassuring answer, and I am particularly grateful for his statement that he will do anything he can to compensate and assist farmers. I remind him that there is a great deal of unclaimed money in the European Union. It would be especially helpful at this stage if the Government were to claim that, because of the high rate of the green pound and the damage that it is doing. Has the time not now arrived when we should have, once and for all, a proper public inquiry into the whole miserable mishandling of this affair by the previous Government?

The Prime Minister: We shall make a statement later about an inquiry into BSE and the handling of that issue in the past few years. This year, with the over-30-months scheme and other measures, some £1.4 billion will be spent on providing support. The problem with asking for more money from Europe is that, as a result of the abatement scheme agreed under the previous Government—which is, on the whole, a good thing for Britain in terms of the rebate that we receive—£71 out of every £100 that we receive must come from the British Exchequer. We obviously must take account of that when making any such application.

Mr. Borrow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the appointment this week of the Independent Commission on the Voting System is an important part of the programme to modernise the British Constitution? When is the commission likely to report and when will the referendum be held? If the referendum finds in favour of an alternative to the first-past-the-post system and if the Parliament runs to its full five-year term, will it be possible to have that alternative system in operation at the next general election?

The Prime Minister: The answers to those questions must await the outcome of the commission, although I expect it not to take an overdue amount of time in reporting. I am very pleased that it has been set up, in fulfilment of the pledge that we gave at the election.

Q2. [17500] **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** Does the Prime Minister recall writing an article that appeared in the *Evening Standard* of 14 April this year—two weeks before the election—in which he provided answers to 50 questions? One answer states:

"Our expenditure plans require no additional taxation."

In light of that, how does the Prime Minister justify a 10 per cent. increase in council tax? Surely that is yet another Labour broken promise.

The Prime Minister: That is absolute nonsense. We gave pledges on the standard and top rate of income tax, and we have kept to those pledges. We never promised—no Government could—that we would never raise council tax bills in any shape or form. The actual rise that has occurred is the increase pencilled in in the Conservative Government's spending plans.

Q3. [17501] **Mr. MacShane:** Question 3, Madam Speaker—*[Interruption.]* This is my first question under the new regime. Forgive me, Madam Speaker.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in view of the fact that RJB Mining made profits of £173 million in 1995 and £189 million last year, questions about the future of the coal mines that Mr. Budge owns should be addressed, first and foremost, to Mr. Budge? Given the huge importance of the industry, especially in Yorkshire, I ask

my right hon. Friend to give some words of assurance to those who believe in the future of that industry—particularly those brave and skilled men who work in it.

The Prime Minister: We will do everything that we can to assist the coal industry. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the very substantial profits of RJB Mining in the past two years. It is also the case, of course, that other British deep-mining companies have signed contracts with generators at more competitive prices. However, having said that, we are working as intensively as we can to try to ensure that the generators and RJB come together. We want to preserve as much of the deep-mined coal industry as we possibly can. This comes at a time when the National Grid and others are advising us of the dangers of relying too much on gas-fired power stations.

In the light of that new advice, my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry will announce today a review of our policy on the approval of new power station developments. He proposes that, in the meantime, all existing applications should be put on hold. That is consistent with the long-term energy needs of the country. It is not a panacea by all means, and it certainly is not a Government subsidy, but it is important that we do all that we can in the long-term interests of energy policy in this country.

Mr. Hague: When the Paymaster General said yesterday that the well-heeled have already done very well out of tax shelters, was he referring to people who have saved more than £50,000 in their working lives, or was he simply speaking for himself?

The Prime Minister: The announcement that was made yesterday is good news for middle Britain. There will be 6 million extra savers as a result—6 million people who will be able to save but at present cannot. Nothing better demonstrates the difference between the two political parties than the right hon. Gentleman's party saying that the system should not be changed at all and our party saying that another 6 million people should benefit.

Mr. Hague: We are all in favour of encouraging saving. We are not saying that the system should not be changed, but do not these proposals penalise hundreds of thousands of people who have worked hard and saved hard in good faith? Was it not a bit rich for a Minister who has £12 million in tax-free offshore trusts to introduce a new tax for people who have worked all their lives, only to build up much smaller amounts? In order to improve these proposals, will the Prime Minister reconsider? Will he order the Treasury to reconsider the £50,000 limit that the Government advocate?

The Prime Minister: I should explain that the same amount of tax relief is going in under our proposals. Indeed, over time there will be more. As a result of people being able to put in cash and take it out as they want—as opposed to its being tied up at the moment for five years—many more people can benefit. Supermarkets, banks and others will offer new proposals. The right hon. Gentleman says that the limit is £50,000. I should point out, of course, that for a couple it is £50,000 each—in other words, £100,000. Therefore, I believe that ensuring that the tax relief that we give is directed to middle and lower-income families is the best way of using it.

Mr. Hague: If the Prime Minister is not prepared to reconsider these proposals for the hundreds of thousands of people who will be adversely affected, what will he say to the people who were told by that the Labour party would not do this? The Chief Secretary said to the *Investors' Chronicle* last year that the idea that

> "Labour is examining proposals to abolish personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts"

was "not true". He went on to say that people were entitled to certainty. What sort of promise is that? What consideration can the Prime Minister give to proposals that involve breaking a promise on which his party was elected to power?

The Prime Minister: That is absolute nonsense. No promise was broken. The same amount of money in tax relief is going in, but, for the first time, the 4.5 million people who have TESSAs, which have a £9,000 limit and which have to be in for five years, can now increase the amount up to £50,000. They can put in £1,000 in cash each year as they wish, and they can get it out as they wish, and the amount of tax relief is set to rise over the coming years. For the first time, middle and lower-income families have a tax-free account into which they can put money. The money can grow. This is about extending opportunities to save, not curtailing them.

Mr. Hague: If the Prime Minister does not think that the Chief Secretary broke promises from what he said to the *Investors' Chronicle*, he should see what the Chief Secretary said to *The Observer*. The Chief Secretary said:

> "We've always supported the Pep regime . . . We're not reviewing it at all."

The newspaper commented:

> "It is easy to imagine Labour putting a cap of . . . £50,000 per person on these holdings. But Darling says he is 'not actively looking at' the question of a cap."

Does the Prime Minister recognise that the proposal is a clear breach of an election promise? Have not middle-income earners now seen mortgage tax relief slashed, pensions clobbered, council tax raised and TESSAs and PEPs scrapped? Will he reconsider the £50,000 limit, because people invested in good faith?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has just suggested that the £50,000 limit is retrospective. That is not the case. Those who have money in funds are protected right up to April 1999, when the new system will be introduced. There will actually be more money for them.

We know that interest rates have had to go up since the election, on the advice of the Bank of England: they would have gone up before the election had the previous Government acted responsibly. As for council tax bills, we inherited those figures from the previous Government, and I doubt whether the right hon. Gentleman stood up in Cabinet and said that they were wrong.

The plain fact of the matter is that this proposal will give 6 million more people the chance to save. There is a simple choice. We can either give those 6 million people the first chance that they have had in their lives to save in a tax-free account or carry on paying a large sum of money to a small group of people at the top. I believe that we should opt for the many, not for the few.

Mr. Hague: If the Prime Minister does not recall what the Chief Secretary said, does he recall that, during the election campaign, he himself said that the idea that he would take action against PEPs was "completely absurd"? Does he recall saying that he had no plans to increase tax at all? When he put up posters saying that, he did not put a footnote saying, "Except for people who have saved hard over recent years" or "Except for people with pension funds" or "Except for people reliant on disability benefits." He said that he had no plans to increase tax at all. Will he now review the £50,000 proposal? It is, after all, in a consultation paper; so if it is not open to review, what is the point of the consultation?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me say that no one will take lessons on broken promises from the party that said that it would never put VAT on fuel, and put it on, and introduced 22 tax rises.

Government is about the choices that we make. There is a choice: we can either spend the same amount of money on tax relief and give 6 million more people the chance to save, or carry on with the existing system. I believe that it is better to give people the chance to save for the first time in their lives by opening up savings to the millions of people who have never had that chance. Millions of people in this country who listen to this debate will realise yet again that the Conservatives represent a few people at the top, whereas the Labour party stands for the many.

Charlotte Atkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a sensibly set national minimum wage will encourage employers to invest in the skills of their staff, and hence help this country to compete? What time span does the Prime Minister envisage for the introduction of the national minimum wage, which is so important to my constituents in Staffordshire, Moorlands?

The Prime Minister: Obviously we want the minimum wage to be established as soon as possible. Of course my hon. Friend is absolutely right: properly implemented, a minimum wage is a good part of a modern labour market strategy, which is why many countries that have minimum wages, such as the United States and the Netherlands, have lower unemployment than Britain.

Of course, one of the benefits of a minimum wage is that it will get us some way towards reducing the huge benefit bill that goes to subsidise low pay. Despite what the neanderthals on the Opposition Benches say, a minimum wage is not just fair, but the right thing for employment.

Q4. [17502] **Mr. Green:** The Prime Minister will recall the Chancellor of the Exchequer saying at the Labour conference last year that

"A Labour Chancellor will not permit"—

Hon. Members: Reading.

Mr. Green: I am reading the Chancellor's quotation. He said:

"A Labour Chancellor will not permit tax relief to millionaires in offshore tax havens."

May I ask the Prime Minister: has the Chancellor reversed that policy? If not, may I suggest that the Prime Minister introduce him to the Paymaster General, who, at the same time as denying small savers in TESSAs and PEPs the fruits of their saving, is enjoying the fruits of exactly the kind of offshore tax avoidance that the Chancellor condemned in opposition?

The Prime Minister: No, Madam Speaker.

Q5. [17503] **Mr. Skinner:** Now that my right hon. Friend has turned over the pages of the energy policy—which some of us have been arguing about for a long time—by restricting the amount of gas that is used in power stations, may I sort of jolly him along a little further and suggest that it would be a good idea as well to restrict the electricity from France, which is also getting rid of miners' jobs, and to stop the protection for nuclear power? Will he also bear it in mind that it comes a bit thick for that millionaire Budge to talk about sacking miners, when he is getting opencast licences by the score and every million tonnes that are ripped out of the soil result in 500 miners losing their jobs in a coal mine? Something has to be done about that as well.

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's point about imports of fuel, of course we are taking action on that. Indeed, a Bill that is going through the House will improve the situation. It is also the case that, as a result of the announcement that my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry will make, some relief will be given to the industry by the moratorium on gas-fired power stations.

On opencast mining, proper consideration needs to be taken—which my hon. Friend knows that we will ensure—of the environmental factors, although many people work in the opencast industries as well, but what is important is that we set any decisions that we take within a long-term energy policy, because it is too important to be left simply to short-term market forces, which was the policy of the Conservative party.

Mr. Shepherd: Why, when the Cardiff electorate rejected the Welsh Office's proposals for an elected assembly, and when 75 per cent. of the Welsh electorate withheld consent to the proposals, are the Government proceeding with them? Is that not a denial of representative democracy? Why bother to have a referendum?

The Prime Minister: The case was for a simple majority in a referendum and that was achieved. On that basis, it would be perverse if we were then to say, having secured a majority in the referendum, that we were not proceeding with the elected Assembly. May I put the question the other way around? Supposing there had been a minority in favour and we had then said that we were proceeding with it, there would have been an outcry from the Conservative Benches.

Q6. [17504] **Miss Begg:** As someone who does not understand the allure of football, I can appreciate that it is a great passion for many boys and girls and some hon. Members. May I therefore welcome today's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment that he is to set up homework clubs in football grounds, thereby improving the literacy of many young people and giving them a great chance in the future? Are there any plans to extend the scheme to Scotland, even if the Prime Minister cannot guarantee the success of Aberdeen football club?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I can give no guarantee on the latter point. The circumstances in Scotland are obviously different because there are fewer big football clubs, but—*[Interruption.]* That is a statement of fact. However, my hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, is working on a scheme that will apply the same principles in those clubs. We are trying to get them together in a Scottish programme as well. The programme launched today will be an enormous success. It is exactly the right thing to do, to try to involve children in homework centres that will excite them as well as teach them and give them the chance to build relationships for the long term with those clubs, which will be helpful to both parties involved.

Mr. Hogg: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the anger and distaste of existing—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have some order in the House.

Mr. Hogg: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the anger and distaste of existing PEP holders who have seen their savings capped at £50,000, the statement having been made by a Minister, namely the Paymaster General, who has so ordered his own affairs as to put his millions outside the scope of UK taxation? Is that not a disgraceful double standard?

The Prime Minister: In relation to my hon. Friend, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is wrong as a matter of fact. In relation to the point about £50,000 PEP holders, which of course for a couple would be £100,000, there is, as I said to the Leader of the Opposition, a choice: we can spend the same amount of tax relief as it is spent at the moment, or we can do it in a fairer way that gives millions of people who do not get the chance to save now the opportunity to do so. We have made our choice; as usual, the Opposition want to have their cake and eat it.

Q7. [17505] **Mr. McDonnell:** As well as ignoring the hypocritical cant from the Opposition, will my right hon. Friend intervene at this late stage in the discussions on lone-parent benefits, and in the spirit of his concept of the giving age, to refer the issue to the newly formed social exclusion unit to address the genuine and deep-seated concerns of many Labour Members, in order to avoid the tragedy of the new Government being the first Labour Government to cut benefit for the poorest children in our community?

The Prime Minister: I simply say that we have to make a choice of priority. The money that we have put into child care and specific help for lone parents—the £200 million programme announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—is, we believe, the best way to help lone parents. Many of them want the chance to get off welfare and into work. The Government are putting several hundred million pounds into the system to help them do that. We inherited a difficult situation, but we believe that we have made the right choice of priority, however difficult it is.

Mr. Loughton: Last week, the Prime Minister invited himself and the world's press to tea with a pensioner couple to proclaim the benefit of the £20 pre-Christmas bonus. In the light of yesterday's local government spending allocation, will he tell us whether he has been invited back for tea to explain how last week's £20 gift has been more than gobbled up by the average council tax rise of £70?

The Prime Minister: First, what the hon. Gentleman says is incorrect. Secondly, the increase in council tax was the increase envisaged by the previous Government. The Conservative Government were not giving any additional help to pensioners for fuel bills, so I bet that, if I went back to the same pensioner couple, they would say, "Thank goodness we voted Labour, not Tory."

Iraq

Q8. [17506] **Mr. Dalyell:** If he will hold discussions with Arab Governments, and those of the other permanent members of the Security Council, with a view to persuading the United Nations to lift sanctions on Iraq in advance of a general settlement.

The Prime Minister: No is the answer to that question. Lifting sanctions cannot begin until Iraq has fully complied with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Dalyell: How can any of us justify an Anglo-American policy, because that is what it is, that results, intentionally or not, in 960,000 Iraqi malnourished children—a UNICEF figure—7,000 of whom died in October 1997? Will my right hon. Friend reflect on a view that is rather different from his own: sanctions, far from weakening the regime of Saddam Hussein, strengthen an enclosed dictatorship of that nature?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend that I reflect very much on those matters. No one can look at what is happening in Iraq without feeling the huge weight of tragedy for those young children and for the people of Iraq who suffer. But they suffer because of Saddam Hussein; they do not suffer because of the United Nations, our American allies or ourselves.

It is so important that people understand that the Security Council resolution is in place and UN inspectors have been sent in because we cannot allow even an outside risk or possibility of Saddam Hussein developing chemical or biological weapons of warfare. Over the past few years, those inspectors have found—and have therefore been able to eliminate and destroy—large parts of what could have gone to build such weapons.

The possibility is therefore not theoretical but actual. We have to maintain that pressure—we have to do it—until those UN resolutions are complied with. If they are complied with, immediate help can be given to the Iraqi people.

It is up to Saddam Hussein to make the changes. I agree that it is a terrible tragedy, and it is a great responsibility for anyone to perpetuate sanctions in such circumstances. I honestly believe, however, that the alternative would be far worse.

Regional Development Agencies (England)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott):

With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the English regions.

On 1 May, the British people gave the Government an overwhelming mandate to modernise Britain—to decentralise decision making, to promote a modern and efficient economy, to raise standards in education and training, and to fight against deprivation and the causes of economic and social decline.

We are committed to promoting policies that pursue jobs, growth, competitiveness and social progress, within a sustainable environment. Our aim is to achieve sustainable growth and to bridge the economic and democratic deficit that bedevils all the English regions. The decision to create the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions underlined the Government's more integrated approach to policy making, which will be just as important at the regional level.

The White Paper "Building Partnerships for Prosperity", which I have published today, states the Government's proposals for new structures and new opportunities in the regions. The new regional development agencies will bring fresh vitality to the task of economic and social regeneration in the regions.

For far too long, the English regions have been disadvantaged by the denial of development agencies, which helps to explain why English regions have lagged behind other regions in Europe. For far too long, the English regions have been neglected; it is our intention to change that.

Since 1945, successive Governments have introduced many programmes aimed at achieving economic and social objectives, but those have often lacked coherence, particularly at the English regional level. Now, more than ever, the English regions are demanding a strategic lead—for greater focus on wealth creation and jobs, for effective policy integration, and for co-ordination of central and local effort. Those goals have been achieved, to great effect, in the development agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Our election manifesto undertook to establish regional development agencies. In June, we launched a major consultation process. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning visited all the English regions and opened a dialogue with regional and national bodies. We received more than 1,500 responses to our consultation paper, which revealed overwhelming support for our proposals.

I will therefore shortly be introducing a Bill to establish nine new regional development agencies, based on the areas of the present Government offices for the regions. These "agencies for change" will be modelled on those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. One of their key functions will be to develop and implement regional economic strategies. They will do that in partnership with regional interests such as local authorities, training and enterprise councils, industry, business and voluntary groups, as well as with the Government.

Regional development agencies will be business-led, but board members will include representatives not only of industry but of local authorities, further and higher education, the voluntary sector, rural interests and tourism. The agencies will bring greater coherence and a regional perspective to national Government programmes and national policy making in areas such as transport and land use planning.

My intention is that regional development agencies will adopt the best elements of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland development agencies, which have played a key role in improving the economic prospects of their countries, but we will not impose a single blueprint on the regional development agencies. The English regions have different and distinct characteristics. Our Bill will provide a broad framework of powers for RDAs, to give them flexibility to reflect the particular needs of the regions that they represent.

Regional development agencies will bring together a wide range of functions that are presently carried out by many separate agencies. Those activities fall into three broad areas. First, RDAs will produce and implement economic strategies that reflect regional priorities and needs, in consultation with their partners.

The strategies will cover economic development, social and physical regeneration, competitiveness and innovation. They will also contribute to work on transport and land use planning. That will all be done in a context that protects the environment and promotes sustainable development.

The strategic plans will specifically cover business support and training. Business links and training and enterprise councils will continue to provide services locally, with RDAs monitoring and providing a strategic regional focus for their work.

Secondly, RDAs will take the lead on inward investment in their regions, working with partners to market the region as a business location. They will develop integrated packages for investors and advise Ministers on applications for regional selective assistance.

Thirdly, RDAs will be responsible for specific regeneration programmes. They will lead on the European structural funds and manage the single regeneration budget challenge fund. They will also take full responsibility for the regional regeneration programmes of English Partnerships and the Rural Development Commission.

As a Government, we are strongly committed to the countryside, recognising the particular needs of people who live and work in rural areas—many of them now represented by Labour Members. Our proposals will put urban and rural regeneration on the same footing. That will ensure that rural interests will be given their full weight. Indeed, they will be strengthened by our proposals.

We are also committed to ensuring an effective focus at national level for expertise, advice and information on rural matters. We are therefore accelerating the part of the Government's comprehensive spending review that is examining how to strengthen the institutional arrangements for delivering rural policy. We will involve the relevant agencies in that work.

The Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill, which is before Parliament, is the first step in providing a new strategic framework for London, which will also have

its own development agency. The arrangements for that agency will be set out in the White Paper on London government which is to be published next year. It will make clear its democratic accountability to the Greater London assembly and the mayor.

Regional development agencies will, of course, be accountable to Ministers and to Parliament, but they will also need to be accountable to their regions. Organisations representing local interests, and, above all, elected local authorities, have a right to influence the work of RDAs. That will be recognised in our board appointments.

We intend to take further steps. As we made clear in our manifesto, we are committed to moving, with the consent of local people, to directly elected regional government in England. That complements devolution in Scotland and Wales and the creation of a Greater London assembly. Demand for directly elected regional government varies across England, and it would be wrong to envisage a uniform approach at this stage. Local authorities and their regional partners are already creating voluntary chambers. We welcome that development and intend to build on it as a mechanism through which regional development agencies will have greater regional accountability.

Only two of the nine English regions match the European average for GDP per head. That is unacceptable. The Government are committed to reversing that decline in Britain's economic performance. Our proposals will do that, with the regions to the fore.

Modernisation of the structures in the English regions is part of the wider reform of the governance of the United Kingdom, spearheaded by the devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales. Our aim is for the English regions to grow and prosper within the United Kingdom and within the European Union. Our proposals for regional development agencies are fundamental to achieving that. They will ensure that the potential of each English region can be unlocked.

That is our vision, shared with the hundreds of individuals, groups and local partners who have responded to our consultation with overwhelming support and enthusiasm. Together, we can ensure that the regions will fulfil their aspirations.

I have been associated with the cause of regional development and decentralisation for more than 20 years. I was appointed as Opposition spokesman on regional affairs back in the early 1980s and produced our alternative regional strategy. As deputy leader of the Labour party, I established the regional policy commission under Bruce Millan, the former European Commissioner and Labour Secretary of State for Scotland. The Millan commission prepared the ground for the White Paper in a detailed and excellent way. I pay tribute to it for that work.

This is a cause very dear to my heart, with widespread support in the country and, I am sure, in the House. It is therefore with great pride and pleasure that I commend the White Paper to the House.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): The fundamental issue is not the goal of regional development, which we all want, but how it is to be achieved. We have serious doubts and concerns about the new development agencies that the Secretary of State is proposing. Will he confirm that the agencies will be not elected, but appointed entirely by Ministers? They are the creatures of Whitehall and will be unaccountable to the public. Will he also confirm that there is no prospect of those appointed agencies being changed during this Parliament, which is the only period for which the Government can pledge?

How will the agencies attract more inward investment to England? Has not inward investment been running at record levels for the past 10 years and more? Is there not a danger that the Secretary of State's plan will set one region against another, with no overall benefit to Britain?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the chairman of the Rural Development Commission has just resigned in protest—[HON. MEMBERS: "Good, about time."] Labour Members say, "Good." That shows their concern for country areas. He has resigned in protest at the Government's decision to transfer the commission's rural regeneration work to the proposed RDAs. The chairman has said:

> "The break-up of the Rural Development Commission sends a negative message to rural England and is a devastating blow for the commission."

Does the Secretary of State agree with that?

We know that Whitehall has been noticeably reluctant to give up its powers, so both regional selective assistance and training will stay with Government Departments. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain the position on planning? The consultation paper, such as it was, suggested that agencies would have the powers to acquire land and prepare it for industrial development. Does not that open up the prospect of more industrial development in green belt land, which many people fear is already under threat?

The Secretary of State talks about the next step being regional assemblies. Is he aware that at the weekend his Minister of State gave an on-the-record interview to *The Scotsman*? The paper reported that the Minister signalled that, if Labour were to win the next election, it could pursue a federal structure for England. He left open the prospect of regional assemblies having law-making and tax- raising powers. What is the Government's constitutional agenda? Does it involve step-by-step progress to a federal structure?

As a west midlands Member, I want to see regional development and, as a party, we want to see regional development, but the Government's proposals amount to only more bureaucracy, less accountability, and duplication of effort, without any benefit for the regions.

Mr. Prescott: I took the opportunity to read the report of the debate on 20 June 1975 when the proposals for the Scottish Development Agency were brought before the House. Everything that the right hon. Gentleman has just said was said in that debate by the Opposition.

Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman voted against the SDA, so I assume that his arguments about bureaucracy mean that he will vote against the new regional development agencies. I remind him that in the election after Labour implemented the agencies, in 1979, his Government swore to abolish the Scottish Development Agency but changed their mind. They changed their mind because the development agencies in Scotland and Wales had done a good job and had attracted inward investment to improve their economies. That is

[Mr. Prescott]

precisely what I want to see for the English regions. It is because those agencies have been so successful that we have attempted to model, as best we can, the English development agencies' powers and resources on the Scottish Development Agency and the Welsh Development Agency.

We believe that the new agencies will be an important force in developing the English regions and their economies. The proposals are important for regional economic development and will play their part in attracting inward investment. It is noticeable that the Scottish economy and the Welsh economy have been much more effective at attracting inward investment, in total, than the English regions. That is largely because Scotland and Wales have had active regional development agencies representing their interests in this country and abroad, as every hon. Member has learnt when travelling abroad. That is why we propose to set up development agencies in England.

I hear what the right hon. Gentleman said about the resignation of Lord Shuttleworth. I have just received his resignation note. He was to retire in March. He was appointed as a Tory by a Tory Government, and he knew that I had no intention of reappointing him as the chairman of that development agency. He is a bit demob happy and he has gone. So be it. The proposals have nothing to do with Lord Shuttleworth: they are about the development of the rural economy. I shall take no lectures from Tories on that subject. A Labour Government set up the rural development bodies and my proposals today mean that a Labour Government will introduce better arrangements for the rural economies.

Yes, Lord Shuttleworth opposes the Government's policy. That is hardly a surprise, but the judgment to be made is whether our proposals will be better for the rural communities than what he would prefer. I call in aid those who are supporting our proposals for the rural areas, including the National Farmers Union, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the local authorities in those areas and the environmental groups. We have to judge the interests of those groups against what Lord Shuttleworth has said. Still, he has gone; happy retirement to him. Frankly, I think that the rural areas will be better off without him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] All planning matters will go through the normal planning procedures. *[Interruption.]* I do not think that it is disgraceful. If Lord Shuttleworth levels charges against us that we do not accept, we are entitled to handle them in the most robust manner. We intend to ensure that rural areas are put on an equal footing with urban areas, to give them the importance that they deserve. We will be judged on that when we have implemented our policies. That is a proper response to such a report.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals, but I hope that he will press on with the second stage, which is to have elected assemblies in the English regions. In the meantime, will he examine the ways in which the regional bodies will be accountable to the House and consider setting up regional Select Committees to scrutinise them effectively?

Mr. Prescott: The direct answer is that it is a matter for the House whether we establish such Committees, but, of course, the bodies will be accountable to Ministers, to Parliament and to the National Audit Office, because they will be statutory bodies set up by the House itself. Make no mistake about it: we have agreed to introduce the development agencies to deal with the economic applications, but we will indeed want to subject them to democratic accountability.

I have always believed in regional government, and I hope to see it brought about. The timetable in the first five years is not easy, but it is possible to work with voluntary groups to establish some form of democratic accountability, and we will discuss with various bodies how we can achieve that.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the creation of regional development agencies and the extensive process of consultation that took place beforehand, but does the Secretary of State recognise the disappointment and frustration in the English regions at the fact that no new funds will be available to enable those bodies to compete on a level basis with the development agencies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, in both attracting inward investment and levering funds out of Europe? If we are simply to have new bodies to churn existing funds, is not that falling into the same trap into which the previous Government fell?

Will the Secretary of State explain the anomaly of the new regional development agencies monitoring the work of the training and enterprise councils and advising Ministers on regional selective assistance, yet taking on the functions of the Rural Development Commission, which is the one body that could and should separately have made the case for the rural areas? Is it because Lord Shuttleworth was a softer target than the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Education and Employment?

I welcome this first step towards regional government, but can the Secretary of State assure us that, as we move on to further steps, the boundaries will be considered? The boundaries on which the agencies are to be set up are matters of statistical convenience and in many parts of the country bear no relation to real communities.

Mr. Prescott: The boundaries will be determined when we consider the democratic accountability of the agencies and will be the legitimate concern of whatever structures are then in place. The proposed boundaries are those of the Government offices, set up by the previous Administration, and we have been happy to accept them. It is easier and quicker to work on those boundaries in setting up the agencies.

On resources, the Scottish Development Agency was set up with funds of £150 million. The present programme, drawing the various strands together, as set out in the White Paper, gives us £750 million, and more than £1 billion of investment in public-private partnerships. We believe that that is a good start, and that the agencies can play a major role in bringing more and more resources to the regions, exactly as the Scottish and Welsh development agencies did. I am satisfied that we can make a start in that way.

TECs are an important consideration in regional development and in boundary issues, as some TECs fit local rather than regional boundaries, and no regional strategy has been developed in the areas of education and

skills training. We are currently discussing with the relevant Departments the way in which we might be able to co-ordinate that. We need to give those aspects a regional dimension, which is as important to planning and transport as it is to education and skills training.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that his historic announcement this afternoon is a major breakthrough for all those who are concerned about employment, training and regeneration in the English regions? Is he aware that in the north-west region his proposals will be met with great support and great acclaim? Can he explain the attitude of Conservative Members, given that those in private sector, including the business leadership team, the CBI and chambers of trade and commerce, are among the strongest supporters of regional development agencies as a means of boosting business and employment?

Mr. Prescott: The points made by my hon. Friend are absolutely right. In the White Paper we quoted various organisations that normally ally with the Tory party, but which find themselves yet again at odds with it on a fundamental issue of policy. I note that the Opposition spokesman did not say that they would abolish those agencies if we set them up. It is for them to make that decision in the future—now they are the Opposition and we are the Government, and there is a heck of a difference.

My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning toured the country and spoke to people in all the regions and to representatives of national business and trade bodies. They all supported the idea of the establishment of regional development agencies. We found that support to be as strong in the south-west as it was in the north-west, and in all the English regions. We are delighted to present a policy which has been universally accepted by those regions.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Given that Scotland will now have its own Parliament and Wales will have its own Assembly, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that one of the greatest concerns for the English regions, and cause of great unfairness to them, is the Barnett formula? Its application means that there is much higher public expenditure per head in Scotland and Wales than is now justified by the facts. Lord Barnett believes that that formula should be reformed. What does the right hon. Gentleman intend to do about that?

On inward investment, what will the right hon. Gentleman do about the fact that the Scottish and Welsh development agencies can outbid the English regions because of their access to much greater amounts of public expenditure than those available to England?

Mr. Prescott: The Barnett formula was devised for the fair distribution of resources between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I accept that there have been complaints about it, but we have made it clear in the White Paper, particularly in relation to devolution in Scotland, that we have no intention of changing it. It could be subject to a review at any stage by the newly elected Parliament for Scotland, the Welsh Assembly, and English regions to discuss any perceived unfairness. At this stage, however, we have made it clear that we have no intention of conducting such a review.

On inward investment, I am sure that all Members would agree that the current situation is not a happy one because the Government have wasted a lot of money when parts of the country have been played off against each other. *[Interruption.]* We have been left with that totally unsatisfactory situation. The President of the Board of Trade is considering how it could be improved. We are working out a concordat to ensure that the use of British taxpayers' money is seen to be fair by all parties and that Britain is not played off against other countries, nor the different regions of the United Kingdom played off against each other, by inward investors. That practice is unacceptable and expensive, and we intend to change it.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. I heard him talk about regional development in 1977, and many times since. I congratulate him and the Minister for the regions on their work over the years on behalf of regional government and regional development agencies.

Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, despite the difference in structure, there will be a level playing field between the regions, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, on inward investment? I represent and have worked on behalf of people in Yorkshire and Humberside, and they are concerned that we may still not have the necessary structure to create the level playing field that they desire to attract inward investment.

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. To have a level playing field is our intention—we need to bring that about. I believe that the regional development agencies will mean that the English regions will be able to play a much more effective part in attracting inward investment than they could play without them.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I hope that Lord Shuttleworth will be around to celebrate the right hon. Gentleman's resignation in the same terms as he has just celebrated Lord Shuttleworth's resignation.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there will be a real problem of competitive subsidy between regional development agencies? What will he do to make sure that that does not happen, bearing in mind the relative costs of getting LG and Siemens to the United Kingdom? Does he agree that what England lacks is a unified agency to attract investment, rather than scattered agencies? Does he understand that we in North Yorkshire will be suspicious that our interests will not be looked after by the municipal tyros of Doncaster, Bradford and Hull?

Mr. Prescott: That was quite an intelligent contribution until the last remark. There is a real issue in respect of competition for subsidies—there is no doubt that it is a real problem. The Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member were unable to do anything about it and, as he rightly acknowledges, they did not do anything about it. We believe that we have to do something. With the number of English agencies that will be set up, we rightly say that we want a level playing field and fair treatment. We have to have greater transparency about the amount of resources available to all those regions for attracting inward investment. It is our intention to achieve that.

[Mr. Prescott]

As for the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about local authorities, they have an important part to play in the development of democratic accountability. I know that he is a strong supporter of local government in that sense, and I envisage local authorities playing that important role. However, we have made it clear that we need to be business-led in certain matters, and such considerations will play a major part in the regional development agencies.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): May I give the warmest possible welcome to the plans of the Secretary of State and his team for regional development agencies? They will help to reinvigorate and re-identify the personalities of our regions across the nation on an equal footing, one with another, with proper consideration for economic welfare within each region. We in the west midlands—an area which has experienced great devastation as a result of over-centralised policy making here in Westminster—will be given the opportunity to reinvigorate ourselves with the help of sensible planning and a proper framework of regional assemblies and regional development agencies.

May I give a special welcome to the part of the White Paper that deals with co-operative development throughout the British Isles? May I recommend to my right hon. Friend that he gives as great a push as possible to the redevelopment of worker co-operatives, credit unions, housing co-operatives and so on, which will give ordinary people a better grip and understanding of the business process that will create wealth in this country within the framework of the regional agencies?

Madam Speaker: Order. That was a very nice accolade for the Secretary of State, but there was no question in it—it was just a long comment. If this goes on, I shall have to stop the statement, because we must have questions, not long statements of congratulation.

Mr. Purchase: There was a question about co-operatives.

Madam Speaker: There was no question. I listened carefully for a question and the hon. Gentleman will find that there was not one. I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to comment on the hon. Gentleman's statement and it is his duty to do so, but it is Back Benchers' duty to ask questions.

Mr. Prescott: I take your point on board, Madam Speaker. The matter of co-operatives is an important one. If we look for differences to explain why European regions have done far better than the English regions, we see that their advantage lies not only in their development agencies, but in their development of a far more comprehensive co-operative system, especially in France.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): One welcomes in principle any proposals that will move power out of Whitehall and into the regions, although these proposals have not yet done so. The really important issue is dealing with competition between regions—between the new agencies and existing agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That matter has not been addressed by the White Paper and I would suggest to the Secretary of State that is foolish to proceed without clearly dealing with the central problem. It is all very well to talk about level playing fields, but there has to be some mechanism for dealing with dispute and competition, and that has to be based on a genuinely national strategy—a United Kingdom-wide strategy—that, in turn, has to reflect different needs.

People talk about the Barnett formulas, but it must be recognised that those are based on needs. Please will the Secretary of State make it clear what sort of arrangement is proposed to deal with the competitive needs of all the regions of the United Kingdom and not only the English regions?

Mr. Prescott: I have made it clear to the House that we recognise the problem of competition between the different areas, but, in establishing the English regions, we are not declaring for a federal United Kingdom. The English regions constitute England, and there is Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. There will be a certain amount of competition between the bodies and we want a level playing field. However, in the early stages of the development—perhaps towards regional government, if that is the evolutionary change towards which we are moving—each body will be represented in the Cabinet by the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and I am happy to represent the English regions.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend. I remember his passion for regional government when I worked for him many years ago and I know that the report is based on good homework. But can the emphasis in the regional development agencies be on growth from within, not just the panacea of attracting industry from without? If we have the right focus, we can develop our regions, with all their talents and skills, from within. Yorkshire and Humberside, the region which I and my right hon. Friend share, is in the front.

Can we seriously reconsider having regional Select Committees, because that would add to the power of the House and the regional development agencies? Can we also consider the prime role which could be played by regional investment banks, which would not cost a lot of money?

Mr. Prescott: I shall pass on my hon. Friend's comments about the regional Select Committees to the appropriate authorities, but that is a matter for the House.

I have always strongly believed in the development of the indigenous economies. In the alternative regional strategy document produced in the 1980s, I was highly critical of regional policy, which was largely about attracting inward investment instead of developing the potential of the local and regional economies. The regional development agencies will do precisely that. They will look at the differences within the regions and exploit their assets and potential by bringing together the various partners. I hope and believe that one of the essential roles of the development agencies will be to consider how to develop the local and regional economies and investment within those areas.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the success of the Scottish,

Welsh and Northern Ireland development agencies was due mainly to the fact that the UK taxpayer subsidised them, to great effect?

The new agencies will not receive the blessing from the Treasury that the others did. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, as a result, instead of creating a level playing field he will be doing exactly the opposite and the regions will compete one against the other? Furthermore, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in my constituency informal and voluntary partnerships are working together successfully, and the interests of Congleton in Cheshire are not the interests of Lancashire?

Mr. Prescott: There is no doubt that there are sub-regional parts of an economy that cannot be centralised in a region and one cannot assume that there is one pattern for all the regions. Anyone who knows our English regions, with their industrial and rural make-up, knows that they vary from one end to the other. Therefore, we must be flexible and adjust to that. That is why we want a regional body rather than a Whitehall organisation.

The subsidies given to Scotland and Wales reflected the high levels of unemployment when the agencies were established. The agencies were one way of responding to that. But after 18 years of a Tory Government, all regions of the United Kingdom have mass unemployment. *[Interruption.]* They had the record of creating more than 1 million unemployed in the south. Some of my northern colleagues found it hard to believe that there was mass unemployment in the south. But that is why we needed a national solution rather than a regional one. Therefore, the subsidies reflected the higher levels of unemployment in those areas. Now we must consider how to develop all the English regions and ensure that we provide subsidies and support where necessary on a level playing field, and we intend to do that.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): My right hon. Friend has been involved with this issue for a substantial number of years and I congratulate him on his statement. I make one small plea. If he has any influence regarding the location of the headquarters of the regional development agencies, I remind him that we have a wonderful place called Wigan, which he and the Minister for the regions have visited several times, and I would offer him an office at the end of the pier if he would consider it.

Mr. Prescott: I remember that I enjoyed the visit to Wigan pier and to the school that is on it, but I cannot give my hon. Friend any assurances about the location of the regional headquarters. Indeed, it would be wrong for a central Government official or a Minister to take what is essentially a decision to be taken in the regions.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Deputy Prime Minister said that part of the reason for making these changes was to decentralise decision making, but in so far as those bodies will take any decisions, they will be undemocratic decisions because those bodies are unelected, unaccountable quangos.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that the proposals lack coherence and will fracture the United Kingdom, in that a town such as Banbury will be lumped in with counties such as Kent and Sussex, notwithstanding the fact that the west midlands is only a few miles up the road to the north and the east midlands a few miles to the east? That will mean that, on every map throughout the country, towns such as Banbury will be marginalised. I must tell the Deputy Prime Minister that Banbury will refuse to be marginalised in that way.

Mr. Prescott: One envisages UDI for Banbury. We shall wait and see whether the people of Banbury agree with that.

The main argument, about democratic accountability, comes ill from a Government who abolished more democratically accountable bodies, established more quangos than anyone else and abolished the Greater London authority—the Greater London council—which we are now reintroducing because it is necessary for democratic accountability.

It is inevitable that the development agencies are part of an evolutionary movement towards democratic accountability, but we do not want to wait for legislation to be passed, which would take a long time. We believe that the English regions need the economic instruments, such as the development agencies, to get on with the job now. Each development agency would be accountable to authorities in the area—admittedly, indirectly, but that is better than nothing, which is what the regions had under 18 years of Tory Governments.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): As a Member from the northern region, hon. Members from which have been among the main instigators of regional government for the past 20 years, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on his statement. We deeply approve of it and strongly support him. Regional assemblies are a wonderful thing as a first step, but will my right hon. Friend give us an idea of when the Government will move towards democratically elected regional assemblies, which is our ultimate aim in the northern region of England?

Mr. Prescott: I certainly understand my hon. Friend's point regarding regional assemblies as an alternative to democratically elected bodies. I have a preference—I think all parliamentarians would—for democratically elected bodies.

There are arguments about whether all regions want regional government, but I believe that they eventually will if they do not at present. If we decide that we want to achieve any form of regional government, we need only consider the structure of local government to realise how many questions arise. If one wants to make the change to regional government, with unitary authorities, it begs the question of the role and structure of local government. Will there be unitary authorities? Will there be county councils? Will there be regional government?

Anyone with experience of entering into such issues knows that the discussion process takes one or two years, quite apart from what is usually a controversial progress through the legislative process. That is why we have said that it would be difficult to envisage achieving that structure in the remainder of this Parliament. That is not to say that we shall not give active encouragement, especially in the northern areas, where there are well-developed bodies of accountability, which may be

[Mr. Prescott]

able to provide a model for us until we achieve the final objective, which I believe should be a form of regional government.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he is proposing an extraordinary duplication of functions for London? He said that the London development agency will be responsible for inward investment, transport and planning, all of which, according to the Minister for London during the passage of the Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill, are functions which will be undertaken by the Greater London Authority.

Who will pay for the Greater London development agency? Will it be paid for through a surcharge on the uniform business rate? Will it be a precept on the boroughs? Does the right hon. Gentleman not realise that the CBI's London region and the London chamber of commerce put as a priority for London what he has singularly failed to deliver—investment in, and a way forward for, London Underground?

Mr. Prescott: The last point about investment in London Underground comes a bit ill, given the disinvestment in London transport during the past 18 years. London Transport wants some £7 billion to modernise its infrastructure. A Greater London Authority will be able to deal with that much more effectively than a central Government. The previous Government took over that function from the GLC, which was doing much better at it than they did.

The hon. Gentleman must not make the mistake of comparing the English regions with our proposals in the London Bill, which introduces accountability and establishes an elected authority. There will be a separate transport body, accountable to the London authority, and the development agency will also be accountable. I am told by London business—they have said so publicly—that a development agency would not need subsidies or moneys. They believe that it could be used effectively in public-private partnerships, along with whatever other resources are made available, to develop the London economy. We look forward to seeing that being done.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I hope that you will forgive me, Madam Speaker—I am not entering myself for Creep of the Week award; nor would I attempt to make my right hon. Friend blush, because the task is impossible. However, I congratulate him on 20 years of principle and persistence that have brought him to his statement in the House today. We in the north-east thoroughly support him on it.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on what he just said about regional assemblies. However, will he take due note of the fact that, while we accept that, within the financial limitations with which this great enterprise is beginning, his comments about budgets must be acceptable to us and we shall work within them, we want a proper regional needs assessment for the English regions in the lifetime of this Parliament?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I accept his argument. In earlier publications on the regions in which I was involved, I pointed out that regional needs assessment had been achieved in my hon. Friend's area. I think that it was the only region in which such an exercise was carried out. It is necessary to make sure that we have a level playing field, and we certainly have that in mind.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): In relation to the proposed concordat on inward investment and the waste of money to which the Minister referred, can he give some specific examples of where money has been wasted under the existing arrangements?

Mr. Prescott: One of the problems with regard to how much grant has been given to inward investment in the past is the fact that the previous Government constantly claimed that it was commercially sensitive information, and the information was not made available. We have seen some information, though not enough to arrive at that conclusion.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): May I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement? He will know that in Cornwall the development agency is a burning issue. Will he outline for my constituents the benefits that they can look forward to through a development agency?

Mr. Prescott: I remember one of my first visits to the south-west. I listened to people in Devon strongly disagreeing with people in Cornwall, and they both hated the city of Bristol. It taught me an important lesson: do not make the mistake of thinking that when one talks of a region, one is talking for the whole region; there are strong and competing interests in sub-regional economies.

That is why we have left sufficient flexibility in the development agencies. They are statutorily based and can assist all other forms of voluntary agencies, such as those in Cornwall and Devon. The RDAs will work with voluntary agencies to develop their region's potential, to make sure that the resources and the packaging are available, to bring together the assets necessary to persuade inward investors and, more important, to help to develop the local and regional economies. We will give them the tools to get on the job. I have no doubt that people in Cornwall, Devon and the south-west will want to get on with it, provided that we supply the tools, which we intend to do.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that when he makes appointments to the regional development agency boards from among the locally elected representatives, he will pay due regard to the political balance in each region, and will not just look to the majority parties, so that we do not end up with all-Labour representatives in Yorkshire and Humberside, or all-Liberal Democrats in the south-west?

Mr. Prescott: Clearly, we would wish to achieve a balance, but one that reflects the regional priorities. In most of these public appointments, the Nolan committee rules will apply.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): May I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement as an important

step towards developing effective regional economic development strategies aimed at competitiveness? May I tell my right hon. Friend not to listen to the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who is a west midlands business man, but just about the only business man in the west midlands who is against an RDA? The proposal has the overwhelming backing of the west midlands regional Confederation of British Industry and the west midlands chambers of commerce.

How do my right hon. Friend's proposals fit in with the assets and liabilities of urban development corporations and of the Commission for the New Towns? Furthermore, what freedom will RDAs have to take an axe to the red tape that currently surrounds the single regeneration budget?

Mr. Prescott: That is an important point. We are looking at the urban development corporations—there are about eight of them, which we will wind up—and the Commission for the New Towns. We intend to put them into one body, which will share a common chairman with the Commission for the New Towns and English Partnerships, performing some of the national functions and roles of those bodies, as we outline in the White Paper.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the income differences that were used in the past to justify vast differentials in subsidies between England and Wales no longer exist?

Mr. Prescott: Regional grants and assistance are under review in Europe, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and the boundaries are being considered. We must await that review in order to make a proper assessment.

BSE

4.21 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

The first priority of this Government is protection of the consumer. I am making this announcement in response to the latest advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which met yesterday, 2 December, and to outline the action that I intend to take on a strictly precautionary basis. I shall publish SEAC's advice in full, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

SEAC has reviewed new evidence, which will be published in the scientific literature in due course. That evidence has emerged from an experiment designed to recheck which parts of cattle may contain BSE infectivity. Under those experimental conditions, in which animals were fed large doses of BSE-infected material by mouth, my scientists have found infectivity in nervous tissues called the dorsal root ganglia, which lie within the bones of the spinal column and would be left with the bone when meat is cut off the spine. The dorsal root ganglia are not currently covered by the specified bovine material restrictions.

Further new findings, which are still being evaluated, indicate that infectivity may also be found in the bone marrow in cattle that are at a very late stage of disease and are already showing clinical symptoms.

In both cases, the experimental animals showed the infectivity only at ages of more than 30 months, above which all cattle are excluded from the food chain and destroyed under the over-30-months scheme, and only after receiving a heavy dose of infected bovine tissue. In any case, consumers would not normally eat dorsal root ganglia as such.

Muscle, meat and blood are tested at every stage of the same experiments, and all results are negative.

SEAC has emphasised that the risk is very small. The committee has suggested that there are three possible alternative courses of action: first, to make public the research findings, together with its assessment of the risk, and to leave individual consumers to choose which precautions to take; secondly, to require that no beef with the bone in from cattle over six months old should be sold to consumers; and, thirdly, to require that cattle slaughtered between 24 and 30 months of age for human consumption should be deboned under official control by the Meat Hygiene Service in licensed plants.

Taking account of the views of the chief medical officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, who advises me on these matters, I have concluded that I should take further action. It would not be acceptable to allow tissues shown to transmit BSE to remain within the human food chain. I shall therefore be consulting as rapidly as possible with consumers and the industry on proposals to implement the second of the options indicated by SEAC: the deboning of all beef, whether from home supplies or imported, coming from cattle over six months old before it is sold to the consumer.

It is helpful that, currently, only about 5 per cent. of beef is consumed on the bone. The proposals would allow deboning to take place in cutting plants, butchers'

[Dr. John Cunningham]

shops, catering establishments or other commercial premises, but would not allow the bones to be sold, given to consumers, or used in the preparation of food. That is in line with SEAC advice on that point. This action, which is being taken on a precautionary basis, will ensure that United Kingdom consumers continue to be given the highest protection possible against the risks from BSE while we press ahead with our determined action to eradicate this disease completely from our cattle herd.

I know that this announcement will come as a further disappointment to our beef producers. My message to them is that this Government are acting firmly and rapidly to protect consumer confidence, which is in the fundamental interests of the beef industry. We are maintaining a high level of support through the over-30-months scheme, direct aid and other measures worth nearly £1.5 billion this year.

I regret that this important matter was the subject of a leak earlier today—although not from my Ministry—which resulted in my having to respond to the high level of media interest prior to making this statement in the House.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I thank the Minister for giving me a copy of his statement in adequate time, so that I could read it before he put it before the House. I appreciate his courtesy.

The official Opposition support any moves that help to make British beef safer—indeed, to make it the best beef in the world. However, does the Minister recognise that his statement today will be of great concern to the quality butchery trade, which has done so much to rehabilitate the prospects for British beef after the most serious crisis the beef industry has ever known? Does the Minister further recognise that farmers who raise long-maturing animals will be extremely worried by his comments? I should be grateful if the Minister, in the course of his consultations, fully took into account the views from those two important parts of the meat business before casting the measures absolutely in stone.

At the conclusion of his statement, the Minister mentioned that there had been a leak. That has perhaps forced him to come to the House this afternoon to make a statement. Will he confirm that, in the light of the information that he received from SEAC, he was minded to make a statement to the House tomorrow rather than today? May I register my annoyance that it was from journalists this morning that I first learnt that a statement was to be made to the House? As soon as I learnt that, I found statements on the matter appearing on Ceefax, from the middle of the morning onwards. Only later did I officially learn from the Ministry that it was to make a statement. Would the Minister like to give us a timetable of the thinking that lay behind the approach to his statement today? Will he tell us when he received SEAC's conclusions and the written report? Will he also tell us when he discussed the matter with the chief medical officer?

Can the Minister tell us whether he has launched an investigation into how the journalist Mr. James Erlichman was able to release on to an unsuspecting world information about the statement in the rather aptly named BBC television consumer programme, "The Really Useful Show"? Will the Minister hold an inquiry into the leak? It is a pity that he is not taking those important matters seriously, because he will know that once SEAC has come to a conclusion, there is always potential for a leak, and it is incumbent on Ministers to come to the House and present their findings without delay.

Will the Minister also enlighten us on the role that the Prime Minister played in the decision-making process in the Government, in regard to the making of the statement today? Does the Minister agree that the leaking of information is damaging to confidence in British beef?

In the light of the Minister's statement, will he now argue that the materials in question—the subject of his statement—should be added to the list of European specified risk materials? Will he confirm that they are currently not on that list? Will he further confirm that their addition to the list would be important in conferring on British citizens who travel abroad and eat beef the same protection that they can expect to receive in this country? Can he tell us how, in terms of third-country imports, he will police adherence to the ban? Does he agree that his announcement might be a further setback to the chances of getting the beef ban lifted?

The Minister has been long on rhetoric but short on delivering results on the beef ban. In the light of the fact that he has come to the House in haste, will he go to Brussels to explain to our European partners exactly what this is all about?

What costs does the Minister expect the meat and butchery industry to incur as a result of the statement? If, as he has said, his announcement will help to improve the safety of British beef, is not it ironic that he makes his statement at a time when he is tearing the guts out of the British beef industry? He is taking away £60 million in hill livestock compensatory allowances. He is overcharging the beef industry on cattle passports. He is levying the industry on the new meat inspection charges. His Government's monetary policy is making the cost of farmers' borrowings, which are rising, increase.

In short, the statement shows that the Minister is out of touch with farming and could not care less about the beef industry.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman began by saying that he would support any moves to protect consumers, and then went into a long ramble about why he thought I was making this statement today. I had every intention of making a statement on the SEAC report. I said within days of my appointment that I would publish SEAC advice as quickly as possible after receiving it, and make statements. I have kept that promise to consumers and the country as a whole today. It was always our intention that a statement should be made. He asked what role the Prime Minister had played. The Prime Minister played the role that any normal Prime Minister would: he agreed that I should make a statement to the House, and that was that.

As for the serious part of the right hon. Gentleman's questions, as opposed to all the nonsense about the leak in the media, of course I understand that farmers are worried, as are consumers. I am also concerned, but is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should have suppressed this information, and that we should have refused to act on SEAC's advice and kept the matter quiet? Is that what he would have preferred? If that is the implication of his shenanigans about how the information

has been disclosed, I know on which side of the argument I stand. I am fully in favour of being candid with consumers about the nature of the risks that they face. I emphasise that, notwithstanding the fact that the risk is very small, we should not take the risk of infected BSE material being allowed into the food chain. That is the basis on which we have taken this action.

There was never any intention to make this statement tomorrow. I do not know where the right hon. Gentleman got such twaddle from, but it is simply not true.

I have informed our partners in Brussels of this statement to the House and the reasons why I am taking this action. My officials are in constant touch with them about the actions that we are taking on BSE.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about consumer confidence in the beef industry. It is precisely because we have acted promptly and fully on SEAC advice, and because we have imposed the most rigorous standards on our beef, that I am able to say with confidence that beef is safe. That is also the basis on which I am able to say in Brussels and in the Council of Ministers that we have a good case for a progressive lifting of the ban. If I were not to act in that way, it would undermine our ability eventually to get the ban lifted.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): I welcome the speed with which the Government have acted today in response to the SEAC evidence. However, that evidence will be greeted with concern in my constituency, especially by the family and friends of Mike Clifford, who sadly died of new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in June 1996. In the light of the tragedy of new-variant CJD and today's statement, is it not important for the Government to announce soon a full inquiry into the previous Government's handling of BSE and the links with new-variant CJD?

Dr. Cunningham: I well understand the concern expressed by my hon. Friend on behalf of her constituents and others. I know at first hand of the concern of parents who have lost loved ones through new-variant CJD, because I have met some of them. One of the young women who died was a close friend of my son and had studied with him at university. I am well aware of the dreadful circumstances for those families, and I understand the pressure for a full inquiry into all aspects of the matter. I am having urgent and continuing discussions with my right hon. Friends, but I am sorry that I cannot make an announcement about a decision today. Obviously, I would have done so if I could.

As a consequence of the previous Government's mishandling of these issues, the British taxpayer provides about £1 billion to support our beef industry. That is the price we are paying for the consequences of the BSE crisis, in addition to the appalling consequences for the health and well-being of young people.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given the seriousness of the Minister's statement, does he acknowledge that, although he describes this development as a further disappointment for the beef sector, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is another desperate blow to the morale of that sector? It may have the practical impact of sending several specialist producers to the wall as a result of the changes that will, alas, have to be implemented.

While acknowledging the importance to importation of a level playing field throughout the single market, will the Minister consider a far more important time scale than the one to which the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred when he spoke such fatuous nonsense? Will the Minister deal not with the time scale of events over a few hours this morning, but with the time scale of events in the months ahead that will affect our vital domestic beef sector?

I return to the exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Time between my party leader, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), and the Minister's own. The Prime Minister said on the issue of importation that we would "expect the same" standards elsewhere in Europe. Will the Minister confirm that "expect the same" means "ensure the same"? The Prime Minister spoke about acknowledging the need to mitigate the financial consequences of this afternoon's statement. Will the Minister assure us that mitigate means compensate, not least in the context of the cuts in the hill livestock compensatory allowances, the strength of the green pound and the constraints that the new Government have put on the over-30-months scheme?

Will the Minister confirm that, as part of the continuing strategy to get the beef ban lifted throughout Europe in the interests of this country, the sooner he can announce a full public inquiry into the entire history and handling of the BSE issue, the better it will be for all of us?

Dr. Cunningham: Of course, I understand how beef producers feel. After all, I represent many of them in my constituency and I met some of them recently. However, the fact remains that the overriding priority is to safeguard consumers and people's health and well-being. That has to be our first priority and that is why I have acted in the way that I have.

Of course, I do not want to do unnecessary damage to either farmers' morale or confidence in British beef. That is why I repeat that British beef is safe. I repeat also that the tests on this material were also carried out on meat and blood and showed negative results. It is safe to eat and to export British beef. I shall go on arguing that in Brussels.

The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) asked me a question about a level playing field for imports. I remind the House that it was on my initiative—indeed, on my insistence—that, last July, the Council of Agricultural Ministers voted to take a uniform and rigorous approach to safeguarding beef. That decision will take effect for all imports of beef from our European partners from 1 January. I am not willing to tolerate any slippage of that decision—that will happen from 1 January. If, for some reason, it did not, I would revert to my position of taking unilateral action against any beef imported to this country. I hope that I do not have to do that. The decision has been taken, and I want it to be implemented from 1 January.

What the Prime Minister said about imports is the same as what I have just said: we shall insist that imported beef is treated in the same way as we treat our own.

I cannot make any promises about extending compensation.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Why not?

Dr. Cunningham: From a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman asks, "Why not?" Our support for the beef

[Dr. Cunningham]

industry totals almost £1.5 billion. It is easy for hon. Members to go on demanding just more and more. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), the Conservative spokesman, did that, too. As a former Agriculture and Treasury Minister in the previous Conservative Government, he bears a large measure of responsibility for the problems and circumstances that we face, and he should be the last person to demand more and more public expenditure.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I thank my right hon. Friend for his timely, serious and necessary statement. May I tell him of the fearfulness and desperation of beef farmers on the hillsides in my constituency? In Flintshire, I met the president and county delegate of the National Farmers Union and they told me of the need for a level playing field. I very much support my right hon. Friend coming to the House as he has, but just hope that he may be able to give some crumb of comfort to beef farmers.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Like me, he has represented hill farmers for 27 years in the House. I know that he maintains strong links with them and has their best interests at heart. I have already made it clear to the House that I shall insist on a level playing field with regard to beef imports.

I forgot to respond to the final question asked by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West, which related to a public inquiry, although I had made my position clear in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith).

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I have every sympathy with the agriculture industry and the fact that this statement has had to be made. That sympathy extends to the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. I greatly welcome the decision to put the SEAC report in the House of Commons Library and otherwise to publish it. Assuming that the contents of that report underpin what the right hon. Gentleman has said, he will have my support for the measures that he has outlined.

I have three specific questions. First, is it necessary to apply this regime to cattle born after 1 August 1996, having regard to the fact that there can be no cross-contamination from that date and also having regard to the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has already announced a cull policy based on vertical transmission?

My second question relates to consumption and price. Will the right hon. Gentleman please give an undertaking carefully to monitor whether there are substantial falls in either consumption or price so as to be better informed about whether further compensation is necessary? Thirdly, has he already had discussions with the two relevant Commissioners—Fischler and Bonino—with a view to a Europewide regime of the kind that he has just announced for the UK? He will have strong support from Conservative Members if he presses for such a regime.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his expressions of understanding and support. He has, after all, stood at the Dispatch Box in very similar circumstances. I think that he will be able to satisfy himself when he sees the copy of SEAC's advice, which is available in full, that I have made this decision and am making this announcement on the properly supported basis of its advice.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked whether it was necessary to apply this decision to all cattle. Let me give a practical example of why it is necessary and why I rejected one of SEAC's propositions on cattle under 24 months as opposed to those between 24 and 30 months. It is impossible for butchers in receipt of meat to know the age of that meat. It is also impossible for consumers to make the distinction, so the simple, clinically unambiguous way to guarantee that there are no errors, mix-ups, cheating or confusion is to ensure that all beef is sold after it has been deboned. They are the reasons why we came to our conclusion after very careful consideration. I shall, of course, consult the industry urgently about that, but it is my intention to lay an order as quickly as possible to give effect to the conclusions that we reach.

I shall, as we do now, continue carefully to monitor the consumption and price of beef. The sales and consumption of prime cuts of beef are now higher than before the original BSE crisis hit. Of course, that is not true for all beef, but it is for prime cuts. I repeat that I am taking these measures on a precautionary basis. There is a very small risk, but I am in no doubt that British beef is safe to eat. I eat British beef and I will continue to do so.

I have tried to make personal contact with Commissioners Fischler and Bonino today by telephone, but was unable to do so. However, my officials have been in touch with their officials and I have written to them both, explaining the basis of the decision and the background.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): Does my right hon. Friend accept that he has done more in the past six months to restore confidence in the beef market among consumers than the previous Administration managed to do in five years? Does he agree that, at a time when new CJD cases are still arising in our population, it would be mad to do anything other than accept SEAC's recommendations? Will he also assure the House that standards in slaughterhouses and meat processing plants are now adequately supervised by inspectors, ensuring that no contaminated meat enters our food chain?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who—because of his experience, knowledge and qualifications in medicine—is well placed to speak in the House on those issues. I absolutely share his view that it would have been a serious dereliction of my duty and responsibilities had I decided not to publish the report and not to act upon it. They are the responsibilities that fall to me in my current post, and I do not shirk them.

My hon. Friend's final point was important. We have taken considerable action—we continue to do so—to improve hygiene and supervision levels in our slaughterhouses and meat cutting plants. I have closed down meat plants when it has been necessary. It has been necessary to do so and, if it becomes necessary again, I shall not hesitate to do so again. I have withdrawn those

operators' licences and destroyed the meat in those plants, to be absolutely sure that we can satisfy British consumers and our European partners that we shall take every precaution that it is possible for us to take.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The right hon. Gentleman will know that one of the immediate risks of the statement, which I accept that he had to make, is that there will be a further fall in beef prices at auction marts. He will know also that prices are already very low indeed. Will he therefore, at the very least, seek from the Chancellor of the Exchequer the means to maintain the level of grant—particularly HLCAs—to farmers? The request has nothing to do with the green pound, but is related to grant levels and HLCAs, so that the Minister may give at least some very small support to farmers—given that suckler herds and upland farmers will be the ones who will, yet again, feel the heaviest draught from the announcement.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his understanding of the absolute necessity for me to make the announcement and to take my decision today. I appreciate his comments in that regard. I understand very well his valid point that the statement may act further to depress beef prices. I hope that that will not occur—which is why I reiterate not only to hon. Members but to the public that it is safe to continue to eat British beef. Given the rigour with which we safeguard our beef, I am able to say that our beef is as safe as, if not safer than, that produced anywhere else in the world. If I were not taking those decisions, it might be less easy to make that claim.

As for the hill livestock compensatory allowance payments, the right hon. Gentleman and Conservative Members know that the previous Administration made a one-off additional payment to hill farmers, but made no continuing provision for that extra support. We fought the general election on the clear statement that we would stick within the public expenditure totals proposed by the then Conservative Government and voted for by every right hon. and hon. Member on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I welcome my right hon. Friend's prompt statement, which is in marked contrast to the fiddling and faddling of the Opposition, as they now are. Although I understand the need for the statement, we on the Labour Benches understand how beef farmers must be feeling today. I am sure that the Government will take cognisance of the effects on farmers. We place prime importance, however, on the safety of the food that consumers eat. Will my right hon. Friend therefore ensure that the food standards agency is established at the earliest possible opportunity?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for what is indeed prompt, urgent action. We shall continue to act promptly and urgently whenever circumstances so dictate. I understand that he knows very well, from experience in his constituency, the views and problems that beef farmers face. I share his view that the safety of consumers is of primary importance. As for his question about the food standards agency, I hope that we shall publish a White Paper on our proposals before too long.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Does the Minister accept that computer traceability and certification are essential to a solution, yet in 14 months, the Tories did nothing, and after seven months, the Labour Government have done nothing? Will there be proper research and monitoring? Now that T-bone steaks from top-quality, grass-fed Aberdeen Angus herds are to be banned, how long will this costly, disastrous farce continue?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been. I can understand his comments about the previous Administration doing nothing on cattle traceability, but has he missed the announcement that we shall locate the cattle traceability service in Workington; that we have obtained the site; that the site is being equipped; and that we are about to appoint the head of the service? Has he had his head in a haystack? The Government have been acting from the very first day after the election to install a computer-based cattle traceability scheme for the whole national herd. I am proud of the record of my hon. Friend the Minister of State in rapidly carrying that work forward. I am also proud of the fact, incidentally, that in doing so, we shall create 250 jobs in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), where they are desperately needed.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and the prompt way in which those matters have been brought before the House—unlike what happened under the previous Administration. I am sure that he is well aware of the desperation, especially among Welsh farmers, and of the blockades that, unfortunately, have occurred over the past two days. Clearly, they have been prompted by the collapse in the market price for their product. Over the period during which there has been a substantial reduction in the price of beef in our marts, that has not been reflected in the price that consumers pay in supermarkets.

Will my right hon. Friend do two things? First, will he assure the House and the country that, following the measures, consumers can have total confidence in Welsh—and British—beef that is and will be on sale? Secondly, will he speak to or call in the heads of supermarkets—including Tesco, which was responsible for the importation from Ireland of the beefburgers that prompted the problem in Holyhead—to explain why the price of beef in our supermarkets does not correspond to the low prices in the marts and why they are continuing to import products that could be sourced in Britain?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his expression of support for the decision that I have taken today. In respect of the action of beef farmers in Wales, I should say that illegal action will be met with the full consequences and rigour of the law. We cannot tolerate illegality from farmers. Not only is that so, but such action totally undermines our position when we complain—as we have and as the previous Government rightly complained—about similar action in France, which affected our meat exports. It is simply unacceptable for Welsh or any other farmers to take to the streets and act illegally.

I should explain to those farmers that such action is totally counter-productive for them; it damages Britain's interests in Europe. In the case of Irish beef, the Republic of Ireland has been one of our staunchest supporters in

[Dr. Cunningham]

trying to get the beef ban lifted. When I am working in Brussels to build coalitions of support for our position and our beef industry, nothing could be less helpful than such action day in, day out against the legitimate exports of our European Union neighbours. There is a single market in beef in the European Union. That brings us obligations as well as opportunities. I strongly urge all farmers to bear that in mind, because such behaviour is damaging the interests of the beef industry and the interests of Britain.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Minister accept that this morning his officials were reported as saying that the risks to human health were remote? He has said that the risks are very small. Does he accept that the hard-pressed British beef producers, farmers and retailers are likely to be deeply concerned by what he has announced, not least because of the devastation that they have undergone over the past couple of years? Does he further accept that what he has described as a precautionary measure is a panic measure and that he is as interested in protecting his back as he is in the statement that he has just made?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman's comments are patently absurd and irresponsible. Can he contemplate a Minister who had received on the record advice from an independent scientific body refusing to act to safeguard people's health and well-being? That would be an untenable position for any Minister. Of course the risk is very small, but there is a risk. It was my duty to take action to remove that risk in the interests of the people of this country. I have done so legitimately on the basis of sound, independent scientific advice.

I meant to tell my hon. Friend the Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger) that I shall discuss his comments about beef purchasing with the supermarkets.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): My right hon. Friend knows that a constituent of mine died from CJD. I should like to press him further on a public inquiry. We have spent billions of pounds on the crisis and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of cattle. Unfortunately, at least 20 people have died. The tragic reality is that there will be more. When will a decision be taken on a public inquiry? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier that there would be a statement on that.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. As I have already told the House, it would have been good—and, I guess, appropriate—if I had been able to announce our conclusions on a public inquiry. I regret that I am not able to do so. I emphasise that urgent discussions are continuing on that. I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the death of one of his constituents from new-variant CJD. In fact, 22 people have died. We are advised that more deaths are predicted. The human costs of the tragedy are immense. The financial costs are in excess of £2 billion and increasing rapidly. To date, 1.9 million cattle have been slaughtered. That is the legacy in the beef industry left to this Government and this country by the Conservatives.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Livestock farmers in my part of Devon will be hard hit by today's announcement, but I understand why the Minister had to come to the House and make his statement. I should like some clarification. He mentioned how deboning will be handled in catering establishments and butchers' shops. Those bones will not be available for sale to the public or for use in any form of catering establishment. How does he intend to differentiate in butchers' shops between bovine bone and other mammalian bone or between bones from animals over six months and veal bones from animals under six months? Is it his intention to designate bovine bone as specified bovine material, with the attendant requirement for staining and disposal, which the slaughterhouses are used to, but which would cause considerable problems in butchers' shops?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Lady asks some important questions, and I understand her concern about beef farmers in her constituency. I share it, and if it is possible to do more to help beef farmers, the Government will do so. As for her specific question about bones, we do not intend to designate bones as specified bovine material. They will be removed in butchers' shops and other catering establishments, as I have said, and they will not be available to consumers or to pass into the food chain, so the second part of her question about staining bones simply will not arise. The hon. Lady also asked about veal bones, but the restrictions will not apply to animals under six months old.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Will my right hon. Friend note that there have been no calls for an inquiry from Conservative Members? That is because, were we to have an inquiry, it would show the farmers who were the architects of their disastrous state.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making the simple point that the Conservative party has been noticeably silent on the need for a public inquiry into all the issues.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that he is taking fear of beef infection to an extreme? The test was carried out under extreme conditions and, despite those conditions, no animal under 30 months showed any infection. Surely that was a positive result, which confirms the existing policy. Instead of putting more pressure on our farmers, the Minister should have taken the first option suggested by SEAC—

"to make public the research findings"—

and allowed the public to make up their own mind.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I should deliberately and constructively allow infective BSE material into the human food chain. I simply am not prepared to do that.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of my constituents, Matthew Parker, died earlier this year of new-variant CJD and that his family have called for a public inquiry? One of their major concerns is that information about BSE should be made public, as my right hon. Friend has done today, and not concealed, as some Conservative Members seem to wish.

Dr. Cunningham: I express my sympathy and condolences to my hon. Friend's constituents. I was

pleased to note that a spokesperson for the CJD support group welcomed the prompt and clear action that I have taken in the matter.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Minister said that he would consult. Given that the experiment involved heavy doses of heavily infected BSE material being fed to cattle and that, even in those circumstances, only cattle over 30 months were found to have very low infectivity, will he consider the suggestion made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), that the Minister should excuse from the scheme cattle born after 1 August this year? One has to make some distinction. Will the Minister promise the House that he will consult with an open mind, because his proposals will have a devastating effect on the beef industry and the high end of the butchering market, which has done so much to help to restore confidence in beef in recent months?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall consult urgently on those issues, and I expect to lay orders quickly after that consultation period.

To return to the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), I explained in some detail why I could not do what he suggested: it would be confusing and difficult to administer and control. The simplest and most effective response to the problem is to ensure that all beef is sold off the bone. Customers and consumers will understand that clearly, and it will avoid unnecessary complications and different processes for butchers.

I trust the butchers, and I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) said: they have worked hard and done a great deal to help to restore confidence in British beef. I am sure that they can continue to do so, even though I acknowledge that there has been something of a setback.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I thank my right hon. Friend for the speed and candour of his statement. If SEAC routinely made available its proceedings, would not that remove the need for the regular leaks and urgent statements?

I want to take up the point that has been made by all parties save one, about the need for a public inquiry. Is not it extraordinary that this catastrophe for public health, the beef industry and the public purse, which may have been compounded by incompetence, has not yet been the subject of a proper full public inquiry? Would not that do more than anything else to begin the process of restoring public confidence? If my right hon. Friend cannot give us the details, will he at least tell us in principle that he wants an inquiry and that it is not being blocked by producer interests?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks and his support for the promptness and candour with which I have acted. SEAC concluded its deliberations only very late last night. It would normally be encouraged by me to give a brief statement of its conclusions, but it did not have time even to do that in this case. I regret and greatly deplore the fact that its advice to me was leaked.

I am delighted to have the support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health in the Chamber today, and I share his view that there are strong arguments for a public inquiry into all aspects of these matters, but I assure my hon. Friend that no one among the producers has sought to exercise any influence on me as I present the arguments and continue the discussions, as I must do, with Government colleagues about the decision, which is not yet made. As soon as we reach a conclusion, I shall want to make a statement.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The right hon. Gentleman began his statement by saying that food safety was a priority. I do not think that anybody would argue with that, but what priority is given to the livelihood of thousands of farmers? He has said candidly that he does not propose to take any steps to recompense the beef industry, which is in the absolute pits. How can he, as the Minister responsible, sit and watch the whole agricultural industry dissipate before our very eyes?

Dr. Cunningham: To suggest that the whole of British agriculture is disintegrating is somewhat over the top, even for the hon. Gentleman. [HON. MEMBERS: "Livestock."] He did not say that; he said the whole agricultural industry.

As for what the hon. Gentleman says that I said, let me repeat what I in fact said: I cannot promise the House that there will be compensation.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on coming to the House immediately on receiving SEAC's advice. The consumer will want to know why the information was not available five or 10 years ago. Why was research on infectivity not carried out by the previous Government?

I add my voice to calls from all parties, except the Conservatives, for a wide-ranging public inquiry. I should like it to be on the pattern of the Scott inquiry, taking detailed evidence from witnesses in public, with cross-examination and expert analysis, so that we can find out what mistakes were made and who was responsible. Should not the previous Government have done far more five or 10 years ago to stop the disaster that now engulfs the beef industry?

Dr. Cunningham: The papers and decisions of the previous Administration are not available to me and my colleagues.

Mr. Williams: Why not?

Dr. Cunningham: Because that is the way in which British government operates. If my hon. Friend is dissatisfied with that, I share his view; but that is how things are, and I cannot change it just for the moment.

As any sensible Administration would, we have carried on—I want to be fair to the previous Administration—developed and expanded the scientific work on BSE that was set in train. As time has passed and the research has become more and more sensitive, new results have emerged. I have reported to the House on the latest of those results today, and I have announced the action that I believe to be necessary and about which I am urgently consulting.

My hon. Friend joined many other right hon. and hon. Members in pressing for a public inquiry. He will have heard what I said earlier on that subject.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): The most important message that should go out from our

[Mr. Robert Walter]

deliberations this afternoon is that British beef is the safest in Europe. The Minister said that SEAC's experimental evidence was that the traces had shown up only in cattle over 30 months old and only in material that would not normally be consumed. Will he therefore reaffirm, for the benefit of the consumer, that no British beef that has been eaten in this country in the past 18 months contained any material that could lead to any risk of any sort of transmission of disease?

I accept that Mr. Fischler and Mrs. Bonino are not taking calls today, but is there in any way in which the Minister's actions today can bring forward, in the current negotiations, the date of the lifting of the export ban?

Dr. Cunningham: At least I can congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his first statement, that the most important message to send out today is that we are taking all the necessary action to ensure that British beef is as safe as any in Europe, and safer than most. I share that conclusion, but I cannot agree with the rest of what he had to say.

The reality is that, as we know, there is a long incubation period for the disease, so we cannot be certain that no beef containing BSE infection has been sold to consumers in the past 18 months; I cannot give that guarantee, because that guarantee cannot exist in the circumstances that have prevailed.

The hon. Gentleman made flippant remarks about Commissioners Fischler and Bonino. I wonder whether Conservative Members have learnt any lessons at all about our relations with our colleagues in the European Union. The fact, I understand, is that Mrs. Bonino is in Canada, and although we tried to track her down, it proved impossible. However, her office is well aware of what is happening, as is that of Mr. Fischler, to whom I talk regularly. I have cordial and constructive relations with them both, and I intend to maintain them, unlike the previous Government, because that is in the best interests of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I should like to pursue the question raised by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), about the status of bone within the food chain. My right hon. Friend has said that it will not be classified as a specified risk material in the future, so that leaves the status of the material in limbo and the arrangements governing its storage and disposal slightly in doubt. What arrangements has his Department made for the large amounts of material that will require disposal in the future?

Dr. Cunningham: As I made clear to the hon. Lady, bone will not be designated as a specified risk material. There is no question of a large amount of additional material being disposed of, because, as I pointed out and as my hon. Friend will recall, 95 per cent. of beef is already sold off the bone. Only a small amount of additional material is involved, and none of it will be allowed to be put to any use in the human food chain. Bone will be disposed of as it has been disposed of in the past when it has not been used in any manufacturing process.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I recognise the difficulties confronting the right hon. Gentleman, but does he recognise the sense of desperation that will be felt by the farmers I met in Wincanton on Monday?

Will the right hon. Gentleman look very carefully again, at his leisure, at the scientific basis for the decision that he has taken, particularly the rather curious distinction that is made between dorsal root ganglia and the neural material in the surrounding tissue? Will he hold hard to his decision to refuse the importation of substandard meat into this country, as from three weeks' time? Will he look again, as the hon. Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger) has requested, at the behaviour of the large supermarkets and at the differential between the price of meat for sale in those shops and that on offer in markets? Will he also look again at compensation and perhaps consider using the contingency funds available to the Government, because our agricultural industry is facing a crisis?

Dr. Cunningham: As I hope the hon. Gentleman will recognise, I did not come to the House without giving very careful consideration to the advice that I have received. I have not come to a hasty decision, taken without proper contemplation of all the consequences. Of course I shall be consulting, but I believe that it is quite clear that action is necessary.

I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman the guarantee that he has sought in respect of imported meat. I have no intention of backing down on the issue. I made a concession when I accepted a delay in implementation from 1 October to 1 January, but I am not prepared to make any more concessions. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I therefore expect that decision to be implemented.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to ensure that I reconsider supermarket practices. I hope in the course of this evening, if these matters allow, to have consultations and discussion with a number of leaders of the food industry in this country. I have no doubt that they are listening to what is being said in the House about the matter.

As for the support for hill farmers in general and beef producers in particular—I understand why the hon. Gentleman has legitimately raised that matter—let me say again that the Government are providing in this financial year, for all the relevant measures, about £1.5 billion in total. That is substantial support, by any test; he and his right hon. and hon. Friends have spent that contingency reserve 10 times over on their various requests.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): While supporting the right hon. Gentleman's concern about public health and expressing the sympathy of everyone in the House for the victims of CJD and their families, may I particularly welcome his statement that all scientific evidence must be followed up? He must be aware that SEAC has pointed out that the evidence linking the cattle feed to new-variant CJD sufferers is tenuous.

Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to investigate the fact that a large historical collection, known as the Corsellis collection, of CJD material—9,000 specimens of brain tissue—taken from people who died from the disease in the 1950s and until recent times, before the current outbreak could possibly be attributed to their deaths, is held at Runwell hospital in my constituency? It remains to be investigated why those people died of that disease. Is the Minister aware that a scientist at Charing Cross hospital, Dr. Claire Royston, is unable to proceed with that investigation for want of resources?

That research could be extremely significant in either confirming or refuting the current thesis as to the cause of the CJD deaths.

Dr. Cunningham: We are pretty clear that there is a connection between BSE and new-variant CJD. The burden of scientific evidence leads to that conclusion. As for the doctor to whom the hon. Lady referred and the history of CJD, I am happy to receive advice and to look at evidence and scientific research, from whatever quarter it may come.

The Ministry is sponsoring a considerable amount of research into those matters, and we shall continue to do so. I am in no doubt about the connection between BSE and new-variant CJD.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The Minister is obviously reluctant to compensate the industry for the new costs imposed by the extra ban. Would it not have been possible to make a contingency payment for the evolving science of BSE from the £400 million underspend on agriculture, rather than letting the Chancellor have that money for use on another pledge in his green Budget?

Dr. Cunningham: I am not aware of any £400 million underspend in my budget. If the hon. Lady is referring to the recurring nonsense uttered by the Conservative spokesman, the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), let me tell her for the removal of any doubt that there was not a word of truth in what he said. Such an underspend just does not exist.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Why cannot the rules that affect the export of British beef to the continent of Europe be applied immediately to imports of beef from the continent of Europe? Why do we have to wait for 1 January? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his comment to the effect that that delay is some kind of a disappointment to the industry is the understatement of the year? The industry is now on its knees and surely he should do something about it immediately.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman has not taken much notice of what has been going on. If we are to get a European Union-wide agreement—

Sir Michael Spicer: Why do we have to have such an agreement?

Dr. Cunningham: Because there is a single market for beef in Europe, and that is the best way forward. In order to reach a European Union-wide agreement, it was necessary to agree on an implementation date of 1 January. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman and the House that the previous Government had every opportunity to take my approach to beef imports, but they signally failed to do so.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is considerable sympathy and understanding for the difficulties in which he has been placed because of constantly changing scientific advice? That sympathy might be greater if he recognised that his need to follow such advice of the day was matched by his predecessors, who also followed it.

If we are to avoid the situation in which the Minister and his successors have to come to the House every six months from now until eternity to announce yet another new scientific development, will he look again at the scientific budget of his Department, which represents a small proportion of the £1.5 billion that he mentioned? He should think about expanding research so that he might get some final, consistent answers and so that policy could be consistent. Then, scientists would not keep on changing their minds and forcing him, as they did his predecessors, to change his mind.

Dr. Cunningham: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman that the scientific advice is constantly changing. The science and understanding of these terrible problems is evolving and developing; it is not changing. Scientists are becoming more and more systematic in their examination of the possible location of infection. I welcome that research programme. The way to resolve the problems is not to call for more expenditure, but to work deliberately, consistently and ruthlessly to eradicate BSE completely from the national herd. When we do that, the problems will have been resolved.

As for my Department's science budget, the hon. Gentleman says that it is small in comparison with £1 billion, which is true; but it is still a substantial science budget at £130 million a year. It is the budget predicted and supported by his right hon. and hon. Friends when they made their public expenditure proposals for this financial year. As a scientist, I am keen to extend, wherever possible, support for scientific research, but, in the present straitened circumstances of public expenditure, we in the Ministry have to look carefully at every pound we spend, whether in science or anywhere else.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Minister accept that I do not take issue with his need to come to the House and make a statement in the light of information available to him? However, may I report the despairing phone calls that I have received from farmers in my constituency today and a call from Paris on a mobile phone from the chief executive of what used to be our biggest beef exporter? He is now struggling to export lamb and salmon to the continent and asking whether there is any point in keeping his business going, because he cannot cope with this trickle of announcements. We need to reach a position in which, first, we have a real prospect of eliminating BSE from the herd, and, secondly, we have in place a traceability scheme that is accepted by the European Union and will enable us to get back into the marketplace.

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman think again about the cut in the compensation scheme for cull cattle? That has had two potentially damaging effects: it might halt the decline in the incidence of BSE just at the moment when the incidence is becoming extremely small, and it is devaluing the capital value of many farmers' herds, leaving them unable to survive. Will he think again?

Dr. Cunningham: I am pleased to be able to say that I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Gentleman says. To the constituent who called him on a mobile phone from Paris I would say, yes, there is a point in continuing. I recently attended the food fair at ANUGA in Cologne, where a great many Scottish food producers, from Orkney to the borders, were displaying their products and

[Dr. Cunningham]

demonstrating with considerable skill and success their ability to export food from Scotland. I made a point of visiting several of the stands, some of which displayed lamb and salmon products. There is a great deal of point in continuing, because there are enormous markets to be satisfied.

We are pressing ahead with all possible speed and deliberation to eradicate BSE from the national herd, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that that is the way to resolve the problems. He is also right about traceability, and from our first days in office, my hon. Friend the Minister of State engaged consultants and took their advice. He has made a decision about where the traceability centre is to be located, and the buildings are being established as we speak. It will soon be operational, and I am delighted that we have made such good progress.

As for the over-30-months scheme, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that decisions about that scheme are made by the Beef Management Committee in Brussels and not by me personally. At the time of these changes, I said to the National Farmers Union that if it could come up with a different way—one that its members thought was fairer—of applying the decisions, I would try to get those proposals implemented instead. I should say here that I welcome the statesmanlike response of Sir David Naish to these problems and the measured way in which he has acted, which stands in stark contrast to the conduct of the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). Sadly, however, the farmers could not agree on a different way of proceeding.

Points of Order

5.33 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This matter arises from a hearing of the Accounts Commission for Scotland held in Haddington last Friday, 28 November, to look into an excellent 1985 initiative by East Lothian district council. I have expressed my opinion of that matter in early-day motion 479.

My point of order arises from the fact that I have been advised that the chairman of the commission, Professor Percy, delivered a public rebuke of me for not being present at his hearing. Apparently, he said that

"it was regrettable that the Member of Parliament had seen fit not to be present in view of the serious statement that he had made"

in the early-day motion. Those present, including representatives of the press, got the clear message that the chairman thought that I had got my priorities wrong when I decided to vote in the House on Friday rather than attend his hearing. I have always understood that attendance in the House of Commons is the overriding duty of Members of Parliament, Madam Speaker, so may I seek your advice on the propriety of the chairman of a subordinate body telling a Member of Parliament that attendance at his quango is more important than voting in the House?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman gave me some indication of the point he intended to raise, but there is little that I can usefully say in response. I have not seen a transcript of the comment to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Obviously, all Members of Parliament find that there are conflicting calls on their time most days, but I am aware that many hon. Members decided that the right place for them to be last Friday was in the Chamber. If that meant that some outside bodies felt disobliged by hon. Members' inability to attend their proceedings, that is to be regretted. Although I do not think that any further comment or special protection from me is required by the hon. Gentleman, I hope that outside bodies will realise that parliamentary proceedings must remain the first call on hon. Members' time.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is almost becoming tedious to have raise such points of order with you, but this one relates to the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland on public expenditure in Scotland which he delivered at 4.30 pm today in the Scottish Grand Committee. The statement was made available to hon. Members in the Vote Office at 4.31 pm, but, by that time, I had already conducted an interview on the subject at Millbank, having been given the full figures by journalists. I checked the fax time of their information—it was 3.55 pm. Despite your constant admonitions, Madam Speaker, the Government are choosing either to ignore or to defy your wishes on behalf of the House. It seems that the Government simply wish that the House of Commons did not exist.

Madam Speaker: I share the irritation of the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members. I have deprecated such occurrences before and I do so again most strongly. I see that the Scottish Grand Committee met at 4.30 pm today to consider a ministerial statement on the Scottish

local government settlement and what the hon. Gentleman says indicates that that statement was available well in advance to the media. What is happening is that the status of this House is being devalued, which I deprecate most strongly. I hope that senior Ministers present here will note my remarks and ensure that there is no recurrence of such events. It seems that I have to make statements such as this every two weeks.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order that Members of Parliament are impeded in carrying out their parliamentary duties by the outrageous behaviour of a public transport company? I had to travel to Gravesend this morning to meet the flagship of the standing NATO fleet and had allowed plenty of time to allow for the usual delays and breakdowns. The train stopped at Crayford, where all the passengers were forced to get off, apparently for no other reason than that the train was running late. Had it not been for the quick thinking and co-operation of some of the passengers, I would not have got to my engagement. If you can assist in any way, Madam Speaker, it would benefit not only many hon. Members, but many commuters.

Madam Speaker: I have a good deal of authority from time to time, but it extends only within the House and not to the railways. However, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee, Clements house, 14-18 Gresham street, London. That body deals with issues affecting rail users and has the legal right to make recommendations for improvement.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. With respect to your authority, which you have just mentioned, I was wondering whether you could help me with a problem I face. I fully accept that you have no responsibility for or control over the contents of answers to written questions, but that is not the thrust of my point of order. All Ministers, when they sign written answers to Members of Parliament, have in the jacket of those questions a guidance note from the permanent secretary of their Department stating that the answer should be factually correct and as helpful as possible in answering the question.

Yesterday, I had a written answer from the Department of Social Security to two questions that were grouped with a question from another hon. Member. One of my questions specifically asked the Department to publish the minutes of a meeting that the Secretary of State for Social Security had with an official from Wisconsin on compulsion for lone parents seeking work and welfare to work. The general answer to all three questions in no way answered that question. The Table Office tells me that, under the rules of the House, I cannot for three months retable that question to elicit the answer that I sought.

I now know, from a telephone call that I have made to the Department, the answer to my question, but it is not in the written answer that appears in the *Official Report* because the Government do not want to put in black and white in the public domain their refusal to issue those minutes. I do not question their decision, but they have not answered my question, so it has not been published in the *Official Report*. That is an abuse of the procedure whereby questions are tabled in order to elicit answers from Ministers and to question the Executive.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman rightly said when he began his point of order that I have no responsibility for Ministers' answers and comments. The hon. Gentleman did not give me notice of his question and I have not seen the question and written answer, but I should like to look at them. However, I am sure that what he has said has been noted this afternoon.

Electro-convulsive Therapy (Restrictions on Use)

5.41 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to prescribe the circumstances in which electro-convulsive therapy may be used without the patient's consent; to establish who may administer it; to lay down requirements governing the apparatus with which it is administered; and for related purposes.

Electro-convulsive therapy is usually carried out under anaesthetic. The patient is strapped down and an electric current is passed through the brain, causing a convulsion. In 1990–91, the last year for which figures are available, 105,466 treatments were administered to an estimated 20,000 patients.

ECT is given to patients suffering severe depressive illness. The increased effectiveness of anti-depressant drugs has resulted in a reduced use of ECT, but its present level of use is not known because the previous Government stopped collecting data centrally.

In January this year, the Royal College of Psychiatrists completed its as yet unpublished third audit of ECT clinics in England and Wales. It revealed that 45 per cent. of junior doctors

"lack knowledge about one or more basic issue related to effective administration of ECT."

The audit's authors say that for

"maximum efficacy and minimal side-effects"

those administering ECT should fully understand such issues and have

"access to, and training in the use of, appropriate equipment."

Although all mental services now have a named consultant psychiatrist responsible for the ECT clinic, routine ECT treatment will usually be given by junior doctors. According to a Royal College of Psychiatrists press release, the third audit found that a majority of ECT machines met what was the then college standard, but in August this year one of the audit's co-authors told me that a more recently completed survey had revealed that 53 per cent. of ECT machines were obsolete.

In other words, in our hospital system, ECT treatment may be carried out with or without the patient's consent on equipment that is out of date and is administered by doctors who often do not have adequate training.

I submit that if that had happened in any other field of medicine, public opinion would have focused on it and found it wholly unacceptable. ECT continues, however, without any legal mechanism for improving the circumstances in which it is prescribed and carried out—perhaps because of the stigma attached to the mentally ill.

Data on ECT may be collected, but they are not held centrally. Inquiries to a specific trust or unit may be answered, but it is impossible to get a sense of the national picture. My Bill would establish a legal obligation on all hospitals to supply the Department of Health with detailed information on every patient in receipt of ECT and on the Department to publish an annual record, broken down according to gender, age and race, with an assessment of outcome.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists "ECT Handbook" publishes a suggested treatment record form for clinics to use. It includes space for an assessment of outcome to be completed by both the patient and the responsible medical officer. My Bill would make the reporting, collating and central publication of such information compulsory.

There is a need for a change in practice. The Royal College of Psychiatrists, following its audits during the past 17 years, has given some clinics a yellow card—even a repeated yellow card—but there is no statutory means of giving a red card. Without that sanction, how effective can a warning be?

Should ECT be used at all? Some may have reservations about my Bill because it does not ban ECT, as has been done in some countries, such as Germany and Holland. It is commonly accepted in Britain today that, where possible, medicine should be evidence based. Enough examples are reported of patients who believe that their lives have been irreparably damaged by ECT. I have received a number of such letters and reports, and they are harrowing.

Such evidence is, of course, anecdotal, but there are enough anecdotes at least to raise serious questions. The wording of the Mental Health Act 1983 suggests that ECT would not be legal at all under emergency procedures if the changes to the patient it brings about are found to be irreversible. Some hard evidence is required.

For its part, the Royal College of Psychiatrists claims "rock solid" evidence that ECT works. It also argues that claims of side effects such as memory loss are attributable to the patient's depressive disorder. I note that the Royal College of Psychiatrists cites as the "best evidence to date" of ECT's success in treating severe depressive illness a 15-year-old piece of research it conceives can be criticised. With proper data collection and measurement of individual outcomes, my Bill would help to ascertain ECT's effectiveness and whether its effects are reversible.

My Bill proposes some limitation on the relative ease with which ECT can be given. At present, if a patient consents, ECT can be given without the agreement of a second opinion appointed doctor. The consent principle in the Mental Health Act 1983 can also be overridden by detaining the patient and treating them under the patient's best interest principle. While a risk of suicide, self harm or danger to others understandably requires the putting to one side of the consent principle, it is disturbing that that can occur simply because it is thought that the patient's health may improve if they are given ECT.

At the time of the debate on what became the Mental Health Act 1983, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), then the Secretary of State for Health, said that he had decided not to include ECT under treatments requiring both consent and a second opinion

"but as experience is acquired, and if opinion changes, we shall be able to move it into the more serious . . . category."—[*Official Report*, 18 October 1982; Vol. 29, c. 86.]

My Bill would take us to the situation that the right hon. and learned Gentleman envisaged might be necessary. It would also ensure that ECT is carried out in safe circumstances and that the patient can be given ECT only if he or she has given informed consent and if a second opinion appointed doctor agrees, unless urgent treatment is judged necessary by the responsible medical officer.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Gunnell, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Audrey Wise, Mr. Paul Burstow, Mr. Peter Bradley, Mr. John Austin, Miss Melanie Johnson, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. Gordon Marsden, Mr. Ken Purchase and Mr. Neil Gerrard.

ELECTRO-CONVULSIVE THERAPY (RESTRICTIONS ON USE)

Mr. John Gunnell accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to prescribe the circumstances in which electro-convulsive therapy may be used without the patient's consent; to establish who may administer it; to lay down requirements governing the apparatus with which it is administered; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 30 January, and to be printed [Bill 94].

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Considered in Committee [*Progress, 2 December*].

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

MEANING OF "THE TREATIES" AND "THE COMMUNITY TREATIES"

Amendment proposed [2 December]: No. 3, in page 1, line 13, after '2', to insert '(except paragraph 19)'.—[*Mr. Howard.*]

5.50 pm

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I remind the Committee that with this we are taking the following:Amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 13, after '9', insert

'(except Article 2 paragraph 22)'.

Amendment No. 59, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'except Article 2(3)(c)'.

Amendment No. 34, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'other than in Article 2, paragraph 19)'.

Amendment No. 36, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'other than in Article 2, paragraph 22)'.

New clause 21—*Appointments to Employment Committee—*

'.—Pursuant to Article 2 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, Paragraph 19 (Cmd. 3780, page 31), Her Majesty's Government shall make appointments to the Employment Committee in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations.'.

New clause 27—*Social Chapter: Report to Parliament—*

'.—Her Majesty's Government shall make a half-yearly report to Parliament on the implementation of Article 2, paragraph 22 of the Treaty setting out the United Kingdom legislation and employment implications arising from the new Employment Chapter and Social Chapter as agreed in the Amsterdam Treaty which shall be subject to resolution by each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): When we were discussing the Bill yesterday, I was trying to explain to the Committee and to Conservative Members my view that the proposals in the social chapter were an important contribution to the success of building harmony and a social partnership between employers and employees throughout the European Union. Today, I start by emphasising the fact that there are in this country many companies that were already implementing the provisions of the European directive concerning works councils before our Government signed up to the social chapter.

The European directive on works councils covers undertakings or groups of undertakings with at least 1,000 employees in 14 European Union states and the three European Economic Area states and at least one establishment employing a minimum of 150 workers in two of those member states. It therefore applies in 17 countries to multinational companies with their headquarters in the

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

United Kingdom, or anywhere else in the world, which operate on that basis. Although employees in the United Kingdom or any other country outside the European Economic Area do not count towards the 1,000 and 150 thresholds, they were considered within the overall picture if the companies that employed them were based in the requisite number of European Union states.

The Library has produced an interesting research paper, which includes the following statement:

"It is estimated that, regardless of whether we are in or out of the Social Chapter, 113 UK-based companies will have to set up European Works Councils or other procedures under the Directive because of the number of their employees in other"

European Community or European Economic Area

"Member States. It is likely that most of these companies will choose not to exclude their UK workforce from any arrangements they make. Some 57"

European works council

"agreements have already been reached in UK companies and all include UK employees. All but 6 are in companies covered by the Directive."

A publication called "Bargaining Report", issue No. 167, published in December 1996, on European works councils, gives a helpful list of those 57 agreements. I shall not quote the entire list, but it starts with Albert Fisher group, Allied Domecq and APV and continues through British Airways, British Steel, British Telecom and Coats Viyella to Hanson Brick and Hanson Electrical—which is interesting, given the association of the latter two with a member of the other place—Imperial Chemical Industries, Imperial Tobacco, Laporte, Lloyd's Register and Marks and Spencer. The list continues through Reckitt and Colman, Reuters, Scottish and Newcastle and Securicor and ends with United Biscuits and Zeneca.

That interesting list shows that these matters were already influencing the situation in this country. Listening to Conservative Members yesterday, one would have thought that what was being proposed if we signed up to the social chapter was a terrible device that would destroy British business and cause great damage, and that British business strongly opposed it. In fact, those UK-based or British-based companies were already implementing the provisions outlined in the social chapter.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Does my hon. Friend consider that one of the problems with the Conservatives' approach is that so few Conservative Members have read the social chapter? I remember reading it during the Maastricht debate and the same was true then. I saw the astonishment on Conservative Members' faces because they had not understood how little was contained in the social chapter, how much was excluded, the way in which it protected small firms and the fact that it had to take account of economic conditions. That is the problem: Conservative Members have not read the social chapter.

Mr. Gapes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment because, as on so many other connected matters, he is right. He has read the social chapter and all the other matters that we are debating in the Committee.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) *rose—*

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) *rose—*

Mr. Gapes: I give way to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash).

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the problem is not the large multinational companies but the small and medium businesses? Does he accept that, if one were to draw an analogy with the United States, the key question is whether we have enough flexibility in our labour market to enable us to generate jobs of the type that are being produced in the United States and that he is misrepresenting the position? I have indeed read the social chapter.

Mr. Gapes: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman says that he has read the social chapter. I suggest that he reads it again because anyone who has read it and the directive knows that small companies are specifically excluded. Conservative Europhobes have an amazing misunderstanding of, or deliberately misrepresent, the situation. Their stance would be greeted with hysteria among Conservative and Christian Democrat parties in all other member states of the European Union.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that one of the fundamental problems that businesses in Germany have is the incentive to remain small—at 10 employees or fewer—precisely because of the threshold in social legislation? That is exactly the threshold the virtue of which the hon. Gentleman now extols. The consequences are dire.

6 pm

Mr. Gapes: I am sorry, but I fail to understand the relevance of that intervention to the social chapter. I presume that it relates to internal German domestic law—if the hon. Gentleman is right. I am not sure whether he is; it certainly has nothing to do with the European Union or the social chapter.

Mr. Bercow: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's strictures on the social chapter with the greatest possible interest. What does he say about Commissioner Flynn's proposal that works councils should be established in companies with 50 employees or more? Is he opposed to it? If so, is there the slightest prospect of the Government doing something about it?

Mr. Gapes: Had this country not signed up to the social chapter, the Government could have done nothing about it. The only way this country can influence the outcome of discussions and negotiations on these matters is by being at the table—rather than opting out.

Various proposals have been suggested in a number of areas, but they have not yet come to fruition and negotiations continue. It is therefore premature and unrealistic to say that such proposals have been agreed. Indeed, only two matters are currently included in the social chapter and they relate to works councils and parental leave, which we discussed earlier. New provisions in other areas are under consideration, one of which relates to burden of proof in sex

discrimination cases. As a result of the Amsterdam agreement, the Government will now have a voice in the negotiations on the final wording of that proposal.

Other proposals concern part-time workers. The Confederation of British Industry said that there should be an agreement on that. An agreement has been made among the social partners, who believe that high regard should be paid to how employers consider the rights of part-time workers. I hope that progress will be made in the not-too-distant future.

All good employers want to consult, inform and involve their employees. They regard committed, dedicated and loyal employees as vital to the success of their business. The best way to achieve that is to pay people well, show them respect and listen to them when they have views to express or grievances. Bad employers operate on the basis of driving down wages, not consulting, imposing, and acting in an autocratic and arbitrary manner. Unfortunately, if no social legislation is in place and there is no social protection or social partnership, bad employers are more likely to exist, to succeed in the market and to undercut the rates paid by good employers. That is why it is important to have a national minimum wage and the social chapter.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman will be surprised to learn how much I agree with him about good employers. Almost everyone in the House agrees that any good employer listens to his or her work force. When I was on the Employment Committee, it never ceased to amaze me how many big companies, some of which the hon. Gentleman has quoted in terms of their support for the Amsterdam treaty, did not carry out such policies.

Does the hon. Gentleman not realise, however, that it is the business of neither national Governments nor the European Union to determine how an employer relates to his employees? That way goes the stifling form of government that we had previously, with beer and sandwiches at No. 10.

Mr. Gapes: That was a most interesting intervention. There is clearly a deep philosophical division between those who believe that Governments have no role in setting minimum standards and those who follow that logic and believe that everything should simply be left to the markets.

Mr. Robathan: I do not believe that.

Mr. Gapes: If everything should not be left to the market, I presume that there must be minimum standards and regulations to prevent exploitation and injustice, just as was proposed by a former Prime Minister and Conservative leader when he was responsible for wages councils in the early years of this century.

Mr. Bercow: Churchill?

Mr. Gapes: Yes. I refer to the right hon. Member who, having started off in Dundee and Oldham, finished his parliamentary career in the borough I am also pleased partly to represent—Wanstead and Woodford. As far as I know, he has not yet been expelled from the modern Conservative party.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Gapes: The hon. Gentleman seems to be a little agitated. Does he wish to intervene?

Mr. Bercow: I should love to. We all appreciate the hon. Gentleman's genial spirit, but he is meandering somewhat. I shall rescue him with an alternative challenge. Does he think that the American model or the European model is a better route to the creation of jobs?

Mr. Gapes: I was fortunate enough to come across some interesting statistics that show that unemployment in certain European countries is falling faster than it is in the United States. Among those countries are Sweden and Germany. That clearly shows that the model the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue—the American model—lock, stock and barrel, which has no social protection or legislation to help protect the poor, the disabled and those with other problems, is at variance with the European model, which I prefer.

If we had to choose—we do not because we are part of the process of developing a model—I would rather start with a model based on social partnership than one based on the avaricious grinding down of poor people and exploitation. The hon. Gentleman obviously prefers the other model. That is the philosophical difference between modern, hard-faced conservatism and the Labour party's one-nation approach.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman should know by now that I am a soft-centred individual. If he is not aware of that yet, he will be in the future. May I ask a simple factual question? Does he accept that, between 1974 and 1994, 31 million new jobs were created in the private sector in the United States and that precisely none were created in the European Union?

Mr. Gapes: Those are interesting statistics. I shall check the facts when I have read the transcript of that interesting intervention. Even if they were true, which I doubt, they would be irrelevant to the argument about the social chapter, which is a recent innovation in the EU. The figures that the hon. Gentleman quotes from the early 1970s are neither here nor there. We must deal with the situation in the 1990s.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): The hon. Gentleman is providing the dual benefit of entertaining the House and being patient with it. Does he realise that almost every provision to be introduced under the social chapter—one of which, incidentally, the hon. Gentleman referred to as a proposal, but is a directive that was debated by European Standing Committee B this morning—is already implemented in one form or another in most of the European states which have, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) pointed out, produced zero employment gain over the period in which the United States has produced some 30 million jobs?

Is not the hon. Gentleman saying in effect—it is a perfectly reputable position, but it is important to bring it out—that he prefers to protect workers who are already

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

in jobs and, if necessary, to leave many tens of millions of ordinary people out of jobs for the sake of protecting those in work?

Mr. Gapes: If it were true that those were simply matters for other European states, I would be extremely concerned. Measures can be taken by national Governments to deal with the problem, as our Government are dealing with the legacy of the past 18 years by creating the welfare to work programme and by co-ordinated activity between the member states of the European Union, which is why the employment chapter was put into the Amsterdam treaty.

There is a combination of co-operation and action at a European level and the more important national component of action to reduce unemployment. The two must go together, because we are in a single market. There must be certain minimum standards within that market. That is why the concept of the social chapter, bringing together the social partners, developed concomitant with the establishment of the single market. It is not a case of one or the other. The two go together, side by side.

I agree with the criticism that some countries have had serious increases in unemployment. Germany certainly has serious problems, some of which are undoubtedly related to the unexpectedly high costs of German unification. I remember discussing what would happen with Members of the German Parliament in 1989, 1990 and 1991. Within four or five years, they said, east Germany will be fine and everything will be great. They did not expect the massive costs of the transfer from the west to the east and the impact that that would have on their economy.

Rising unemployment in Germany is clearly related to unification, but there are other factors. We could discuss them, but I do not want to delay the House much longer and other hon. Members want to speak.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is filibustering his own Bill.

Mr. Gapes: If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, I am happy to give way to him. Otherwise, I should be grateful if he did not make contributions from a sedentary position.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he believe that, when and if Europe has a single currency, there may be similar effects on unemployment in some parts of Europe as there were following German unification? What parallels would he draw between the two?

Mr. Gapes: There are no direct parallels. The argument about a single currency is for the debate on a different amendment. I would prefer not to go down that road now. I should be happy to read out the document produced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the hon. Gentleman so wishes, but that is a matter for a later debate.

Mr. Robathan: Why does the hon. Gentleman think that, this time, the Germans will be right about a single currency whereas they were wrong in 1989, 1990 and 1991? Could they not be wrong twice in a row? Have they only ever been wrong once in their lives, and does he take them at face value?

Mr. Gapes: We can discuss that matter in the context of a later amendment.

The Government have carried out the mandate that they got from the British electorate on 1 May, which was to join the social chapter. The Conservatives were against joining, and fought the election with a strong claim that joining the social chapter would be a disaster, yet they were resoundingly defeated. Consequently, one would expect them to display some humility and accept the fact that they lost, but we still hear the same arguments as we heard before.

Not all Conservatives take that view, however. The Conservative MEP Tom Spencer—

Mr. Radice: Good man. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Gapes: The reaction from the Conservative Benches is somewhat different. Tom Spencer called the treaty

"a useful consolidation and clarification of the existing treaties and it should be accepted by both government and opposition in Westminster."

Mr. Swayne: Oh, that's all right, then.

6.15 pm

Mr. Gapes: That was easy. I have more quotations, if other hon. Gentlemen want to intervene. Anthony Teasdale, MEP, was the special adviser to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he was at the Treasury before the election. Mr. Teasdale wrote a pamphlet with another Conservative MEP, Mr. Brendan Donnelly. The pamphlet, entitled "What's Right with the Amsterdam Treaty", was published only in October, so perhaps hon. Gentlemen have not yet had a chance to rush out and buy a copy.

The two MEPs reject the argument that the Conservative party should oppose the Amsterdam treaty because it includes the social chapter. They state:

"Whatever the merits and demerits of such a move, everyone understood that it would follow if Labour were elected, Amsterdam Treaty or no Amsterdam Treaty. It is therefore perverse for critics to attack the treaty for incorporating the Social Chapter, and any criticism of this kind is likely to cut little ice with an electorate which accepted the legitimacy of UK accession by its vote on the general election of 1 May."

Mr. Swayne: I entirely accept that, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that new clause 27 acknowledges that Labour mandate? It merely puts in place a means by which the House might monitor the implementation of the social chapter.

Mr. Gapes: In which case, why is the hon. Gentleman arguing for the removal of the social chapter from the Bill? I fail to understand his argument: he wants the social chapter to be removed and to be kept in. I am a little surprised.

Mr. Radice: Perhaps the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) did not listen to the speech of the

right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who made clear his total opposition to the social chapter when he moved the amendment.

Mr. Gapes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

In conclusion, I hope that, in a few months' time, when they have given further thought to these matters, wiser heads in the Conservative party will recognise that it is not in the interests of their party or of the country for them to keep their heads in the sand and to fail to face up to reality.

The modern world requires that Britain plays a full part in the European Union, negotiating in our national interests to obtain the best deal for our country. That is what my right hon. Friends have secured through the Amsterdam treaty and their decision to sign the social chapter.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): On Second Reading, I made clear my opposition to the Bill for three very good reasons. One reason might be described as purely tactical: I object to the Government's failure to use the unanimity required in treaty negotiations to secure a solution to the problem of fishing quotas and the working time directive—although I suppose that the latter cause would not gain much sympathy on the other side of the Chamber.

I also oppose the Bill most sincerely because I think that it is a very mean treaty which does little to adjust our institutions to a Union of 20 or more members. The treaty barely addresses enlargement—that will require another intergovernmental conference and another treaty. Most particularly, I oppose the legislation because of the inclusion of the social chapter and the employment chapter. That is also why I shall support the amendment. Those chapters will not create a single new job in my constituency—in fact, the loss of competitiveness as a result of the measures may lead to job losses and to bankruptcies. The blame for that result will lie firmly with the Government and those provisions in the treaty. The Government's adherence—some might suggest that it is somewhat out of character—to a dogma that is both outdated and anti-competitive will cause many problems.

The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) suggested that the social chapter contains few provisions. He even claimed that Conservative Members have not read the social chapter. I assure him that we have read the social chapter, together with some excellent research material about it.

Mr. Letwin: My hon. Friend may be understating the position. Does he agree that, in all probability, the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash)—and perhaps also he himself—knows the social chapter by heart?

Mr. Walter: I shall not recite the social chapter to the Chamber this evening, although I shall allow other hon. Members to do so if they wish. At the time of the Amsterdam conference, that empty box—as the social chapter has been called—contained only two specific provisions on works councils and parental leave. My question is: for how long?

United Kingdom business practice does not follow the European social model. Our business practice is viewed on the continent as more competitive and a threat to European businesses. When the Amsterdam treaty was signed, the works councils directive applied to firms with 1,000 or more employees. The Commission now proposes to reduce that number to just 50 employees. Conservative Members regard flexible labour markets as critical to the future competitiveness of British industry. We occasionally hear such thoughts echoed among Labour Members, but there is little in this measure that would lead to flexible labour markets continuing on their current basis in this country.

Unemployment in Britain today is significantly lower than in any of our major European competitors. The flexibility created in the labour market by the previous Government means more jobs and a wider range of jobs. In our flexible labour market, more people can find a way of working that suits them. Is it a coincidence that the United Kingdom, which has the most deregulated labour market in Europe, also has more people in work than any other major country in the European Union?

In the past 20 years, Europe has seen the consequences of inflexible labour markets. Britain's more flexible labour market has ensured that unemployment is below that in Germany. United Kingdom unemployment stands at 7.1 per cent. In Germany, unemployment is 9.9 per cent; in France and Italy, it is 12.5 per cent.

Mr. Radice: I shall test the hon. Gentleman on the social chapter. Has he read the last sentence in article 1 or the last sentence in article 2.2?

Mr. Walter: I have indeed, but I do not believe that either article mentions the unemployment rates in Germany, France, Italy or the United Kingdom—which is what I was referring to.

I believe that the best way to help the unemployed is to improve their chances of getting a job. It is no secret that Britain's competitive position in world markets, its attractiveness to foreign investment and its low cost base are due to low social costs. In fact, Britain's social costs are lower than those in most other competitor countries. Thanks to the policies of the previous Government, the United Kingdom has a much lower level of statutory non-wage costs than any of our major competitors. Our hourly labour costs in manufacturing are significantly lower than those in any other G7 country.

For every £100 that is spent on wages in the United Kingdom, an employer must add approximately an extra £15 in non-wage costs. In Germany, the employer must add an extra £31; in Spain, it is an extra £34; in France, an extra £41; and, in Italy, an extra £44. Nevertheless, when the cost of living is taken into account, real take-home pay for manufacturing workers in the United Kingdom is higher than in either France or Italy.

If the social chapter is an empty box, as has been claimed, will those non-wage costs creep into labour costs in the United Kingdom? The European social chapter is the means by which the European social model in labour practices will spread across the channel.

Mr. Radice: Has the hon. Gentleman read article 2.3 of the social chapter? He will see that there is a British veto if it is a question of

"—social security and social protection of workers;

—protection of workers where their employment contract is terminated;

—representation and collective defence of the interests of workers and employers . . .

—conditions of employment for third-country nationals . . .

—financial contributions for promotion of employment".

The terrible fears to which the hon. Gentleman refers may never be realised. He simply has not read the social chapter.

Mr. Walter: With the greatest respect, I have read the social chapter. My fear is not that the British veto might not exist in such matters but that the Government would be perfectly prepared, in their enthusiasm, to allow those costs to spread across the channel. I have heard nothing in the debate so far to suggest that Labour Members would be anything but enthusiastic about that spread of European social practice.

I referred earlier to the works councils directive. At the time of Amsterdam, it applied to companies with 1,000 or more employees, but the Commission now proposes to reduce that to 50 employees. In Germany, that kind of structure applies to firms with just five employees in some cases. In larger German companies, up to half the seats on the supervisory board must be reserved for employee representatives. The hon. Member for North Durham frowns. I believe that those non-wage costs would creep into the social chapter and come hurtling across the channel.

In many of our continental partners, the heavy hand of the state is present in the labour market. In the Netherlands, an employer must apply to the employment service before he can dismiss an employee. In Belgium, planned overtime must be notified to the authorities in advance. One can go around Europe on a tour of anti-competitive labour practices, but perhaps the star prize should go to Sweden, which offers an aggregate 450 days paid leave to parents, following the birth of a child.

6.30 pm

I do not suggest that any of those practices are currently in the social chapter, but the excellent research paper provided by the House of Commons Library, entitled "The Social Chapter"—this is proof that some of us on the Opposition Benches have read not only the social chapter and the treaty but some of the background material provided by the Library—lists current issues in European social policy: working time, maternity leave and pay, young workers, European works councils, parental leave, part-time and temporary workers, posted workers, transfers of undertakings, consultations with workers, redundancies and transfers, worker information and consultation, onus of proof, equal treatment, positive discrimination, sexual harassment and equal treatment in occupational social security. Then there is a delightful heading, "Further Reading".

In my constituency, just how many new jobs will be created from signing the social chapter? Or—if Ministers have done their research—how many jobs in my constituency will be destroyed as a result of the Government's plan for a statutory minimum wage, which is not even part of this debate but can only compound the problem?

I regard myself as a good European, but I have no problem whatever in opposing the social chapter and the employment chapter as being bad for Britain and bad for Europe.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): New clause 21 stands in my name and that of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). It is a very modest proposal, simply requiring the Government to do what they should do: consult employers and workers' organisations before making appointments to the Employment Committee. I know that the Government have regular consultations with employers' organisations, and I hope that they also have regular meetings with workers' organisations, so the new clause poses no practical difficulties.

I hope that it will not be misinterpreted when I say that we on the Liberal Democrat Benches are a little cynical about the Employment Committee and do not feel that there is a role for discussing employment opportunities and the creation of jobs with our European partners, because we believe that it is a proper matter for the European Union to discuss. However, the Employment Committee may prove to be—we shall have to wait and see—yet another talking shop that achieves very little. If that happens, it will be regrettable, but if it enables a proper dialogue to take place between the representatives of industry and commerce in this country and those in continental Europe, who may take a slightly different view about the best way to proceed towards job creation, that must be a good thing.

I was interested in the earlier discussion across the Chamber about the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and continental models. When the Prime Minister and his colleagues spoke about these matters in the various Councils of the European Union, I thought that he suggested that the Government were for flexibility nowadays. I thought that they were for the Anglo-Saxon model of job creation, which is, perhaps, not as untamed as the American model. We have no problems in agreeing with that. We believe that the key elements for job creation are completing the single market, maintaining deregulation and flexibility in the labour market and reducing labour costs. Those should be promoted within the context of the European Union.

There is clearly a dichotomy of thought on these matters between the British position and that of some of our European neighbours. Indeed, it characterises what we do in this country, and the Anglo-Saxon tradition. I know that there are strictures in this place about using foreign languages, so I shall not use the term in the original, but it translates as "hard capitalism" or "savage liberalism". The concept of "savage liberalism" is obviously absurd; nevertheless, the term is used in France and elsewhere. It is important that we engage in the debate. If the Employment Committee can play a part in ensuring that the British point of view is very much to the fore in the debate, that seems to be a worthwhile objective.

I do not need to detain the Committee further. The new clause would simply ensure that the Government consulted before making appointments to the Employment Committee. Not all Governments have always consulted widely before making appointments to the Employment Committee. It is to our advantage to see that this measure is clearly stated in the Bill and is used as a precedent for other appointments that the Government may wish to

make. I hope that the Minister will be able to accept the new clause, or at least accept its spirit, and satisfy us that the Government's intentions on this matter are quite clear and that consultation will take place.

Mr. Brady: I apologise for having missed the beginning of the debate, and, if I may, I shall recount a small anecdote that relates to European matters. I was detained by a Standing Committee that was considering rather arcane matters of copyright law. That provides a perfect illustration of the dangers of allowing any further extension of qualified majority voting, given that, in the very important matter of preserving and protecting databases—an industry in which the UK has more than 50 per cent. of the European market, and which is far more important to the UK than to any of our partners—the British Government were forced to accept that the database would be protected for only 15 years, rather than 25 as we had first wished. I shall not linger on that. I just thought it an interesting illustration of the dangers of allowing control over our legislative processes to leave our shores.

I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes)—who has left his place after a splendid speech—because of the clear and frank way in which he set out his objectives and beliefs in higher social costs. It is a legitimate debate which we used to have with the Labour party when language was used in a more straightforward way, in the days when people always used to say what they believed rather than sometimes hiding behind slightly different permutations of language, which seems to be the current fashion.

This point might help the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) to understand some of the rather puzzling differences between the sounds that emerge from the mouth of the Prime Minister and what the Government are doing when they negotiate on our behalf in Brussels. I fear that in European matters, as in matters of domestic interest, words do not always mean what they purport to mean. That is a subject to which I shall return.

The way in which the Government presented the treaty to the Committee—indeed, to the country—was a fascinating illustration of the way in which they seek to present themselves and sometimes present minor achievements in negotiations as great triumphs. They presented the treaty as a triumph for the role of the member state, and as a triumph for business. They held it out as an example of a great new understanding of the way in which markets work. Closer inspection of the treaty and of the Bill shows that none of those claims is true.

Article 127 of the treaty incorporates the goal of high employment levels across European Union countries. The Government would have us believe that they are seeking to provide a business-friendly, less regulated environment that will enable higher levels of employment to be achieved. It will be a new environment that provides flexibility and all the elements of the Anglo-Saxon model to which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome referred. I fear that that is not strictly reflected in any accurate assessment of the treaty.

One hopes and expects that the Labour party and the other European members states will recognise and understand that the Anglo-Saxon model is more effective in generating employment and in providing an environment in which business can succeed. The average rate of unemployment in the European Union is about 10.8 per cent., compared with 7 per cent. in the United Kingdom. Other European countries should see the wisdom of following the UK model.

The International Monetary Fund has criticised the lack of flexibility in other European member states and the sclerotic state of continental labour markets. It has called for comprehensive reform of policies and institutions affecting the labour markets in continental economies. On the other side of the equation, it has praised the United Kingdom for the policies that have been so successful in building our economy and our labour market, and have allowed businesses to succeed.

I must again refer to the use of words. The Government's practice is to use words cleverly—by that, I am not implying any great compliment—which sometimes misleads the public. That can be difficult for Opposition Members. The Government sometimes mean the opposite of what they seem to be saying. A clear example is what they say about the employment chapter and the social chapter.

At the same time as Europe is apparently calling for greater flexibility and is accepting that labour markets need flexibility, it is also saying that we need co-ordinated flexibility. That is an oxymoron: it suggests that the only way to achieve the free, open labour markets that businesses require is to have a central plan co-ordinated from Brussels that establishes a blueprint for business. It shows that the Government and many of our European partners have little understanding of the way in which markets and business work.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we have not a central plan, but a co-ordinated strategy? We are not dictating to people, but working together to achieve common goals.

6.45 pm

Mr. Brady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. I fear that the treaty is open to different interpretations, given the way in which it has been drafted, and the Commission's view of its effect in practice. The public relations information that has been put out gives the impression of a co-ordinated strategy, but I do not believe that that is the truth of the treaty.

The treaty sets out a new area of EU expenditure. Article 129 deals with incentive measures. Although it does not implement a rigid blueprint that must be accepted by and imposed on all member states, it gives the Commission the power to direct those incentive payments towards the member states that do the bidding of the Commission or of the majority in the European Union. Because of the different employment practices in this country compared with those in much of the rest of Europe, there is a great danger that incentive payments will be directed elsewhere rather than to the more flexible and effective UK economy.

Article 130 establishes a new Employment Committee. That is another way of centralising, controlling and creating uniformity across the member states, and lies uneasily with the suggestion that there is a drive for greater flexibility in European labour markets. I believe that it is a blueprint for harmonisation of employment law. The hon. Member for Ilford, South hinted at that, and it

[Mr. Brady]

comes back to economic and monetary union. It is widely accepted that economic and monetary union will require fiscal harmonisation to avoid competitive tax rates. Similarly, many people in the European Union believe that lower social costs attached to business gives an unfair competitive advantage. They may give a competitive advantage. They certainly give British business a competitive advantage at the moment, which is one of the reasons why our unemployment rate is so much lower than that of many of our European partners.

Mr. Bercow: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Is he aware that the 1989 social charter, to the principles of which this country is now committed, refers to leave that must "progressively be harmonised"? Does he agree that that is not only consistent with what he is saying, but is in direct conflict with the point made by the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker)?

Mr. Brady: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. With customary eloquence and clarity, he has put the point rather better than I did.

The approach to harmonisation that seems to have escaped Labour Members is clearly set out in the treaty. The Commission will produce guidelines, which will be agreed by qualified majority voting, so the British Government will have no right of veto. Those guidelines may be contrary to the practice of employment policy in this country. I understand that the guidelines will be approved in the next couple of weeks, or so the Social Affairs Commissioner expects. Member states will then be called on to establish national action plans. At that point, I might agree with the hon. Member for Gedling, because member states could be asked to produce national action plans. However, the treaty does something entirely different: it requires those action plans to come back to the centre. By qualified majority voting, the institutions may make recommendations to member states that could be contrary to the policy, practice or intentions of our elected Government.

It is slightly disingenuous to suggest that the treaty is a decentralising measure which gives greater freedom and flexibility. It does not. Article 127 states:

"The Community shall contribute to a high level of employment by encouraging cooperation between Member States and by supporting and, if necessary, complementing their action."

That puts an obligation on member states to complement what other member states are doing. That is a very interesting treaty obligation. It does not suggest that the United Kingdom or any other member state could operate its own, independent, flexible labour market conditions. The treaty clearly intends to create a single entity in European labour policy, whereby member states should seek to improve not their own competitive position, but that of the European Union.

Some people may say that that is all very well—if we raise standards in the EU as a whole, that is a good thing. Of course it is, but I question, first, whether it is possible to raise standards in the EU as a whole by placing social costs on business throughout the EU and, secondly, whether it is in the UK's interests to sacrifice its more competitive social costs.

Buzz words appear throughout the employment sections and the rest of the treaty: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, equal opportunities and flexibility. Most of us would happily agree with all those things, but, on Monday, I had the great advantage of joining members of the Select Committee on Education and Employment on a trip to Brussels to meet Mr. Flynn, the Social Affairs Commissioner. I had the opportunity to question him on what some of those words mean. Again, I heard a different interpretation of English language, which is the result of far more than the distance of the Irish sea. Indeed, some of my antecedents come from the same emerald isle.

I was filled with admiration for the way in which Mr. Flynn avoided my questions, but some remarkable things emerged. Talking about flexibility and adaptability, I put the question to him directly: does focusing our policy on flexibility and adaptability to improve employment conditions throughout Europe mean that we have seen the last of Europewide harmonisation, through directives such as the working time directive, which increased social costs throughout Europe? "No," said Mr. Flynn, so there is no question about that.

Then I pursued Mr. Flynn on the question of flexibility. "What does it mean?" I asked. He said, "We are talking not about flexibility"—I hope that the Committee will be grateful for the fact that I am resisting the temptation to impersonate him—"but about positive flexibility." I pursued him a little on the definition of positive flexibility. I only wish that, on a Wednesday, we had the opportunity to pursue the Prime Minister in the same open way, so that he actually gave answers and the details behind the policy, which sometimes give the game away, rather than just words, which sometimes obscure the meaning.

It emerged that positive flexibility can mean more, not less regulation. Notably, Mr. Flynn gave one example: under its new flexibility policy, the Commission would, as a matter of urgency, be pressing to remove the current exemptions from the working time directive. Therefore, particularly in relation to transport work, flexibility in the context of the Amsterdam treaty means increased employment costs and more restrictions on working hours. It also means bringing forward the directive on part-time work as a matter of urgency. Again, sometimes, the interpretation of the treaty by Ministers and by those far more senior people in the hierarchy—the Commissioners in Brussels—is different from that commonly understood from their use of words.

Employability is difficult to define, but I am not sure that I even understood the definition that the Commissioner gave. He said that, rather than use the word "employability", he would prefer to use the term "partnership gap". In that instance, I was completely floored. I cannot say what it meant: it did not appear to have any meaning whatever.

I return to the incentive payments and the way in which it is possible for the Commission and the European institutions to force member states into line in the interpretation of social and employment policy. It is important to note that, in the new round of structural fund expenditure, 10 per cent. of the funds—a lot of money—will be kept in a reserve fund. It seems that that will be spent in member states that perform according to the Commission's wishes: the Commission will spend money in member states that perform well according to the treaty standards in article 127.

Why will that money be reserved? Is it to reward countries that do something that is not in the guidelines set out by the Commission, but that—as with the UK—achieves better results than countries that do? Or is it to encourage—or support perhaps—countries that find that their economies are less effective and that have lower employment, precisely because they observe the terms of the Commission guidelines? It is clear that the Commission will not be rewarding countries that adopt a freer, more flexible approach.

The policy set out in the treaty will not lead us towards a more flexible employment model or to more job creation, on which the UK has an excellent record. I asked Mr. Flynn for an example of a country that best summed up his model of positive flexibility. I had in mind the UK, which has of course a much better unemployment record than most other member states, or even—this was perhaps a little hopeful—the United States, but he held out Denmark as the best example of flexibility to which we should all lean, a country which has extraordinarily high taxation and social costs attached to business.

That brings us back to the central point. What is being sold to the British public is not identifiable from the words that are attached to the treaty and from the way in which they are expressed. That is worrying. It is not a great example of democracy in action.

The only reason why there needs to be a co-ordinated employment policy throughout the European Union involves something that we may discuss later: European economic and monetary union. If EMU exists in parts of the continent of Europe and there are economic shocks that affect employment, a centrally directed mechanism will be needed to change policy and to alleviate some of the problems that EMU will cause.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I have been educated and informed this evening, but I confess to being a little confused on occasion. As the debate has veered between the philosophical and the specific, a theme seems to have emerged from the Conservative Benches: by definition, all regulatory provisions are anti-competitive and bad for business. That assertion is absolutely extraordinary and completely at odds with the proud history of the Conservative party, particularly in the 19th century, in which I am sure many Conservative Members wish they were living. The Conservative party has been proud to intervene. It has appreciated the fact that the free market has to be regulated in everyone's interests.

It may be because I am to leave shortly for a dinner at the CBI—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I am sorry, but it comes with the turf with new Labour. I am not sure what CBI stands for, but inevitably I have had to do some preparation and I spent last night wrestling with Adam Smith. In "The Wealth of Nations", we find time and again that the apostle of the free market never intended that labour markets should be completely untrammelled—that markets should be completely free. The hidden hand of the market may be excellent in relation to consumer choice, but it is not the way to run a country in the interests of all its citizens.

The Government recognise that not only business but workers have a crucial role to play in the conduct of our economic affairs. Workers, too, have the right to have their voice heard.

Mr. Letwin: I wish to spare the Committee possible trial and tribulation. I take it that the hon. Gentleman intends to argue why the provisions should be included in the treaty and why there should be European legislation on the matter, rather than whether there should be national legislation on the matter as he appears to be doing.

Mr. Pound: The hon. Gentleman may be assured that eventually I will reach the very point to which he refers. I simply wanted to respond to what appeared to be, if I may be forgiven for saying so, almost inherent anti-Europeanism.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that Adam Smith's great work was in fact "The Wealth of the Nations—"nations", not the European Union?

Mr. Pound: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information, which I will add to the small store of knowledge that I have accrued in the short time I have been in the House. I was under the impression that the work was called "The Wealth of Nations", but I understand that Adam Smith originally wrote it in Scottish so it may possibly have lost something in translation when we first read it in Fulham.

7 pm

We have heard about things hurtling across the channel like V1s or doodlebugs. That to me is indicative of what I called the inherently anti-European emotions that we have heard from Conservative Members. Indeed, I feel that if someone offered some Conservative Members a Christmas pudding for nothing and it was revealed that it had been boiled in Brussels they would strike it from the hand of the donor, and should there be French brandy on the Christmas pudding it would be drop-kicked into the Thames without a second thought.

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Mr. Pound: I give way to the expert on Christmas puddings.

Mr. Brady: It is bizarre that the hon. Gentleman accuses us of being anti-European when he raised the subject of Vls or doodlebugs.

Mr. Pound: To be aware of the history of our nation is not to be pro or anti-European but merely to be fairly well educated.

Mr. Bercow: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is working himself up into a lather of excitement before a good dinner. I am enjoying his speech, but I fear that he has started on an unfortunate note. He referred to the CBI. Does he acknowledge that the CBI is not Euro-sceptic, but is opposed to the social chapter and to the Government's policy in relation to that because it knows that the social chapter will damage the cause of British business and British employment?

Mr. Pound: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but that is not my understanding of the

[Mr. Pound]

current position of the CBI. I am confident that after the port and cigars have been passed around tonight and we have had the opportunity to discuss the matter the CBI will be as much in favour of the social chapter as I am.

The two main subjects under discussion—the social chapter and the employment title—have been described as empty boxes. Various other metaphors—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr. Lord. I thought that I was being told to shut up. There were gesticulations from behind the Chair. As someone who is fairly new to the ways in which this place operates, I thought that it might mean that I was committing some social solecism.

The new provisions on social affairs and employment are not empty boxes but some of the most important provisions of the Amsterdam treaty. I cannot understand why Conservative Members do not appreciate how much those two specific aspects concern the people of Europe and Britain. It is not for me to speak for the Government, and it will doubtless never be my place to speak for the Government, but were I able so to do I would say that we welcomed those provisions whole-heartedly. By bringing the social chapter into the treaty, we have made it clear once and for all that British workers are worthy of the same rights and protection as their European brothers and sisters—and about time, too. I believe that Mr. Bercow is about to rise.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman answer the question that the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) declined to answer? Does he believe that the American model is a better route to job creation than the European model, or does he believe that the European model is better? There must be an answer.

Mr. Pound: I apologise for referring to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) by his given name. I appreciate that that is not done, and I will not do it again. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) is more than capable of speaking for himself. We have heard much about the Anglo-Saxon model, but our concern tonight—as a European country, which we are, and in Europe, where we are—should be with matters European. Whereas it might be interesting from an abstract point of debating style to compare our economy with that of the United States, that is not the business before the Committee.

For once, we are recognising that British workers are entitled to the same protection as their continental counterparts, but Conservative Members are telling us that if we adopt those basic rights—the litany of which was read out as though it were some invocation or mediaeval curse rather than a basic framework and structure of protective regulations—it will make us uncompetitive. We can bandy statistics all night, but my belief—and, I believe, that of Labour Members generally—is that that is simply not the case.

The flexibility that has been mentioned today is in many ways underpinned by security at work. If there is one thing that cuts to the heart of the issue, it is that insecurity at work, untrained staff and people without the necessary flexibility cannot service a modern economy. The social chapter will itself underpin the strength of the British economy and the continuing reduction in unemployment.

Mr. Brady: I am most intrigued to know whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that measures regarding job security and tenure will be forthcoming under the social chapter. We hear so often that there are only two measures in the social chapter. Is he suggesting otherwise?

Mr. Pound: I was perhaps speaking in the abstract. It was said that in Holland, I believe, one has to notify an agency if one intends to dismiss a member of staff. That is completely incorrect: one simply has to notify the employment agency that a vacancy exists. Speaking as an individual, I should be perfectly happy for a provision offering tenure at work to be implemented, but that is not what we are debating.

What we have heard tonight might lead us to believe that a terrifying vista or horrifying European nightmare of regulation is, if not hurtling across the channel, at least oozing under the door of the Chamber. Yes, there have been times when some of our European partners believed that regulation per se was the answer to Europe's social and employment problems. That is no longer the case.

Nowadays, there is a different attitude in Europe, and we owe it to ourselves, our constituents and the House to be part of that new attitude in Europe, not to be constantly cavilling at the perimeters and making the accusation that by providing the basic rights contained in the employment title and the social chapter we shall lose what we have gained over the past few years.

By signing up to the social chapter we now have a voice in the wider debate on employment, social rights and competitiveness. The previous Government—doubtless for excellent reasons and nothing whatever to do with internecine warfare—denied themselves the opportunity to be involved in the discussion. Almost by definition, they adopted an isolated and extremist position.

Mr. Letwin: Will the hon. Gentleman explain what he means by the interesting notion of our having the opportunity to take part in the discussion and having a voice? Will he relate it to what happened this morning in European Standing Committee B? The Committee considered three directives and was told specifically that the Government had failed to analyse them but felt that they had to sign up to them. What does the hon. Gentleman believe to be the characteristic of sitting at the table and having a voice if that voice is constantly contradicted by a large number of voices across the table?

Mr. Pound: I cannot comment on what the hon. Gentleman got up to before lunch today because I was not there and I have not seen the video, but the jobs summit provides a good example of our voice being heard. The Government's input and emphasis on promoting employability and adaptability was accepted by the rest of the people at the summit. With the greatest respect, I cannot see that that degree of agreement would have been reached by any previous Government. I freely confess to a complete lack of knowledge of what the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but if he would like to give me details of his movements before lunch I will be happy to discuss them later.

The UK Government insisted that the employment title recognise that the key to a high level of employment is

"a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce and labour markets responsive to economic change".

That, too, has been copied by our partner nations in Europe. We are at the table and what we are saying is being listened to, respected and adopted by many of the other nations.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The hon. Gentleman is making a strong case against the United Kingdom having an opt-opt on anything at any stage, because, he says, we should be present at the table and in a position to influence the debate. Why are the Government therefore so proud of the opt-out that the Prime Minister says that he secured—although it was secured by the previous Government—over border controls? Should we not be at the table on that matter, playing our happy part as part of the European family?

Mr. Pound: We have not exercised that opt-out in discussions on the employment title and the social chapter. I have a personal view on the Schengen situation that is shared by many hon. Members on both sides of the House. As a loyal supporter of the Government, however, it would not be appropriate for me to mention that view now. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] Conservative Members cannot split Labour Members on the issue with the ease and frequency with which they split themselves.

Mr. Letwin: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his patience in taking interventions, but I think that he has failed to realise the force of the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins). He asked not about the hon. Gentleman's views on Schengen but about the structure of his argument. So far, the hon. Gentleman has made an argument in favour of certain types of social legislation; the House understands that. Such legislation could be enacted domestically. The only argument that he has made so far in favour of incorporating such provisions in the treaty—and, more specifically, incorporating the treaty into English law—is that we should have a voice at the table. If that is a general principle, it should extend throughout the scope of European legislation. He must therefore—I hope—be about to present some other argument for incorporating into English law the provisions dealt with by this group of amendments and new clauses.

Mr. Pound: I should have hoped that it would be self-evident that in both this and the next century employment patterns are and will be multinational rather than merely national and that we have to view our employment and social legislative practices in the European context. I should have hoped that that was self-evident.

Mr. Letwin: I am tremendously grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I assure him that I will not intervene again in his speech. In claiming that we have to take a European view, however, he has now hit the nub of the issue. Will he admit that we are part of a global marketplace and that the real competitive threat faced by all Europe is a global threat, especially from the tiger economies?

Mr. Radice: Tiger economies?

Mr. Letwin: Yes, the tiger economies: notwithstanding their current difficulties, they will beat the British and the rest of the Europeans hands down if we cannot match their practices, practice for practice. Does the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) agree that we are part of a global marketplace and not merely part of the European marketplace?

Mr. Pound: I should hope that all hon. Members realise that if global competitiveness has proved one point—especially in the part of the globe that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—it is the necessity of a strong trading and economic bloc, of which Europe is the exemplar. I do not wish to go into the entire debate on economic and monetary union, although I should be happy to do so if Conservative Members so wish, but it makes sense—if for no reason other than defensiveness—for us to be part of a strong united Europe. The day of the former tiger economies—currently the stuffed pussy-cat economies—may return, and their cause may re-emerge. That is all the more reason for us to be strong in Europe and not to be where the previous Government chose to be—on the periphery.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Pound: Mr. Lord, will you advise me on whether I am able to give way to three hon. Members at once?

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman will have to decide on one hon. Member.

Mr. Pound: What a pleasure it is to see the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I realise that the hon. Gentleman believes in high employment levels and that he holds that as a valuable and important objective of the current Government. Can he not appreciate, however, the concern of the many Conservative Members who fear the institutional arrangements that we are debating? Conservative Members have no objection to social progress as the hon. Gentleman has outlined it—the Conservative party's history is one of social progress, such as "the widow's shilling", under Chamberlain—but what will the hon. Gentleman do when there is a genuine belief that the specific route or measure being proposed by the European Union conflicts with the objectives of the Labour Government in maintaining a high employment level? What will he do if he has to deal with a law that is superior to anything that he will be able to affect through the Labour Treasury Bench? That is the conflict and the resolution that we are trying to identify. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has implied that we could enact the social provisions domestically, so that we are not ruled or governed in circumstances in which the judgment of elected Members of Parliament is in conflict with the views of the European Union.

Mr. Pound: I have strong admiration for the hon. Gentleman, who has been consistent in his views, which

[Mr. Pound]

have earned him great admiration both among hon. Members and from the public. In response to the points that he made, I would point out that we still have the veto. If we accept that the only way of achieving economic success is constantly to undercut working terms and conditions and to drive down wages, we do not need regulation or the social chapter—but that way madness lies. We must consider the health of the entire nation, not just the health of the employing section of the nation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South specifically dealt with the points made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), with far more elegance and brevity than I could manage.

7.15 pm

Mr. Bercow: I am richly enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech, but he resembles nothing so much as a shifting goal post. Let us try to identify exactly where he stands. He regards himself as a good European. Does he therefore believe that holiday pay throughout the European Union should be harmonised under the provisions of the social chapter—yes or no?

Mr. Pound: There is much evidence to suggest that what those using the Anglo-Saxon model might regard as excessive holiday pay, particularly in Germany, is being harmonised from within Europe. Across Europe, such forms of harmonisation are the precise results of Maastricht. I believe that workers deserve a break. Perhaps holidays do go on too long in some parts of Europe, but I will not name any specific countries.

Before my soup gets cold—it may well already be cold as it is quite a fashionable dinner, I am told—I should like to make my final points. The new social and employment provisions provide an excellent basis for improving prosperity, tackling unemployment and tackling the issue that has been raised only peripherally in this debate: social exclusion. Across Europe, we must consider the issue of social exclusion. The social chapter goes a long way towards incorporating that concern and that philosophy into the heart of our Government's actions.

As hon. Members are well aware, the social chapter provides a mechanism for agreeing Europewide standards for minimum levels of fairness at work. What on earth is wrong with that? How can anyone carp and cavil at that basic demand? Do people oppose it only because it is pan-European? I should hope that anyone who cares for the people whom they represent would be a strong supporter of it.

The Government went to Amsterdam determined to put jobs at the head of the EU agenda and to bring the social chapter provisions into the treaty. As one of the humblest and most obscure Government Back Benchers, I am proud of what the Government achieved in Amsterdam. I am utterly convinced that the way forward in achieving an inclusive, economically successful, low-unemployment nation within the rest of Europe is precisely as delineated in the two issues that we are debating today.

Mr. Cash: After that robust knockabout by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound), perhaps we should return to some of the more fundamental questions in examining the nature of the provisions. I have heard much talk about relative hourly costs for production workers, and I thought that it might be useful to mention the most recent figures comparing costs in, for example, Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. On a baseline figure of 100 for hourly labour costs in 1997, the figure for Germany is 145, for France it is 93, for Italy it is 92 and for the United Kingdom it is 80. That gives one a simple snapshot of the differentials between wage rates in other countries under the provisions of the social chapter and the kind of manoeuvring that is taking place with a view to trying to undercut the United Kingdom. Fundamentally, that is what the issue is mostly about.

Let no hon. Member imagine that the arrangements for the social chapter have been designed simply to enhance the benefits of those in other parts of Europe. There is an ulterior motive to ensure that higher labour costs are applied in the UK so as to raise our wage levels and put us—from the point of view of other European countries—on more of a level playing field. For the UK, the bottom line is that we have a substantial differential advantage at the moment, which is one of the reasons why we are doing relatively well.

The same argument applies to the minimum wage, to which the Government are committed. The figures for the Liverpool model, which I have been given by Professor Patrick Minford, suggest that the direct effect of the proposals

"would be to raise the pay of low-paid men by 21.6 per cent. on average, and that of women by 25.6 per cent., an overall weighted average . . . of 24.1 per cent."

That would mean a substantial increase in costs to the UK.

Mr. Radice: Pay is excluded from the social chapter.

Mr. Cash: Yes, but the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the Government are introducing proposals for a minimum wage. That is what I am dealing with. The hourly rate at which the Commission arrives has to be reflected by movements similar to those in respect of the code of conduct for what is described as "harmful tax competition", which is the new method whereby the Commission achieves a degree of harmonisation across the board—achieving in national legislation proposals which are commensurate with the kind of playing field that the Commission wants to create in Europe as a whole.

On the costs of the social chapter, Professor Minford points out that general gross domestic product would be depressed by a staggering 20 per cent., with consequences for unemployment that the model cannot effectively quantify, so far is it from even the worst United Kingdom experience. That is devastatingly bad news. If the Government want to challenge the Liverpool model and the arguments of Professor Minford, I have no doubt that he would be only too delighted to take them on. He says:

"In the case of the weakest combination, the damage to output is estimated at 9 per cent. and unemployment increases by 3 million (10 per cent. of the labour force)."

That is published information—*[Interruption.]* It is all very well for the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) to laugh. As Chairman of the Treasury Committee, he may wish to ask Professor Minford to appear before the Committee and to examine such questions. That would be the responsible way of going about the matter, rather than proceeding on the basis of the advantages that claimed for the social chapter and the

arguments that go with it. I suggest that there should be a proper debate rather than the kind of banter that we heard during the speech of the hon. Member for Ealing, North.

Mr. Radice: I am sure that members of the Treasury Committee would be delighted if Professor Minford appeared before the Committee when we consider issues such as economic and monetary union. No doubt he would talk about the issues to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Of course, models depend on what assumptions one feeds in: if one feeds in incorrect assumptions, one gets incorrect results.

Mr. Cash: I would say much the same of reports that have poured out of the European Commission such as the Cecchini report, "One Market One Money," and all the other junk that has been generated. They have effectively been written backwards because all the Commission ever wanted was to arrive at the conclusions from which it started. That is the worry. I would agree with the hon. Gentleman if he were prepared to conduct a completely objective analysis in the Treasury Committee. I suspect, however, that he has been appointed Chairman of that Committee precisely because the Government do not want an objective analysis. The hon. Gentleman is well known for coming from where he started, and I assure him that I know where he will end up.

I come now to questions on the impact that the process towards European economic and monetary integration has had on the British economy, the consequences of the exchange rate mechanism and the advantages that we have had since we came out, which I am sure that the hon. Member for North Durham would not want to dodge. I should like to believe that he could apply the same criteria to the advantages that we have had since we left the ERM to the advantages that we are enjoying while we are out of the social chapter.

I am well aware that relatively few provisions of the social chapter are as yet to be incorporated—it is a softly softly catchee monkey operation. Having served on the Select Committee on European Legislation for the past 14 years, I have seen stuff such as this as it has come forward in a series of proposals. There is masses of legislation in the pipeline. It is a fraud on this debate and on the people of this country to pretend that the issue gravitates only around questions relating to works councils and the like.

I turn to a comparison that we can genuinely make between economies elsewhere in Europe and economies at the present time both in the United Kingdom and—so far as a reasonable comparison can be made—in the United States. There is no doubt that outside the social chapter, with union legislation under Baroness Thatcher, changes have been made as a result of which we are truly competitive in the world.

Since 1974, unemployment in the European Community has increased. That is very significant. From 1974 to the present day, unemployment has risen from 2.5 per cent. to an average of about 11.5 per cent. The issue is not just one of adopting a chauvinistic or party political point of view on one side of the Committee or the other. In the national interest, it cannot be right for us to ignore the reality that unemployment in Europe has risen since 1974 by such an amount.

There is the most appalling youth unemployment in countries such as Spain, where it is running at about 35 per cent., Italy where it is 33 per cent., and France where it is 28 per cent. It is monstrous that people should be subjected to such misery and deprivation as a result of policies that have been pursued in Europe over the past 20 years in the process of so-called ever closer union. As I said the other day, the process is in fact ever closer division.

The policies are causing deprivation, hardship and unemployment. I cannot for the life of me understand how, in a trivial exercise called the jobs summit last week, Labour Members could possibly imagine that they would be able to claw back the dangers to the people of this country—including their own constituents—that what I have just described represents. Believe me, it will come to haunt them.

As has been mentioned, 31 million jobs have been created over the past 20 years in the United States compared with zero in Europe. Do not Labour Members realise that there must be a lesson to be learnt from that? Why are they involved in the Gadarene rush towards creating massive unemployment and greater difficulty for the people of this country? I shall give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis)—or at least I think that I am about to. I thought that he was rising and wanted to say something.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): My hon. Friend has provoked me to speak rather than my asking him to give way. I apologise to him for intervening in the middle of his speech. If the social chapter is so minor and unimportant, as Labour Members claim, why was our joining the social chapter raised at the top of the agenda at every Council of Ministers that I attended? The continental countries were clear about wanting us to join so that more could be added to it without further disadvantaging them.

7.30 pm

Mr. Cash: My right hon. Friend, with his immense experience, makes a telling point. The real reason why the other countries have been so anxious to impose the social chapter on us is that they want to ensure that the United Kingdom does not get a competitive advantage in the ever-increasing legal area of employment. I should not really say this, but in a funny way it is quite a good ruse from their point of view, if they get away with it. Unfortunately, not only are the Government prepared to run with that ruse, but they are prepared to advocate it. They want to destroy jobs in the United Kingdom.

That is what is going on in the coal industry. In my Adjournment debate the other day, I pointed out that the German coal producers are getting as much as £5 billion a year. State aid is tied up with the social chapter and employment policy. Why are the so-called new Labour Government anxious to drive out good, honest, hard-working miners in my constituency and elsewhere in the United Kingdom on the altar of the ideology of the European Coal and Steel Community—which stinks—giving the Germans the opportunity to pay their miners £5 billion a year? What are the Government doing about that? That is social policy. That is where they are destroying United Kingdom jobs and creating advantages for people elsewhere.

I have always supported the notion of a single market, but I do not support gross differentials, gross unfairness and a complete lack of competition. That is the problem.

[Mr. Cash]

That is why I am so concerned about the behaviour of a Labour Government that got in on the basis of a vast mistake that was made over the exchange rate mechanism. We broke promises on that, tied up with monetary union and other issues. Perhaps the British people had not quite connected that with domestic issues. A Labour Government ride into that vacuum and go around destroying jobs, such as the 5,000 that they are about to ditch in the coal industry, although I heard the Prime Minister attempting desperately to hang on to the cliff edge by making some promises this afternoon. We know that his commitment to a 20 per cent. cut in emissions is at the root of the problem and the Labour party's embarrassment.

The social chapter is about employment policy and the manner in which we create jobs. By signing up to it, we shall take away the advantages that have been built up by the Conservatives over the past 18 years. I find that very depressing. I hope that the people of this country will take note of the arguments of Conservative Members, although I am experienced enough in this place to know that the best way to keep a secret is to make a speech in the House of Commons.

The European Commission's figures on the effects of the social chapter show that regulation has shackled employers. Greater flexibility to respond to market conditions is essential if jobs are to be created. According to the European Commission, non-wage labour costs add an average of 30 per cent. to employment costs in the European Community. The figure approaches 50 per cent. in Germany, France, Italy and Belgium, but it is only 19 per cent. in the United Kingdom, where health care and much of welfare spending is paid for by general taxation. Many other member states are searching for alternatives to high payroll taxes because of the damage that they inflict on employment opportunities and are looking for ways to put the costs of social benefits on the general taxation budget.

The provisions of the social chapter and the employment title are nothing more than pieces of paper that will cause incredible damage to people in my constituency and throughout the United Kingdom. I trust and believe that they will cause a great deal of embarrassment to the Government, who are inviting the chaos, the disorder and the implosion of the European Community that the measures will cause.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). I do so with some astonishment, because—I think that I understood his argument—he said at the beginning of his speech that the social chapter was a deliberate, organised attempt by other European countries to bring our social costs up to European levels. I remind him that we had an opt-out. It is not the other European countries that are arguing for the abolition of that opt-out; it is the British Government. That is an example of the xenophobic rhetoric that I referred to earlier in Committee.

I am looking particularly at the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) because yesterday, when I could not be here, he said that I did not justify my claims about xenophobic rhetoric. I am happy to do so by referring to the language and policies of the Conservatives. Last week, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) imagined a housewife in Surrey being disconnected from the political process because Members of the European Parliament speak in a foreign language.

Mr. Cash: I must intervene. The hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with that. I will not be accused of being xenophobic. The hon. Gentleman must answer a simple question. Does he think that it is xenophobic to produce statistics based on the European Commission's analysis of wage rate differentials? If he does, he is clearly mad.

Mr. Rammell: I shall not respond to that directly. I do not think that it is wrong to quote European Commission statistics. That is not the issue on which I was accusing the hon. Gentleman of using xenophobic rhetoric. However, he said—I am paraphrasing him—that the social chapter was an organised conspiracy by other European Governments to bring our social costs up to their levels. The proposal to abolish our opt-out does not come from Europe; it comes from Labour.

Mr. Radice: I know that it is boring to hear the social chapter read out and I know that Conservative Members are not enthusiastic about it because most of them have not read it. However, we have a veto on social security and social protection of workers—the non-wage costs. If those wicked continental Governments are seeking to impose their social costs on us, we can prevent them by using our veto. Have the Conservatives not realised that?

Mr. Rammell: Some clarity and some facts are welcome in the debate.

The rhetoric used by the Conservatives is important. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said to the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), a couple of years ago:

> "I hope that my right hon. Friend can influence the Government, so that we British can be proud of the things that are our heritage. That is completely different from spending our time attacking our allies and neighbours for what, allegedly, they are doing, because that is xenophobic."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 410.]

He was not talking about the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats: he was talking about the Conservative party and Conservative Members. That is why I made the point.

Mr. Letwin: I apologise for intervening again so soon, but the point made by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) must be nailed. It is clear in article 137 of the social chapter that we do not have a veto over measures relating to working conditions. The fears that were being expressed by my hon. Friends arise on precisely that point.

Mr. Rammell: I did not hear those comments from my hon. Friend: I heard him mention social security legislation and, on those issues, we have the veto.

I shall move on to some of the working conditions proposals in the social chapter. I speak on the issue with some knowledge, because I was a senior manager in the public sector for 10 years before 1 May. I understand the practical need for flexibility and adaptability in the workplace. I also understand the frustrations of being unable to get employees to adapt and change.

If we are to compete and succeed economically and industrially, we need change. We need people to work in new and different ways and to show flexibility and adaptability. It is also crucial that employees have enthusiasm and commitment. That will happen only if people have security of employment—insecurity in employment is one of the biggest destabilisers that prevent people from being enthusiastic about and committed to their work—channels of communication so that people feel that they can put their views forward, and a sense of ownership and belonging to the organisation or company for which they work. That is the only way for people to work effectively.

Mr. David Davis: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman with some sympathy, but does he accept that companies can have good communications and industrial relations without all the regulations? All the best studies carried out in this country and across Europe—for example, in Holland—show that high levels of regulation lead to low levels of growth which lead to high unemployment. That does not help anybody.

Mr. Rammell: I do not believe that that is so. We can all select examples to prove our case. We should consider the experience of the Dutch which, in the past few years, has been a strong example of social partnership with both sides of industry working together. They have seen a transformation of the economic situation. We can all quote statistics from various countries to support our examples.

I was talking about the criteria needed for successful economies and industries. If those criteria are accepted—there seems to be a broad measure of agreement on both sides of the Committee—we have to make a decision about whether to follow the legislative route. Should the matter be left to employers and employees to negotiate or should the Government legislate for some basic minimum standards of fairness in the workplace? Even Conservative Members agree that some legislation is necessary—for example, health and safety legislation. Once that has been accepted, other legislation is a matter of judgment, including the judgment whether such legislation should be national or through the social chapter and the European Union.

Conservative Members are somewhat disingenuous about the issue. They have argued, in Committee and in European Standing Committees, that the employment protection proposals could be achieved through UK legislation. That is disingenuous because the Conservative party has given no evidence that it would support such legislation.

I support the legislation that comes from the social chapter for several reasons. We should judge the issue case by case. That is important, because one of the illusions that we suffered under the opt-out was that it would protect us. The longer the opt-out went on, the more it became clear that the social chapter was coming in through the back door. Companies were reacting to it, but—this is the key point—we did not have a seat at the negotiating table.

Employment protection legislation should also be achieved through Europe to ensure a level playing field. Some 60 per cent. of our trade is with other European nations and it is important, so that one country does not gain a competitive edge over another, to have some basic minimum standards and costs.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the reason why legislation should not be presented in this House is because the Opposition would oppose it? That seems a strange reason.

Mr. Rammell: That is not what I said. I was drawing attention to the fact that Conservative Members are misleadingly giving the impression that they would support UK legislation in employment protection as an alternative to signing up to the social chapter. There is no evidence to sustain that argument.

7.45 pm

The British Government are right to use the social chapter and to judge the issues case by case. I genuinely believe that a balance must be struck between social costs and the burden placed on business. One of the frustrations of our debate is that it is unrealistically polarised. Conservative Members seem to claim that the choice is between total flexibility—with no legislation on any employment situation—and total restriction. That is not the real world and is not the situation that we face. A balance must be struck somewhere in the middle and that is a matter for negotiation in the workplace, in the House of Commons and in the European Union.

We have heard other arguments against the social chapter. The shadow Foreign Secretary, at the start of our debate on the amendments, seemed to say that Britain had the best record in Europe for inward investment and that the social chapter would damage the prospects of inward investment. That argument is fatuous. It was clear to any informed observer, and certainly any international business observer, for two years before 1 May, that it was likely that Labour would win the general election with a commitment to sign up to the social chapter. However, inward investment was not cut. It has not been cut since Labour was elected and signed up to the social chapter.

The argument is also misleading because when we consider the types of companies involved in inward investment we see that their wage costs and terms and conditions are way above anything introduced in the social chapter. It is misleading to suggest the social chapter is a factor in the equation when such companies decide on inward investment locations.

I also take fundamental issue with the view put forward by the shadow Foreign Secretary yesterday when he said that, in a competitive world, all the crucial decisions are taken at the margin. His argument was that marginal differences in price make all the difference. Price and labour costs are important, but the idea that the only route to economic and industrial success is to concentrate wholly on labour costs at the expense of anything else is one reason why the previous Government got it so wrong.

We have also heard many Conservative Members expressing concern about how social chapter proposals will impinge on jobs in this country. We heard that argument before the introduction of equal pay legislation, when the Conservative party claimed that giving women rights to equal pay would result in a significant reduction

[Mr. Rammell]

in the number of women employed. However, following that legislation, we saw a dramatic explosion in the number of women employed.

Mr. Bercow: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the parental leave directive will increase employment in Britain?

Mr. Rammell: In the longer run, it may well have an impact in attracting people back into the workplace, but I do not want to polarise the arguments artificially, as the hon. Gentleman is attempting to do. The parental leave directive, giving three months' unpaid leave, which the vast majority of people will not take up, because they will not want to forgo a quarter of a year's salary, is completely marginal in relation to the number of people who are taken on or made redundant in a workplace. That argument is fatuous.

The key issue of the social chapter was fundamentally and conclusively resolved in the general election. In any general election campaign and in any manifestos issued by political parties, there is a series of issues on which people vote; but some issues have added saliency, and people understand the clear division on them between the political parties. The social chapter was one such issue.

That was certainly my experience on the doorstep: people understood that the Conservative party had negotiated the opt-out and was there to protect it, and that if Labour was elected we would sign up to the social chapter. People voted overwhelmingly, in historic proportions, for that proposition. We should remember that in this debate.

Sometimes on the doorstep one comes across hostility to Europe and the European Union, but in seven years' campaigning I have yet to come across one person in my constituency who has said that he or she would not vote Labour because we wanted to sign up to the social chapter. The prominence that Conservative Members give to that issue is way beyond its recognition and understanding among the general public.

The issue is about bringing the country into the 20th century and taking it through to the 21st. People want minimum standards of fairness; they understand the need for flexibility, but they want the other side of the coin as well. If we can achieve minimum standards of fairness in employment through Europe, that is what people want us to do. That is why they want us to sign up to the social chapter.

Mr. Swayne: I ask the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) to read the *Official Report* of yesterday's sitting; there he will read of the seriousness of his accusation, made in the Committee's first sitting, with respect to xenophobic rhetoric. I would not want to repeat that now.

Instead, I want to draw the Committee's attention to new clause 27. In many respects, it concerns one of the less controversial aspects of the treaty as a whole. Notwithstanding the fact that Conservative Members are wholly opposed to the social chapter and its implications, we accept that the British people were warned and, as the hon. Member for Harlow pointed out, gave the Government a mandate. New clause 27 recognises that. It would put into effect a means of monitoring the activity of the legislation and would enable us to pass resolutions on it.

When I went to Germany the summer before last, I arrived just after the Prime Minister—then the Leader of the Opposition—had addressed the German equivalent of the Confederation of British Industry. He was well received, but had he stayed to listen to the debate that followed his address, he would have been somewhat embarrassed, because business man after business man got up and asked for the same Thatcherite reforms for Germany that we had experienced in our labour markets in Britain: reforms which the right hon. Gentleman had voted against at every opportunity.

Mr. David Davis: My hon. Friend is being too kind. The current Prime Minister was sitting in the front row when the head of the German CBI said that Britain, after 15 years of Tory reforms, was the best equipped country in Europe to face global competition.

Mr. Swayne: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. Our delegation had gone to Germany precisely to discuss with German business organisations and individual business men how they might achieve the same reduction in social legislation and social costs as we had. At every meeting, I asked the Germans how much they believed that their problems arose from their own internal legislation, and how much from the social chapter. We know the answer, because we know that at the time the social chapter consisted of only two elements; but they were completely unaware of, and had given no thought to, that question.

New clause 27 will prevent such an occurrence in this country. It is right and proper that businesses and the House should know the source from which such legislation arises, because the Government with their majority can implement whatever social protection they choose.

Many Labour Members have implied that we Conservatives are against social protection. It is not a question of being for or against social protection: the treaty that the Government have signed effectively raises the possibility of our having to implement social protection legislation of which we disapprove, and which we fear may generate unemployment.

The Government made their intention clear from the outset, and trailed their objective well in advance. In so doing, they failed to exact any price whatever for their concession. As a result, the concession has been pocketed and more has been and will be demanded by their partners. That was an act of unilateral disarmament which will cost this country dear.

Mr. Coaker: It is interesting to be able to participate in the debate and comment on the amendments. In all the meetings of European Committees, in European Standing Committee B, and in this Committee, we start from the premise that we have one group, the Conservative party, that is by and large Euro-sceptical, and another, the Labour party, that is not Euro-fanatical but is determined to work within the European context to try to improve matters. It is important to set out that philosophical divide, because the arguments on both sides should be seen in that context.

There is a continual re-run of arguments that are almost about whether we should be in Europe in the first place and whether we should participate in anything European. The amendments are not constructive amendments, designed to improve Britain's position: they are wrecking amendments. They arise from a desire that Britain should take no part in the drive to improve European standards.

Why should our people be denied the minimum standards that are being given to other workers throughout Europe, and the employment and social policies that promote jobs and fairness in a European context? We all want a voice at the table, not isolationism. Without flexibility in the labour market throughout Europe, there is bound to be increased unemployment.

Why do Conservative Members appear to want to deny our work force the protection and rights at work, and the proper health and safety regulations, that are common to the rest of Europe? To try to achieve all those aims for our own workers and our own country would not be to abrogate our sovereignty to the rest of Europe; it would be a way of trying to assert our sovereignty.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that we operate in a world market, not only a European market. If we give authority to Europe to decide those matters for us, we limit our ability to make decisions in our own interest so that we can trade in the world in the best possible way. We are a global trading nation, and global free trade should be our final objective, not tying ourselves into Europe. The danger is that we will tie ourselves into a fortress Europe. That is where the social and employment chapters are leading us.

Mr. Coaker: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's argument, but, as has been said, the Government recognise that we operate within a global economy. If we are part of a strong Europe we will achieve more than we would if we opted to be little Englanders, working within the confines of our nation state. As part of a European block and co-operating with one another, we will achieve more than by opting for the individualistic, narrow, nationalist road which the hon. Gentleman would prefer us to follow.

8 pm

Mr. Robathan: When the hon. Gentleman talks about what we can achieve, does he believe that we will gain the same employment prospects as those on continental Europe? After all, they are not very good. I was in the House when we debated the Maastricht treaty and I saw the same starry-eyed optimism among Members then, but I must say that most of them are now rather disillusioned.

Mr. Coaker: I cannot speak for those individuals, but I am certainly not disillusioned or a starry-eyed optimist. I am a realist and, in my view, the employment prospects of our people and those across Europe will be better served by co-operating at a Europewide level rather than by taking a narrow nationalist view.

The Government believe that, as a proud, modern state, we can achieve certain benefits at national and European level. The Opposition argue that the provisions of the employment and social chapter on people's rights at work will make our country more uncompetitive. We believe, as will be argued with ever increasing force, that those provisions will make us more competitive because a motivated, happy, contented work force, who enjoy good standards at work, will achieve and prosper more than those who are disaffected and driven by minimum standards.

The Opposition argue that if we accept the social chapter we will be burdened by over-regulation. Instead of scaremongering about bureaucracy and peddling myths about over-regulation, the Opposition should consider how they could fight for higher standards. All they want to do is deny our people the rights enjoyed across Europe.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): It does not matter two hoots whether one is a Euro-sceptic or disillusioned. It is abundantly clear from the directive on the 48-hour week that the European Commission is prepared to bring in the social chapter by majority vote, using the health and safety provisions. Surely it is a denial of democracy to spend all this time arguing about an issue when there is nothing to decide.

Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that, irrespective of his attitude, that of the Opposition or anyone else, the battle was lost when the European Commission brought in the 48-hour week under health and safety provisions, according to the majority vote? Does he not accept that it could behave like that on every aspect of the social chapter?

Mr. Coaker: I do not accept that. The Government are putting forward an alternative point of view. We are talking about working together in Europe. Perhaps we will not get everything we want every time, but, by being a co-operative member of the European Community, working to achieve common goals, the impact on our country will be far greater than it would be if we tried to achieve such goals on our own.

Mr. Radice: The working time directive was not decided under the social chapter. It was brought in under health and safety regulations which are already in the treaty of Rome. The argument of the hon. Member for Southend East (Sir. T. Taylor), who is my colleague on the Treasury Select Committee, is irrelevant to the social chapter. He has read it and he knows that many matters are not subject to qualified majority voting, including, for example, those relating to social security and social provision. Social provision, which has been spoken about most by the Opposition, is governed by a national veto.

Mr. Coaker: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; his experience in such matters speaks for itself.

Some specific benefits are starting to be apparent from the employment and social chapter provisions. I do not believe that there is anything more important than making job creation and employment the top priority in Europe. I believe that our people and those in Europe would agree with that.

The Government believe that we can create more jobs and better employment prospects by working together. The title on employment included in the treaty refers to that and to the need to increase the scope for skills and training, which is particularly important. It advocates that

[Mr. Coaker]

all the policies of the European Union and its nation states should take into account the need to create employment opportunities and promote equal opportunities.

Once we have such social polices in place, we can begin to tackle unemployment and social exclusion. The amendments tabled by Conservative Members are designed to wreck the Government's aim. Why should our workers and families be denied the same rights and standards as those enjoyed by people in the rest of Europe? That question needs to be answered. Conservative Members would deny our citizens those standards.

Other improvements have been agreed in the face of continued opposition from Conservative Members. This morning in European Standing Committee B, we discussed the part-time workers directive, which is designed to ensure that part-time workers have the same rights and entitlements as full-time ones. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) may raise his eyes in amazement, but such workers are looking forward to further legislation to protect their rights at work. If we are serious about creating flexible labour markets, we need to ensure that part-time workers have the same rights as full-time ones and that they are protected at the workplace.

It is important to consider the implications of the European works councils directive, which also points to the right way forward. Conservative Members disagree with the idea that workers should be consulted and involved in decisions about planning for the future. That directive is a significant attempt to involve workers in their companies. Such involvement would help to create the motivated work forces about which I have already spoken.

Another directive of particular importance, with far-reaching repercussions, is the parental leave directive. Many people will not understand why Opposition Members are opposed to it. It does not reflect the old type of society that Conservative Members want to represent, but the new, modern society in which we live. If Conservative Members want to deny the fact that parents increasingly want to be with their children either at their birth, or some time during their early years, they are not living in the same world as I do. That directive offers not only unpaid leave for child care, but leave to parents who need it for urgent reasons.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Would it be true to say that the attitude of the Conservative party suggests that it is anti-family?

Mr. Coaker: Their attitude reflects one of the key features of the election and of this debate: the fact that the Conservative party represents the old values of the Britain of yesterday and the new, vibrant Government represent Britain as it is today and people's demands as we move forward. The parental leave directive is all about improving standards at work, increasing flexibility and trying to work together with the rest of Europe to solve common problems. If Conservative Members disagree with that statement, they deserved to lose the last election. Only by working together can we achieve common success and tackle common problems.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I shall make a short, simple speech—I guarantee to take no more than two minutes—and I hope that the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) will think about what I say.

It is a bad thing to hand over the power to make laws to another body if one cannot do anything to change those laws when they go wrong. Time after time with Europe, we have seen promises go wrong, and there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. Take agriculture policy: this afternoon, we witnessed the pathetic sight of a Minister trying to pretend that health considerations were involved in his decision on bovine spongiform encephalopathy. We all know that that is a load of codswallop, but the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is desperately seeking any way to get the curtailment of trade with Europe removed, and he believes that introducing all sorts of strange new health proposals will help somehow. The Minister is a nice person, but we are kidding ourselves if we believe that.

What can the hon. Member for Gedling do about agriculture policy? He knows that it is going terribly wrong and that it is costing his constituents a fortune. He knows that it is an insult to the poor people of the world that we are spending millions of pounds destroying food. I am sure that as a member of the Labour party, he is upset at our spending £1,200 million on growing high-tar tobacco that will end up in the third world. I am sure that he is offended and outraged by all that, but there is nothing that he can do about it. The main argument against transferring powers is that if things go wrong, there is nothing we can do about it.

To that extent, the social chapter and all the things the hon. Gentleman was talking about are a big problem—a democratic problem. If he wants to introduce proposals to improve the lot of working people in co-operation with other nations, that is fine. We can hold expensive conferences in five-star hotels, which I am sure some Labour Members would be glad to attend. We could agree with other European countries to take action together on a national basis in a way that would give us a let-out—if things went wrong, we could do something about it. Despite the unhelpful intervention by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who is usually more constructive, I hope that Labour Members will appreciate that whether we are Euro-sceptic or Euro-enthusiasts, all the stuff about the social chapter is deliberately misleading the people of Britain. Whether or not we have the social chapter, the laws can still be applied to us.

I remember that the previous Conservative Government were keen to protect the interests of Great Britain and its people and anxious to do so promptly. When we heard that the 48-hour week directive was to be applied through health and safety legislation, the Government got terribly angry—and rightly so. They said, "Surely these European chaps cannot do that—it is illegal and wrong." The Government took action by going along to the courts to try to get it sorted out, but sadly they failed. The hon. Member for North Durham is correct in saying that if we want to change social security laws—for example, to give extra protection to single mothers, as some Labour Members want—we cannot do so by majority vote. The plain fact is that, as the experience of the 48-hour week directive shows, the sort of social legislation that we have been talking about tonight can be applied through health and safety.

Most of those present tonight are younger Members—I am one of only two old people here. I hope that younger Members will think about the roller-coaster effect of the European Union—whether or not we agree to things, they happen anyway. Hon. Members who were here in 1988—I know you were, Mr. Martin, as you are a most conscientious attender—held wonderful debates on the Bill that became the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 and said how we were going to stand up and make sure that the quotas were given to British fishermen. Today's younger Members would have been delighted to hear us—they would have been jumping up and down, waving Union Jacks and shouting, "Hooray, hooray!" Yet a few years later, we found that that law had been torn up by the European Court and that our constituents were going to have to pay huge amounts of compensation to people who pretended that they were British when they were in fact Spanish or Dutch.

That is all terribly sad, and hon. Members should appreciate that democracy is declining quickly. Whether they vote for or against the amendment—there are perfectly good reasons for either course of action—they should remember that it is pointless nonsense. At the end of the day, whether we have the social chapter or not, the European Union can apply all the social legislation it wants. It cannot do anything for single mothers, as the hon. Member for North Durham rightly pointed out, but it can bring in many other sorts of social legislation through something that was passed a long time ago and which we were led to believe was concerned only with ensuring that we did not have mice and rats on factory floors. If hon. Members doubt that, they should look back over the debates on the health and safety clause. It was made clear then that only health and safety considerations were involved, such as making sure that workers did not catch bad diseases from rats and mice.

8.15 pm

Whether the hon. Member for Gedling votes for or against the amendment, I hope that he will think carefully about the interests of democracy. What is important is not what the Committee agrees to, but what extra powers will be achieved by the European Court and by the European Commission. To that extent, I hope that hon. Members who have attended conscientiously and shown an interest in European affairs that has been lacking until now will appreciate that battles are lost without even being fought. That is not a laughable matter—it is desperately serious and very worrying for the democratic system.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I respect the long-held and consistent views of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), but I cannot help thinking that the litany that he has just gone through owes much to the lack of real determination shown by the Conservative Government in defending British interests. They had 18 years to try to do something about the common agricultural policy, which most hon. Members would agree is seriously flawed, but achieved precious little. Megaphones and handbags prevailed over hanging in there and preserving British interests, and that was a real shame.

It is also a shame that, in the British context, much of the debate—tonight and at other times—has concentrated on extreme positions. Conservative Members will know where I am coming from when I say that I defeated a gentleman called Hugh Dykes; he sits at one end of the continuum of views on Europe, and I deprecate such blind Europhilia—it is of no use to anyone and it is not the line taken by the Labour Government. Although I would not include the views of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East, I equally deprecate the views of the other extreme, which were ably represented by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) in European Standing Committee B. He stood up and said that both he and the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who did not demur, were happily extremist on European issues.

The difficulty with the debate in Britain starting from those extreme points is that they drive the agenda, whereas the reality is located in the middle. From 1 May, the Government have taken a realistic, pragmatic line in all matters European, which, in both actions and deeds, puts British interests first to a far greater extent than did the megaphone and the handbag.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. It might help the hon. Gentleman to know that we are not debating all matters European, but the amendment that deals with employment and social provisions. Perhaps he would care to address that matter.

Mr. McNulty: I fully accept that, Mr. Martin, and I apologise for the somewhat lengthy introduction to my comments on the amendments, which will follow on in part from my colleagues' speeches.

We discussed social and employment provisions this morning in European Standing Committee B, and we have previously discussed other matters that may or may not be germane to the debate. As we saw in Committee this morning, we tend to hear either conspiracy theories or a litany of abuse against what the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood described this morning as a quisling Government, who are happily selling out British interests to—in a paraphrase of the hon. Gentleman's words—Johnny Foreigner from Brussels.

That is quintessentially the prevailing view among Conservative Members in European Standing Committee B, as we saw this morning when we discussed part-time work and the works councils directive. The sum of their argument this morning was that the works councils directive was nothing to do with workers but rather was interfering with managers' right to manage and should not happen. The hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood described parental leave as a licence for men to go fishing. Quite where he got that from I do not know and he did not put it into the context of the directive. On part-time work, the clear thrust of Conservative Members' views was that part-time workers are not real workers anyway and do not deserve any rights at all.

In essence, as was said this morning and as has been said more than eloquently by my hon. Friends this evening, each of those elements will set in train good business practice. It is extremely complacent to say that the best companies do this anyway. The social and employment dimensions of European policy are about bringing the worst up to the best. Would that it were possible to ignore the need to do that and hope and pray—as Conservative Members seem to do—that it will be the case, but it is not. We are concerned with maintaining

[Mr. McNulty]

flexibility and not going back to over-regulation. Conservative Members view any form of intervention and regulation, however light the touch, as a return to 1960s and 1970s corporatism or statism, which it clearly is not.

Conservative Members, as ever, have quoted selectively from the treaty. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) referred only last night to article 128. What he did not say is that article 127 says clearly that the competencies of member states will be respected. Conservative Members do not like that, because it does not fit in with their arguments, so they ignore it. It is always the same during significant debates on Europe. If the facts staring them in the face do not bear any relation to their perception of reality, they ignore them. They believe that the European directives on part-time work, works councils and parental leave are the start of some deep, misguided, socialist conspiracy to harness latter-day western European capitalism to the shackles of 1960s corporatism, which will destroy our flexibility and competitiveness.

It is sad that, to varying degrees and over varying centuries, Conservative Members argue from various positions in the dark ages. The reality is that within the European dimension we seek flexibility through employability, which has resulted in some of the measures that I have talked about, but also through competition and welfare reform. Conservative Members need to consider the whole package, not just the parts that they select for the development of the theory of world domination by the massive European state. Conservative Members must have regard to all aspects of the employment and social dimension of the treaty, rather than pick holes in it.

All those elements clearly need to be underpinned by decent minimum standards of fairness at work. When we discussed those elements of the directives this morning, we were not talking about what many of my hon. Friends would consider luxury in terms of parental leave, works councils and part-time work. We were talking about establishing minimum standards in those areas, and that is what will prevail when we come to consider other areas. That is the reality.

There is no conspiracy other than the conspiracies of silence, megaphones and handbags that we have had for 18 years which have got us into this position. Had we been fully committed during that time to fighting for British interests, as the Government have done in a pragmatic, cohesive and professional way since May, Britain would now have a level playing field. There is no huge conspiracy, no pulling one little thread out from one element of the treaty and exploding it into some massive conspiracy, which is what Conservative Members have done time and again.

I appreciate your exhortation, Mr. Martin, so I shall finish on this point. Conservative Members maintain that harmonisation of imperfect and unfair tax is the co-ordination of every element of the fiscal code for Britain and every other country into some super-European structure, but that is wrong. The same applies to social and employment legislation. Conservative Members were wrong then and they are wrong now. They can whistle in the wind—I think that that was a phrase used this morning—until the cows come home, as long as they are doing it in opposition. British interests will then prevail in the European dimension, and the irrelevance of Conservative Members and their views will be all the more profound.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): It is always best to quit when one is ahead.

We have had a good debate, beginning with the pitch of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who set out clearly his views on the matters before us. We have also had many interesting speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House, many of them made with passion.

I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not reply individually to hon. Members. I felt that I had to yesterday and I rather felt that I had offended an important section of my friends in the Smoking Room. I have no wish to make matters worse this evening, so I shall try to be more precise.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) asked whether the Government would consult their social partners on the question of appointments to the Employment Committee. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not press his new clause, but if he does I shall have to resist it. The Government have a deliberate policy of extensively engaging our social partners on many occasions. I have already met the principal representatives of the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the Trades Union Congress, the regional organisations of those bodies and representatives of a number of other business sections.

The committee that is envisaged is a committee of international civil servants. It will look at the way in which legislation is to be processed. That is in no way a substitute for a proper committee of people who are involved in industry and commerce who know what is happening on the ground. The Economic and Social Committee is the proper body for that. To some extent, the Committee of the Regions also fulfils that role. We intend to continue to consult those bodies and others and to take into account their views on this committee. However, the appointments will be from civil servants.

With regard to new clause 27, we cannot come back to the full House on every occasion, but there is an agreement to be reached under the provisions that we are debating. This is an opportunity for the House to express a view in principle. There will be another opportunity on Third Reading. The Government are already committed to improving scrutiny of all European matters, including those. I hope that that reassures the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter).

There are three main questions before us. The first is what is the purpose of the social chapter. The second is whether there should be an employment clause in the treaty. The third, on which many hon. Members have focused, is whether there is a contradiction between having a social chapter and an employment clause, and being a competitive economy. I shall take those reasons in order.

First, I was proud to sign the social chapter when I went to the intergovernmental conference on 5 May and confirmed it in the treaty. It is right that, in the areas covered by the social chapter, British workers should have the same protection as workers in other European Union countries. I am happy to defend that concept in any

council and I would say to those who disagree that industrialists throughout the country realise that in the Europe that we operate in—we are part of Europe and part of the European Union—that is an essential feature of, in a sense, the contract.

8.30 pm

The second reason why I believe it is important to support the social chapter is that I want British social partners to have a say in the matters that will be discussed in any case by those who are involved in the social chapter discussions in the European Union institutions. The problem with the previous Government was that, by opting out, they gave away their authority to influence what was happening. The previous Government, by default, agreed to qualified majority voting in many areas as a result of the Maastricht treaty. They cannot complain now that the new Government in Britain were responsible for that because, patently, that was not the case.

Our social partners now have the opportunity to have their voice heard, to make known what they think is best dealt with in employment regulation at a European level and—very important—to make their views known on what they consider can be best achieved at a domestic level in national Parliaments. That is a very important advantage of our signing up to the social chapter.

The third reason why I believe it was right to sign the social chapter is that the British people, on any test of opinion, demonstrated in the general election on 1 May, by their choice of the parties that they voted for, that they wanted British workpeople to have that protection and wanted Britain to be involved in the discussions. I am pleased to confirm that the social chapter is a positive thing and that the Government welcome it.

I shall now discuss the employment clauses. I shall try to summarise to save time. There were references to employment in the treaty of Maastricht and previous treaties. The Amsterdam treaty gives appropriate prominence to the issue of employment. It says that the seeking of a high level of employment is a major purpose—a major function—of the European Union and the European Community. The treaty outlines how that should be achieved.

I say in all humility that the role of the new Government was not insignificant in getting that clause into the treaty. We succeeded in increasing the prominence, among the things that the European Community seeks, of the concept of employability—of European workpeople being better able to take on the challenges of tomorrow because they have better skills and a better education. That was achieved by the new British Government.

What is in the treaty in that regard may be summarised in four parts. First, the treaty says that all policy must be gauged against its employment implications. Who could disagree with that ambition? Secondly, it says that employment policies should be co-ordinated and that there should be a recognition of what can best be achieved at a European level and what is best achieved at a national level. Who could argue with that? Thirdly, it says that there should be an annual report, so that people, not Governments, throughout Europe know what is happening on the employment agenda, what has been agreed at a European level, what is being discussed, what is being agreed at a national level and when measures will come into effect.

One of the problems of the European Union on employment issues is that it is difficult to know what is happening at any of the stages of development. Industrialists and workpeople in this country often do not know what is happening about part-time workers, about working time or about consultation. They become confused because of the lack of focus or clarity. The employment clause forces all of us who are involved in these issues to be precise, to be communicative and to let people know what is happening. That is another important thing. Who could disagree with it?

Spending programmes have been mentioned. Limited spending programmes arise out of the summit in Luxembourg, but the spending is from existing funds, so there are no other expenditure implications.

I believe that there is a strong case for supporting the employment clause.

Even if there is a strong case in social terms for the social chapter, and even if there is a strong case for having employment ambitions and for co-ordination, should we decide not to incorporate those provisions into our law because of the damage that they will do to the competitiveness of our economy? In my opinion, we would be wrong to reach that conclusion.

The competitiveness of our economy is a crucial issue. Apart from the security of our nation, it is perhaps the most crucial. In a country such as Britain, which trades more of its national product than any other comparable country, making our economy competitive so that it can generate wealth and take on export markets is a central motive of any economic policy, but I believe that getting competitiveness right is not about knocking down wages or the standard of workers. It is about motivating workers, about raising their educational standards and about raising the skills of workpeople so that they can take on the challenge of tomorrow.

Workpeople in industry know how to secure the future of their job. They know that it is important to have new designs, new products and new ideas. They know about the importance of marketing. They know that it is important to manufacture products in a way that means that they can be sold at a competitive price, to be productive and to be flexible in the organisation of work at the workplace. All those things are crucial, so the Government have strongly emphasised the need for flexibility at the workplace to help in the running of our economy.

Flexibility is sometimes wrongly interpreted as meaning knocking down the levels of workers. If we try to improve the competitiveness of our economy only by knocking down the rates of pay and the conditions of workers, we shall patently fail because we will not be able to meet the challenge of tomorrow. Every company in the country that is an enterprising unit, whether it be large or small, knows that that is the case. To achieve competitiveness, one must motivate, and to do that one must treat workers reasonably. Part of that treatment is to give them the measure of support that they can get from the social chapter.

However, the social chapter is not only about what can be agreed at a European level; it is also about recognising that some things are better dealt with at a nation state level. When the Government judge that that is the case, and especially when that is reinforced by what our social partners tell us, we are determined to make it the case that

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

those matters are determined at a national level. That important section of the treaty of Amsterdam is to be commended to the House and to the British people.

I reject the proposed amendments.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I shall be brief in responding to the debate. I agree, of course, with the Minister that it has been a good debate. Unfortunately, none of the essential arguments advanced by Opposition Members throughout the debate has received a vestige of an answer from the Government. None of the facts that we have cited has been challenged; none of the evidence has been impugned.

Given the economic performance of the United Kingdom over the past few years when compared with the performance of our partners in Europe, who have been subjected to the burdens that are contained in the social chapter and are similar to those that can be provided by the social chapter in future, there is no doubt that our performance has been superior.

The Government have failed entirely to answer our cardinal point that there is no need for the additional protections and provisions contained in the social chapter. Even if they decided none the less that they wished to make provision for such matters—we know and have acknowledged throughout that there are differences of view between the Government and the Opposition on these issues—there is no need to do so through the European social chapter.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who is no longer in his place, sought to cast doubt on the Opposition's argument because he claimed that on the whole we do not favour legislation to provide additional social protection. That is true, but I have news for the hon. Gentleman, which is that the Labour party has a large majority in the House of Commons and, therefore, does not need our support for such provisions. If the Government wanted to introduce such provisions nationally, it would be the easiest thing in the world for them to do. There is no justification for subjecting the United Kingdom to measures that could be imposed on us, given that qualified majority voting applies to so many aspects of the social chapter against our will.

We know that proposals to which the Government are opposed have been brought forward under QMV. It is nonsensical for the Minister to say, as he did a few moments ago, that where there are matters that can best be decided on a national basis, we shall ensure that they are so decided.

By signing up to the social chapter, the Minister has deprived himself of the right to advance that argument. It can no longer be said. We can be outvoted on matters that even the present Government think would not be appropriate for the United Kingdom.

Nor did the Minister seek to deny that the employment debate guidelines that will be provided under the employment chapter will be mandatory in terms of the influence that they have on our employment policy, which could be subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. That would enable the court to direct certain employment policies to be pursued by the United Kingdom even if the Government were convinced that they would be entirely against our interests. There has been no denial by the Minister about that. The only vestige of an argument that we have heard from the Government is that we should be in there, as it were, because otherwise we shall not be able to influence things.

I must caution the Government about that argument. There are so many organisations and ventures that we could join to obtain some influence, but in some instances there would be the most disagreeable consequences. The argument may be relevant, but it can never be decisive. It is an argument which should be treated with great caution.

Some extraordinary speeches have been made by Labour Members. For example, the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound)—he told us at some length that he had to dine elsewhere and so is no longer in his place—said that we need not worry about anything under the social chapter because there was a new attitude on the part of other countries in Europe. I am not entirely certain which of the examples referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) the hon. Gentleman had in mind. Perhaps he was thinking of the new desire on the part of the French and Italian Governments to introduce a 35-hour working week as demonstrating the new attitude to flexibility in Europe.

The hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) argued that it is important for us to join the social chapter so as to obtain new flexibility in our approach to employment. He was not entirely clear. I thought that he would keep secret to the end of his speech precisely what he meant by flexibility arising from the social chapter. It became clear in the end that the hon. Gentleman meant that new measures were proposed for part-time workers.

There may be arguments in favour of introducing new measures for part-time workers, but to describe that approach as introducing a new flexibility into working conditions in the workplace is to deprive language of all meaning.

I think that it was the hon. Members for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) and for North Durham (Mr. Radice) who said that if we examine the language of the social chapter, everything will be fine. Unfortunately, neither of them was present for the most illuminating speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), who told us exactly how flexibility was viewed by the Commission. He told us that Commissioner Flynn spoke of positive flexibility—an entirely new dimension to the phrase.

It is significant that every Conservative Member who has spoken has emphasised the importance that we attach to employment and jobs. We can always legislate to improve working conditions and to make social provision at the workplace more attractive, but when we do that we find that there are fewer and fewer people at work who are entitled to those benefits.

We believe passionately that a job is the best escape route from poverty, that work is the prize for which we should strive and that reducing unemployment should have a proper place in our policy prescriptions. We believe that signing up to the social chapter will do enormous damage to all those objectives. That is why we shall press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 126, Noes 332.

Division No. 104] **[8.45 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Cran and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Elman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*

Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sloate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

9 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I beg to move amendment No. 66, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 13)'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 67, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 32)'.

No. 68, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 33)'.

No. 69, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 26)'.

No. 70, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 45)'.

No. 71, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 52)'.

No. 72, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 53)'.

No. 73, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 54)'.

No. 74, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 6)'.

No. 75, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 31)'.

No. 76, in page 1, line 13, after '2', insert '(except paragraph 55)'.

No. 7, in page 1, line 13, at end insert '(except Article 2 paragraph 44)'.

No. 61, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'except Article 2(16)'.

No. 25, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 6)'.

No. 30, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 12)'.

No. 31, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 13)'.

No. 32, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 14)'.

No. 35, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 21)'.

No. 37, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 23)'.

No. 38, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 24)'.

No. 40, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 26)'.

No. 41, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 27)'.

No. 42, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 28)'.

No. 43, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 29)'.

No. 45, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 31)'.

No. 46, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 32)'.

No. 47, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 33)'.

No. 48, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 34)'.

No. 49, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 35)'.

No. 50, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 36)'.

No. 57, in page 1, line 13, at end insert 'other than in Article 2, paragraph 44)'.

Mr. Streeter: This group of amendments deals with two specific issues: the extension of qualified majority voting agreed at Amsterdam, and the extension of the power of the European Parliament, particularly its co-decision powers. On both issues, the Amsterdam treaty amounts to a significant transfer of influence from this Parliament to the institutions of the European Union. On both issues, new Labour failed at Amsterdam. A Government without values and principles have returned to the House of Commons with a treaty that has failed the people of Britain and failed the people of Europe.

It is not part of my argument to maintain that the 15 extensions of qualified majority voting—20, if we include the social chapter—contained in the Amsterdam treaty, and the 23 additional areas in which the European Parliament has been given a veto, constitute in themselves the end of the United Kingdom as a sovereign nation state. Clearly they do not, and we do not pretend that they do. It is my strong and passionate conviction that the concessions that our negotiators gave away at Amsterdam were wholly unnecessary. They represent a significant reduction in the influence of this Parliament and of the British Government, and an increase in the influence of the EU institutions, so there is a transfer of power from the House to Brussels. Those concessions have been given away with nothing in return for the British people.

Mr. Radice: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman admits that the treaty of Amsterdam does not amount to a threat to the nation state. I listened carefully to the shadow Foreign Secretary, who said on a number of occasions that, if we signed up at Amsterdam, it would be a grave threat to the nation state. How can the hon. Gentleman square his position with what his right hon. and learned Friend said before the election?

Mr. Streeter: I can do so very easily. The hon. Gentleman misquotes me. I said that the extension of qualified majority voting and the extra powers given to the European Parliament—not the Amsterdam treaty as a whole—do not, of themselves, undermine the nation state. Many months ago, my right hon. and learned Friend made it clear that, had it been passed, the original agenda for the Amsterdam summit would have brought an end to the nation state. He did not make those comments about the consequences of the summit. Nor has the hon. Gentleman heard him say that in any of the debates, at all of which I have been present.

Mr. Gapes: If the original remarks were about the agenda, is that why the Conservative party is no longer pressing for a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty? Does it now recognise that it is a modest treaty which brings about no significant or serious change?

Mr. Streeter: Having heard the hon. Gentleman's contributions over the past three days of the debate, I believe that he would sign up to anything that comes out of Brussels. Provided that it has the word "European" in it, he is happy—never mind the consequences, or the heart or content of the policy. If it is European, he loves it; that is all he has to say.

Before Labour's negotiators even landed in Amsterdam, they revealed their hand to our partners. Before they even arrived at the Council meeting, our partners were licking their lips at the great new Labour giveaway. Before the Minister jogged even halfway through the tunnel, leaving his Union Jack shorts behind, the team awaiting him at Brussels were rubbing their hands—

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Come on. Keep a straight face.

Mr. Streeter: How can I keep a straight face? I am telling a joke.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is illustrated by the fact that, when in opposition, Labour announced the concessions that it would give before it entered the negotiations. No wonder it got such a rotten deal.

Mr. Streeter: That is absolutely right. My hon. Friend eloquently makes the point that I am seeking to make. Before they even left this country to go to the summit, the Government told the world media all the things that they were to give up. What a way to negotiate. No wonder they got such a bad deal.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): The hon. Gentleman's thesis appears to be that the agenda for the Amsterdam treaty talks would have led to the death of the nation state. The negotiators came back with nothing as serious as that, yet, somehow, he is not giving the Government credit for coming back with something better. I do not follow that argument.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman does not follow the argument because he is incorrect in his assessment. The original Amsterdam summit agenda from some of our European partners and from the Commission was the issue that we were discussing, not this country's

[Mr. Streeter]

negotiating position. This country's negotiating position was seriously undermined as a result of the implications of 1 May.

Our partners were licking their lips at the great new Labour giveaway. They knew that this Government had a clear agenda: to give away Britain's competitive advantage under the social protocol, Britain's veto and Britain's position of negotiating strength, established over many years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) has said, new Labour had already said that it was going to give all that away, so the other member states did not have to offer a single concession in return. Given that sorry performance, I am surprised only that the Government bothered to translate the treaty into English.

One thing is clear: new Labour does not know how to negotiate. Its negotiators did not achieve the best deal on offer. It let itself, the House and Britain down. What a contrast with our approach.

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The hon. Gentleman suggests that the Labour Government caved in on QMV, but, in certain areas, we view QMV as positive, and we positively campaigned on it. How can he say that we positively campaigned for QMV, and then, when we achieved what was our negotiating objective, say that we caved in? That is illogical.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Yet again, the Labour party does not know how to stand up for British interests. It does not understand how the European Union works.

Mr. Doug Henderson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the previous Government wanted to include in the Amsterdam treaty provisions to counter fraud? Does he also accept that, because the previous Government were so isolated from the negotiations and would not talk to the others, and the others would not talk to them, they were unable to make any progress to counter fraud? If one is to have an effective provision to tackle fraud, it has to be by qualified majority voting or the country that has been accused of mismanagement of funds will veto it. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that is a positive example of where it has been necessary to have QMV? Because the Conservative Government were so isolated from the negotiating proceedings, they could achieve nothing. A good deal was achieved by the Labour Government, in addition to many other things.

Mr. Streeter: I say it again: the Minister does not understand how Europe works. One of the fundamental reasons for retaining the veto is to enable better negotiations to take place. It is often the veto which will bring people to the negotiating table. The fact that our proposals on fraud did not attract full support one month, two months or three months away from the summit does not mean that they would not have been agreed at the weekend of the summit itself. The Minister knows, or should know, that things are often agreed at the very last minute at European summits. It is the countries that preserve their veto and are prepared to use it which can bring others to the negotiating table. The Minister is the one who has signed away so many of our rights with nothing in return.

Mr. Cash: It seems that the Minister completely misunderstands the problems that can arise when it comes to countering fraud and that he misunderstands the role of the Court of Auditors. In practice, it is precisely because so many of the other member states have not been interested in dealing with fraud—and, as far as one can judge, are still not—that qualified majority voting will not work in our favour. There need to be serious changes, including changes to the procedures of the Court of Auditors, so that each member state has proper arrangements for dealing with fraud at a national level. Those arrangements should be in line with the arrangements that we have, which include the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee. That would be the way to get all member states to adopt proper anti-fraud measures.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. As usual, he makes a telling and important point which has great substance.

The Minister will say that we agreed to QMV in the Single European Act. Of course we did, and we got the single market in return, which has brought greater benefits to Britain than to any other European country. We accepted QMV in limited areas for a specific purpose and got a real benefit in return. That simply did not happen at Amsterdam.

The Government may also say that we agreed new areas of QMV at Maastricht, and of course we did, but we got the vital opt-out from the social chapter and from economic and monetary union in return. I must add that it is the very opt-out from EMU which the Government are now exercising to the full, showing how important it was that we won it in the first place. No such victories were won at Amsterdam.

Mr. Radice: Is it not the case that, as the Library's research paper on the Bill states:

"Member States are required to take the same measures to combat fraud affecting the financial interests of the Community as they take regarding similar fraud affecting their own interests"?

Mr. Streeter: I am familiar with those words. I have to say that I have compared the way we do things in this country with the way things are done in some other European Union countries, especially the Mediterranean ones, and those words do not reassure me at all.

We made it clear in our manifesto that the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty established appropriate limits to the scope of application of QMV. When the Conservative Government agreed to extensions of QMV, we made sure that the people of Britain got a good deal in return. What this Government have done is to give yet more extensions of QMV at Amsterdam—wholly unnecessary extensions—and get nothing in return.

Let us remind ourselves of what the Foreign Secretary claimed to have achieved for the nation at Amsterdam in exchange for these concessions. On 12 November, he claimed two major gains in Britain's national interest. The first, he said, was the protection of our frontier controls, but my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign

Secretary demonstrated that the Dutch presidency had already accepted in March this year—two months before the general election—that we would never give up our border controls.

That first major achievement for Britain heralded by the Foreign Secretary was precisely that—a Major achievement, negotiated by the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). It was something which the previous Government had already achieved, as was widely acknowledged earlier in the year by the press.

The second achievement claimed by the Foreign Secretary was that attempts to incorporate the Western Europe Union as the defence arm of the European Union had been prevented. However, for the first time, the treaty—in article J.7—includes the words:

"The Union shall accordingly foster closer institutional relations with the WEU with a view to the possibility of the integration of the WEU into the Union, should the European Council so decide."

As many Conservative Members have already pointed out, that is not what the Foreign Secretary claimed in the debate on article 1. The paragraph gives the Commission all the legal scope that it needs to start the gradual process of integration—for which it is so famous and at which it is so skilled—of the WEU into the EU.

9.15 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is undoubtedly already thoroughly familiar with article J.7. If it is a matter of, as the language says,

"should the European Council so decide",

am I right in thinking that there would have to be a unanimous decision of the entire Council and that, so long as the United Kingdom retained the veto to which he referred, the measure could not be imposed on it?

Mr. Streeter: In theory, the hon. and learned Gentleman is correct, but my point is a different one. The wording of article J.7 would give the Commission the legal scope to start work on the integration process—to get its ducks in a row—by persuading, encouraging and cajoling member states to sign up for the agenda that it desired. For many years, that has been the Commission's tendency. Clause 1 would give it the scope to do precisely that.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) has missed the point that article J.7 is part of a progressive framing of a common defence policy.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Like Maastricht.

Mr. Blunt: Not like Maastricht; the word progressive was not in that treaty. The word "progressive" was conceded by the Government, for nothing in return.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and picks up the theme of this debate: so many concessions were given by the Minister, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary at Amsterdam, with nothing in return. My hon. Friend has mentioned one more concession.

The Foreign Secretary's claim rings hollow. Even he could find nothing else in the Amsterdam treaty that he could trumpet as compensation for the people of Britain for the many concessions that they have made. There was nothing for Britain's fishermen or farmers, nothing to help Britain's exporters and not a single step towards completion of the single market. All those concessions were made with nothing in return.

Mr. Casale: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for shedding some light on the general thrust of his argument. At the start of his speech, he seemed to suggest that he was against qualified majority voting in principle. He has now moved on to say that, in some areas, the national interest may be served by qualified majority voting, and that he would support it in those cases. I am confused now, however, about the argument that he seems to be making that changes to the EU's institutional arrangements have been agreed because we get some concession or trade-off in another area. The previous Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, agreed to so many changes to qualified majority voting so that we could have a single market. The changes were the means to that end.

Similarly, changes have been agreed in other areas to enable us to have the benefit—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot make a speech in an intervention.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening to my points. If he does not yet understand that Europe works precisely in the way that he has described, he has a lot to learn.

Equally important to our long-term interests is the Government's failure to play Britain's strongest card in institutional reform. They gave away our second Commissioner and got nothing in return. Before the Amsterdam summit, there was an unshakeable link between vote weighting and the number of Commissioners.

The Committee will be aware that we have 10 votes in the Council of Ministers for 56 million people in the United Kingdom. That is one vote for every 5.6 million people. Luxembourg had two votes for 400,000 people. That is one vote for every 200,000 people. Luxembourg is 28 times over-represented compared with the UK. There is a similar pattern in the distribution of the 626 Members of the European Parliament. The five big countries are under-represented compared with the smaller nations.

In the past, our under-representation has been reflected by our second Commissioner. It was understood that we would give up that second Commissioner only in exchange for significant changes in the balance of power on the Council of Ministers and a redistribution of Members of the European Parliament. Article 1 of the protocol on page 88 of the revised treaty makes it clear, however, that, at the Amsterdam summit, Britain agreed for the first time in a legally binding protocol, on which others may rely in the Court of Justice, to give up its second Commissioner. That was Britain's trump card and it has been surrendered without a struggle. Our second Commissioner was given away without any binding agreement on vote weighting.

Mr. Doug Henderson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a change in the number of Commissioners is subject to a reweighting of votes? We specifically achieved that in the negotiations.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman may not have read the wording of the treaty sufficiently carefully, as I shall explain.

[Mr. Streeter]

The lost British influence is not to be restored by voting arrangements in the Council of Ministers, which more closely reflects the balance of population—not a bit of it. The second British Commissioner has been given away in exchange for a vague proposal for a future arrangement either to reweight the votes or—wait for it—to incorporate the principle of dual majority into Council decision making.

Dual majority is of no use whatever to the British people. It gives us no more influence; not a single extra vote. It gives us only a recognition that the population of the states that vote for a proposal must be taken into account. That is hardly comforting in the face of the Franco-German alliance. Influence has been given away for nothing in return.

The Minister's response suggests that he did not know what he had signed. He thought that he had agreed to give away our Commissioner in exchange for a clear commitment on vote weighting. That is not so. It shows that the Minister has slipped up. We already know that the Government have failed to challenge the Spanish amendment on the opt-in on border controls, and now we seem to have discovered another blunder by our man in Brussels. He has failed us again.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does my hon. Friend agree—I hope that this point is helpful to the Minister—that we are debating amendments to a treaty which amends two treaties and certain Acts, yet we do not have a consolidated text? Clearly, Labour Members, who have not read the articles as well as my hon. Friend, are having difficulty in understanding what the issue is all about. Surely the Government should have provided a consolidated document which we could discuss.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I have listened to almost all Labour Members' speeches over the past three sittings, and it seems that many of them have not read the treaty carefully. Many of them seem to be blinded by any piece of paper that says that it comes from Brussels.

If the Minister thinks that I am wrong on whether dual majority is of interest and any significance to British people, I invite him to get to his feet now to tell us how dual majority helps us in a decision-making process.

Mr. Doug Henderson: I have been specific. There is no question of the United Kingdom Government agreeing to any change in the Commissioners until there is a reweighting of the votes.

Mr. Streeter: I am even more worried than I was a few moments ago. The Minister has not read his brief properly, he has not read the treaty properly and he has not read the protocol properly. He has made another blunder.

That is bad enough, but the situation is worse. Not only will we give away our second Commissioner by 2003, to gain nothing in return, but the Government seem to have agreed, in article 2 of protocol D, that when the EU is enlarged to more than 20 states, there can be fewer Commissioners than member states. That means that we could be without a Commissioner. What a negotiating triumph! That is why I say with such conviction that the new Labour Government failed at Amsterdam. They failed the House of Commons, they failed this country and they failed our people.

The Government did not stop failing there. They also gave away more power to the European Parliament. They gave more power to a Parliament that approaches legislation as though it were playing a game of poker—it deals itself extra cards every time. They gave more power to Labour MEPs such as David Martin, Vice-President of the European Parliament, who said:

"A socialist superstate is exactly what we do want to create."

They gave more power to MEPs who voted in September 1995 for the liberalisation of drug use, declaring that

"drug dependence is . . . not a crime which calls for punishment"

and that

"drug users should not be prosecuted"

unless actively involved in production, trafficking or dealing. They gave more power to Labour MEPs who voted in March 1996 to increase the number of fruits and vegetables included in common agricultural policy price support, even though the Labour party committed itself to the abolition of the CAP in 1994. They gave more power to Labour MEPs who, in April 1996, called for an increase in the rate of income tax, saying:

"It is in the interests of all of us to . . . challenge the idea of cutting taxes."

Dr. Ladyman: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Conservative party has given up all hope of having more MEPs after the next elections?

Mr. Streeter: Not at all. I am simply pointing out what Labour's MEPs, who represent the people of this country in the European Parliament, are like. The Minister is happy to give them more power, gaining nothing for the British people in return.

Mr. Radice: What about those Conservative MEPs who support the treaty of Amsterdam?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman should know that in our party we do not try to gag duly elected Members of Parliament, as the Labour party has disgracefully tried to do. They cannot even discuss issues that are relevant to their constituents. Labour should reconsider that.

I have an internal briefing note produced by the European Commission, dated 7 July 1997. This 12-page summary of the outcome of the Amsterdam summit for each Commissioner contains some interesting comments. Writing to itself, on page 9, paragraph 14, the Commission says, on the European Parliament:

"The European Parliament made two major gains at the Conference to become a genuine co-legislator and a full arm of the European legislature alongside the Council:

Firstly the co-decision procedure has been considerably extended (see Annex p.1) essentially along the lines of the principle suggested by the Commission in its report of July 1996, whereby any instrument of a legislative nature should be adopted under the co-decision procedure between the European Parliament and the Council."

Despite its public pronouncements, the Commission's private assessment of Amsterdam is that the European Parliament made major gains.

Let us consider what co-decision means. It is nothing short of Euro-speak for a parliamentary veto. The European Parliament has a veto over decisions of the Council of Ministers. Labour has handed over extensions of that veto in 23 new areas.

Dr. Ladyman: From my recollection of the Conservative party manifesto at the election, I believe that the Conservative party was in favour of increasing the powers of the European Parliament. It said that that was one of the aspects that needed reform. Is the hon. Gentleman now saying that that has changed and that the Conservative party is completely against the European Parliament?

9.30 pm

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman has obviously failed to read the treaty, and one can forgive him for that, but one cannot forgive him for failing to read the Conservative manifesto.

The power exercised in the legislative process in the EU is a delicate balance between national Parliaments, national Governments, the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. If the Government have agreed extensions of power to the European Parliament, which the Commission says they have, will the Minister tell us—I am happy to allow him to intervene—from whom the additional power has been taken? Has it been taken from the Commission? Not a chance. It has been taken from national governments and national parliaments, all for nothing in return.

Our objections to the failure of the Government do not relate only to the new areas in which co-decision is now to be used; they relate also to the complete failure to deal with problems in the day-to-day operation of the parliamentary procedures in Brussels. What efforts were made to counter the European Parliament's growing tendency to pack First Reading with spurious amendments to give itself areas in which it can force compromise during later conciliation; or is the Minister happy to see more than 600 amendments tabled, as during the progress of the trans-European network transport scheme; or is it the case that in Brussels, as in the United Kingdom, the Government simply do not understand the system that they are trying to reform?

Taken together with the increase in powers of the European Parliament and the extra powers that new Labour has given the President of the Commission, which we will discuss later, I hope that I have demonstrated to the Committee's satisfaction that the treaty represents a complete failure by new Labour. The Government have given up British influence with no extra influence in return. It is no wonder that, on page 2 of the private Commission assessment of the Amsterdam treaty, the Commission states:

"For the most part the Treaty delivered the goods."

For whom? Perhaps the treaty delivered the goods for the European Parliament and the Commission, but it sadly did not deliver the goods for the British people.

The amendments demonstrate our determination to expose Labour's negotiating failures at Amsterdam. Let the Minister respond to this charge: why did he agree to so many concessions for so little in return? Let the Minister tell us in clear and detailed terms what benefits for Britain he brought back from Amsterdam in exchange for all the concessions.

Mr. Radice: One of the problems with the Conservative approach to European matters is the hyperbole of the language used. Nowhere has that been more true than in what Conservative Members have said about the Amsterdam treaty. Before the election, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who was then Home Secretary, said that the agenda for the Amsterdam negotiations would undermine the nation state. Treaties are based on agendas, so the right hon. and learned Gentleman was implying that signing up to the treaty would undermine the nation state. Clearly it would not, and even the right hon. and learned Gentleman has had to row back from that ridiculously exposed position, which he hoped would win the general election for the Conservatives.

I admire and like the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) and he spoke attractively today. However, he also used hyperbole. The Conservative party will not recover its health unless it sees the world as it really is, but Conservative Members go in for gross exaggeration on any European issue. On a whole series of previous amendments, they said that the social chapter would lead to the undermining of our competitive position, but one has only to read the chapter to see clearly that it is fairly innocuous.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: No, I do not want to tempt myself down that path. I must return to the subject of the amendments.

The Conservative party has grossly overestimated the impact of Amsterdam. As the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) said, it is very modest: a mouse of a treaty. It is so modest that I am surprised that he voted against it; perhaps it was a tactical decision, which may have been sensible from the point of view of his position in his party.

The treaty does not undermine the nation state. There was some limited extension of qualified majority voting—

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: No, I want to finish what I am saying.

There was a limited extension of qualified majority voting which was matched by a limited increase in the co-decision powers of the European Parliament. Those go together, because the best way to deal with the problem of accountability that arises with qualified majority voting is through the European Parliament.

I do not see anything particularly wrong with qualified majority voting in many areas, because I do not believe that Britain will always be in a minority of one on every issue. The problem with the Conservative party is that its assumption is that we shall never have any friends in the European Union, and that those awful continentals are so terrible and look at everything in such a totally different way from us that we shall never be able to form alliances with them.

That was a gross exaggeration even under the Conservative Government, who did occasionally find some people who would vote with them; but the new Labour Government has several obvious partners and is acting with them for the good of Europe. That is the sensible way in

[Mr. Radice]

which to proceed. Of course there are some key areas in which we should retain the national veto; any Government would do that for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Bercow: Oh!

Mr. Radice: I said "for the foreseeable future"—I thought that the Conservative party was rather enthusiastic about that formula.

The key areas include taxation, own resources, foreign policy, defence and immigration. It may be that in my son, daughter's, grandson's or granddaughter's time, there will be some change in one of those areas—I cannot foresee the future—but as things stand, that is how we conduct things.

If one wants to tackle fraud, it is sensible not to give individual nations vetoes with which they can stop Europe as a whole doing something about it. If fraud is so important—the Conservative party clearly believes that it is, and so do we—that is an obvious area for qualified majority voting.

Similar arguments are relevant for research spending and for greater openness in the European Community. Most people would like greater openness, so we do not want one country blocking procedures to develop it. That is a sensible argument, and I do not understand why the Conservatives make such a song and dance about it. The Conservative party is so ideological that it cannot see things as they are.

Mr. Swayne: Regardless of whether it is ideological or understandable, will the hon. Gentleman accept that when the previous Prime Minister said during the general election campaign that the then Leader of the Opposition would give up the British veto in six areas the right hon. Gentleman denied it—and then gave it up in 16 areas?

Mr. Radice: That does not really fall together with the charge that we made concessions before we actually started to negotiate. We set out our negotiating objectives because we believe that it is a good thing to work together in some areas, even if the Conservative party thinks that it is a bad idea to work together with any continentals on any issue. We happened to think that there were sensible objectives.

Mr. Brady: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is confusing working together from choice with—as can happen with QMV—being compelled to do something against one's wishes.

Mr. Radice: It is true that it is possible that fraud might be committed in our country and we might say that we would like to resist QMV. I believe that it would be a sensible thing for the good of Europe for the articles about fraud to apply on a qualified majority vote. I do not hold the view that any qualified majority voting is, per se, a bad thing.

In the days of the Maastricht treaty, Conservative Members expressed some concern about QMV. In the days of the Single European Act, the former Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher, occasionally said the kind of things that we have heard from Conservative Members tonight. She was a practical person, however, and she realised that if one wanted to create a single market one had to have QMV because she did not want a situation in which a country could block progress in areas vital to this country. Qualified majority voting has probably benefited this country far more than any other country on the single market issue.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Radice: I give way to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who is a veteran of such debates.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman may care to bear in mind something that has not been mentioned so far in the debate: QMV in relation to public health, particularly in relation to the BSE crisis on which we had a statement today. Does he really believe that it would be in the interests of the United Kingdom to have QMV, as expressed in an article that appeared a couple of months ago in the *Health Service Journal*, which quite clearly suggests that there would be serious implications if one extended QMV to BSE? We would then never be able to get out of the current crisis.

Mr. Radice: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is using hyperbole. The problem about the hon. Gentleman, whose speeches I have listened to with great attention over many years, is that he invariably exaggerates the position. Even when he has a good case, he lets it down because he always make the situation sound so terrible. It is not. Normally, QMV is a practical way in which to proceed. Practical politicians from European countries get together and say what is in their best interests; often, QMV is the best way in which to proceed.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): My hon. Friend is an expert in such matters. Can he tell me how many times the previous Government agreed to QMV? Am I right in believing that they did so on 42 occasions?

Mr. Radice: Yes, but that was when they were in government. It is much easier in opposition to act as a fine, principled Opposition and be against any extension of QMV.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Radice: I know what the hon. Gentleman is about to ask: whether I am in favour of this—yes or no?

Mr. Bercow: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. I am listening to his contribution with rapt attention. Does he accept that a continuous extension of QMV will ultimately break the umbilical cord which links the Government and the governed?

Mr. Radice: No, provided one retains exemptions that are key issues in the operation of the nation state. In other areas, such as fraud, QMV is plain common sense. That is what Amsterdam is about. I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to exaggerate and, as I have listened to him today, he has tended to do so. If he wants to use hyperbole,

he will say such things about QMV. He has already spoken about the ratchet effect; in my view, we are not witnessing such an effect, but the sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Radice: No, I want to get on.

It is certainly true that it would be impossible to develop the single market without the development of QMV. I know that Conservative Members would like to deny the facts of geography, history and culture which prove that we are a European country. We are in the European Union and we can act together with our partners on a range of issues. In some areas we will want QMV, but not on the crucial issues.

If one has QMV and one is interested in accountability, that cannot be achieved only through the national Parliament. I am pleased to see that some reforms have been introduced—they were not mentioned by the hon. Member for South-West Devon—which will help this Parliament to scrutinise European legislation. For example, there will be legally binding minimum periods for the scrutiny of European Union documents. That is useful, and I am surprised that the hon. Member for South–West Devon did not congratulate the Government on signing up to that. Co-decision is sensible, because if we are to have qualified majority voting, and if we are interested in accountability, we have to enhance the position and strength of the European Parliament. I am not frightened of the European Parliament, but the hon. Member for South–West Devon appears to be.

9.45 pm

Mr. Brady: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the accountability that we derive through the European Parliament will be enhanced or lessened by the Government's proposals to change the system of election to the European Parliament, which will mean that his constituents and mine will not know for whom they are voting in the European elections?

Mr. Radice: I am in favour of proportional representation both in a general sense and in respect of the European Parliament, where it is sensible for the Parliament to reflect the votes cast. The swings between the parties resulting from small changes in votes under a first-past-the-post system—

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): Order.

Mr. Radice: I was answering a question.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I am well aware that the hon. Gentleman was answering a question, but I would be grateful if he would now get back to the amendment in hand.

Mr. Radice: I am grateful, Mr. Lord. I think that I answered the hon. Gentleman's question to my own satisfaction, if not to his.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to take up the question asked by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) after what we have just heard from the Chair.

Mr. Bercow: If the hon. Gentleman does not accept that there is currently a ratchet effect working in favour of increased powers for the European Parliament, will he kindly explain to the Committee when there has ever been a repatriation of powers from the European Parliament to the House of Commons? If he cannot demonstrate that there has ever been such repatriation, it follows that there is a ratchet effect working.

Mr. Radice: I thought that it was going to be one of those ratchet-effect arguments—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I am not concerned about that, because we are increasingly working together as European nations on a whole range of issues. I rejoice in that fact, just as I rejoice in the fact that we do not have war. Such co-operation is a way to bind us together. The establishment of the single market means there are other areas in which we want to combine and co-operate, and that is precisely what is happening. If that is to be done at the level of the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament requires increased powers. That is precisely what we have got and I rejoice in that.

If I may correct the hon. Member for South-West Devon on one point, the European Parliament's powers have been increased vis-à-vis the Commission and especially vis-à-vis the President. For the first time, the Parliament will have the power to veto the nomination of the President, and I am in favour of that, although I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not. He was therefore incorrect to say that there had been no change in the relationship between the Parliament and the Commission.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Gentleman refers to provisions in the treaty that would give the European Parliament a right of veto over the appointment of the President of the Commission. That is to transfer powers away from the Council of Ministers and therefore from national Governments. It in no way answers the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) about transferring powers away from the Commission.

Mr. Radice: No, but it is giving powers to the Parliament vis-à-vis the Commission. That was an important change. It is a useful increased power for the Parliament.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: In considering the ratchet, or the lack of it, has the hon. Gentleman given any thought to the protocol on subsidiarity with regard to the Amsterdam treaty, which alters the onus of proof in relation to whether these matters should be dealt with at Community level or otherwise?

Mr. Radice: The idea of the founding fathers that the European Union would end up as a federal state or a federal super-state has now been undermined, and it was undermined at Maastricht by the subsidiarity clause which ensured that those areas where the nation state would be important should be given priority. One of the problems was that other European countries—I know that the hon. and learned Gentleman agrees with me here—also saw that as giving more power to the regions and local communities. The Liberal Democrats obviously did not, so their idea of subsidiarity was a partial one.

This is a modest treaty and a modest extension of qualified majority voting. Any British citizen, not blinkered in the way that Conservative Members

[Mr. Radice]

are, would support this perfectly sensible measure. They would also support the corresponding increase in the co-decision powers to the European Parliament. One follows from the other.

I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on what they have done in this area. They have behaved in a sensible and pragmatic way. They looked at matters as they are and they had objectives. They did not give away the nation state. Such talk is for the birds. Rather, they promoted Britain's interests, in some cases by retaining the national veto and in others by co-operating and accepting qualified majority voting with our European partners.

Mr. Collins: This group of amendments goes to the heart of the bungled negotiating tactics and the missed opportunities which the treaty represents. As we have heard so much about the allegation that it is not possible to criticise the treaty without being anti-European, let me make what I hope the Committee will regard as an unambiguously pro-European case for the amendments.

Like the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), I was born a European and I will die a European. That is a fact of having been born in these islands. It is inevitable historically, culturally and geographically. Like the hon. Gentleman, I salute the fact that in the EU we have an institution which has brought together countries which, for centuries, have fought against each other, which has helped to create a single market which is open to British goods, and to which it is fundamentally in the national interest to belong.

However, that does not answer any of the issues before us today. Those issues concern the nature of the Europe to which we belong, not whether we belong to Europe. The difficulties with the extensions of qualified majority voting which the treaty and the Bill provide are twofold because they help to undermine precisely some of the merits and advantages that have led the Conservative party, clearly and consistently, to be in favour of British membership of the European Community.

In parentheses, since Labour Members always accuse us of 18 years of missed opportunities in Europe, it is worth noting that 14 years ago—within that time frame—the Labour party was advocating our entire withdrawal from Europe.

The key point about qualified majority voting is that it changes the nature of the organisation and government of the European Union. I fear that, in so doing, it challenges and starts to undermine the essential element of popular legitimacy that is required for any national or international organisation to operate.

Specifically, among existing member states the present treaty provisions will remove, over ever-expanding areas of policy, decision making from the national Parliament and the national Government with which all European citizens can most naturally identify, and will—fatally—start to undermine the feeling that even European institutions are organised on a proper democratic basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) drew attention to the fact that a great opportunity had been missed for an exchange, if any concessions were to be made at all, at least for a better deal on qualified majority voting. The extensions in the treaty will mean that in even more areas it will be possible for Governments representing the majority of the people of Europe to be outvoted by countries and Governments representing a minority of the peoples of Europe.

The hon. Member for North Durham thought that to oppose qualified majority voting one had to believe that it was possible for the United Kingdom to be frequently on its own. That is not how qualified majority voting works. Qualified majority voting means that even if we have a number of allies we can still be outvoted and have measures imposed on us against our consent and that of others. As the Union expands, the number of allies needed will grow and the chances of our being outvoted, even with a number of allies, will grow. We missed an opportunity to alter the way—

Dr. Ladyman: The hon. Gentleman is developing an interesting theme. He says that one day it may be possible for a minority to take decisions that the majority in Europe do not agree with. Is that not the basis on which, for the past 18 years, the Conservatives ran this country?

Mr. Collins: It happens to be the basis on which the Labour party currently runs the country, as it only secured 42 per cent. of the vote, so I hardly think that that argument advances things for the hon. Gentleman.

An opportunity was missed to start to restructure the government of the European Union in ways that would bring its decision making closer to the people. One missed opportunity was the opportunity to restructure the operation of qualified majority voting. Another opportunity, which would have addressed the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and sidestepped by the hon. Member for North Durham, was the missed opportunity to tackle the ratchet effect by demonstrating that the protocol on subsidiarity, of which we have heard much, has some practical effect. If it has, let us see a few directives, and a few competences, repatriated or reversed.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): In developing this argument about democratic legitimacy, which I believe that he does appropriately, will my hon. Friend agree that the effect is multiplied by the increasing remoteness of the exercise of power and incomprehension on the part of the electorate? The point about the exercise that we are going through, which the treaty exacerbates, is that the vast majority of the electorate throughout Europe do not understand how those processes work because the thing is so deliberately esoteric, so that democratic legitimacy is not delivered on that basis as well as on the basis that my hon. Friend is explaining to the House.

Mr. Collins: I agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful for the points that he makes.

The greatest achievement and the greatest purpose of the European Union may be to entrench democracy and to spread an area of peace across Europe. For that reason, the top priority for those negotiating on behalf of our country at Amsterdam should have been to make the Union flexible enough for rapid expansion. The argument that is usually advanced by the Labour party and other advocates of qualified majority voting is that more

QMV makes it easier to expand the European Union. I want to argue that in many respects that is contrary to the truth.

Most of the aspirant nations of central and eastern Europe which wish to join the European Union are members of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, all of whose decisions are taken on a unanimity basis. Most of them are likely to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation at the same time as, if not before, they join the European Union, although NATO's decisions are taken on a unanimity basis. Most of those nations are most likely to be able to play a full and active part in the future destiny of the European Union if the European Union is not so inflexible and entrenched in its decision-making processes that it believes that every measure of legislation or directive or Community action must be imposed on every member in the same way at the same time.

The risk of expanding qualified majority voting in the way that is set out in the treaty and the Bill is that we entrench a model of the European Union that is centralised, uniform and inflexible. It will say to the countries of eastern Europe, "We are delighted that you pulled down the Berlin wall and expelled your communist dictatorships, but now we in western Europe will erect a new iron curtain to keep you out from your European home"—

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report progress and ask leave to sit again.*

To report progress and ask leave to sit again tomorrow.—(*Ms Bridget Prentice.*)

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

TOBACCO ADVERTISING

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6294/92 and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Health on 17th November 1997, on tobacco advertising; and supports the Government's efforts to bring into effect a ban on tobacco advertising.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Question agreed to.

STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Miss Ann Widdecombe be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Privileges and Mr. Martin Bell be added to the Committee.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Hellfire Pass (Memorial)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I am pleased to have secured a debate on a memorial for the far east prisoners of war. I am pleased also that my hon. Friend the Minister is here to respond to the debate.

The debate will serve as my maiden speech and it enables me to say that it is my great honour to represent and serve the people of my home borough of Great Yarmouth. I was born in Great Yarmouth and I went to school there. Before coming to this place, I spent all my working life there. I feel extremely privileged to have been elected its Member of Parliament.

It may seem strange to some that I have chosen the subject of a memorial to the far east prisoners of war for my maiden speech. I could, of course, have addressed many issues relating to my constituency; that being so, I shall briefly explain my choice. The subject was raised with me by one of my constituents whose father was a far east prisoner of war. I am sure that the issue is one which concerns other hon. Members and their constituents.

Since the war, we have seen a new relationship develop between Britain and Japan, but, while we look to the future, we must remember the past and all those who suffered on our behalf. The father of the constituent to whom I have referred was one of the many thousands of allied prisoners of war who were forced to construct the Thai-Burma railway line. She told me of the sadness that she felt over the lack of a fitting memorial to him and to other brave soldiers and civilians who died after being captured.

The most infamous section of the railway was that which was cut through a mountain at Konyu-Hintok, which became known as Hellfire pass. It is there that many veterans and relatives of the dead wish to see a memorial built.

Before I expand on the subject, I am sure that it will be understood that I wish to observe the convention of the House and introduce my constituency to right hon. and hon. Members and to pay tribute to my predecessor, and the former I can do ably. As I have said, Great Yarmouth is my home borough. I am sure that it is well known to other hon. Members as one of Britain's holiday resorts. What may be less well known is that it is also a centre for gas exploration, and second only to Aberdeen for activities within the oil industry.

There is also the port of Great Yarmouth, which we see as a gateway to northern Europe. This is a vision which is shared by the European Union, which sees the significance of the link between Ijmuiden in Holland and Great Yarmouth as an integral part of a trans-European route along the A47 from the midlands.

The port has always been integral to the town's success over its history. At the battle of Sluys in 1340, Yarmouth provided more ships than all the cinque ports put together, which ensured victory for Edward III. The king was so grateful that he halved his coat of arms of three lions and added their heads to the tails of Yarmouth's coat of three herrings.

The abundance of the herring was the source of our once vibrant fishing industry and has long been the symbol of the town. Unfortunately, the fishing industry

[Mr. Anthony D. Wright]

in the town has all but vanished, along with the herring. However, since 1966 we have been a strategic port for the North sea oil and gas industries, with their support industries providing employment for many people in the town. We also have thriving businesses in a wide range of sectors, from electronics to food production.

Despite these successes, unemployment in my constituency has remained at a higher than average level over the past 18 years. We welcome the Labour Government's commitment to improve our standard of living through better health care, greater investment in education and providing real opportunities in work and training for the long-term and young unemployed.

As a tourist destination, the borough of Great Yarmouth can offer something for everyone. We have the beauty of the Norfolk Broads in the north-west of the constituency, the secluded beaches of California and Scratby, and the family resorts of Great Yarmouth and Gorleston. This year, Great Yarmouth was named in the top five holiday resorts in the country, with 7 million bed-nights. Half the tourist expenditure in Norfolk is in Great Yarmouth.

I remember that when I was a youngster, holidaymakers would knock on our doors asking for a room for the night, because the hotels and boarding houses were all full up. Now, most of the thousands of visitors who come annually to the borough will stay in one of the many holiday centres that are located in the parishes of Caister and Hemsby to the north and Hopton to the south, where they will find all the facilities that one would expect in a modern tourist resort.

One of the centres in Hopton has recently won some prestigious awards. I was pleased to visit it a few weeks ago for the launch of a local Partners against Crime initiative. While I was making my speech to the audience of about 300 people, the modernisation of the holiday industry became obvious to me when I was heckled for the first time in my political career for referring to the centre as a holiday camp. However, I can assure hon. Members that we can offer a very good holiday, wherever they stay in my constituency.

The fact that the borough of Great Yarmouth is steeped in heritage is often overlooked. Yarmouth's unique system of town planning created the famous narrow rows, a few of which are still in existence. We can boast the second longest surviving stretch of mediaeval town wall, after York; the largest parish church in England; the remains of a Roman settlement at Burgh castle and Caister; and many other significant historic features.

Great Yarmouth has a rich and chequered history. Miles Corbet, a former Member of the House and resident of the town, was a personal friend and lawyer to Oliver Cromwell. He was the last signatory to the death warrant of Charles I. After the restoration, royal vengeance was demanded of Yarmouth for its republican stance, and all its charters and privileges were revoked. Later, in 1867, when political sleaze was rampant—unlike now—the constituency of Great Yarmouth was disfranchised after extensive bribery of the electorate was uncovered. It has not been recorded whether the money was paid in brown envelopes.

I assure hon. Members that no such persuasion was necessary for the people of Great Yarmouth to elect me. Great Yarmouth is a constituency of great diversity, with much in its tradition and past to be proud of, and much, I am sure, to look forward to in its future.

I turn now to my predecessor. Mr. Michael Carttiss was probably more of a thorn in the side of his own party than of the Labour party in the 13 years that he represented Great Yarmouth. On at least one occasion, he was suspended from the parliamentary Conservative group for voting against his own Government, most often on the subject of Europe, and he was a member of the gang of nine who were suspended for rebelling against Maastricht. I found that a bizarre stance by a Member whose constituency at that time was fighting—as it is now—to become a gateway to Europe. Nevertheless, Michael Carttiss is a man of great independence, outspoken honesty and strong character, factors which contributed in no small part to my election as his successor.

An advantage of making my maiden speech six months into this Parliament is that I can already see the benefits for my constituents that the Labour Government have brought. We have already had an extra £119,000 for breast cancer treatment for our local health authority; Norfolk education authority has been awarded £1.5 million towards the backlog of building and improvement work needed for the county's schools; and permission has been given for the building of a new power station in my constituency, which will bring £170 million of inward investment and create 300 construction jobs in an area which suffers from one of the highest unemployment rates in the eastern region.

The Government have given their blessing to a project to build a new outer harbour in the town, and I hope that the roads review will bring back the scheme to dual our stretch of the A47, known as the Acle Straight. That was accepted as a necessity by no fewer than 24 Conservative Ministers who held the roads portfolio during the 18 years of the previous Government, yet it was taken out of the programme last year in a cost-cutting exercise in order to fuel pre-election tax cuts. I am glad that this Government's roads policy will be based on sound economics, strategic planning and safety, and not sacrificed for such short-term political gains.

Although my focus while a Member of Parliament will be on fighting for my constituents, I have been fortunate to represent Parliament on a visit to Albania to oversee the recent elections there, and to New York, where a delegation from the House was introduced to the workings of the United Nations. I have also developed a sudden interest in finance as a result of being selected to serve on the Standing Committee on the Bank of England Bill. I am sure that my interests will continue to widen as my time here progresses.

I return to the subject of the debate. As I explained in my preamble, the matter of a memorial for the far east prisoners of war was brought to my attention by a constituent, Mrs. Carol Cooper, whose father, Lance Corporal William Smith—known as "Bill"—died while in captivity in Burma in 1943 when she was just four years old. During the two years he was imprisoned, he wrote an extensive diary in a book that he made himself, covered in fabric from his kit bag. In the diary, he not only recorded the daily events of his imprisonment but wrote many poems about his family and his experiences, recipes that he wished to cook when he returned home and the

home addresses of his fellow soldiers. Some of the names are marked with a cross. That was to signify which of his comrades had fallen on the journey from their original base at Changi in Singapore as they marched towards Burma.

Lance Corporal Smith's family remained unaware of the existence of this remarkable document until Mrs. Cooper read about the auction of a diary written by a soldier of the Royal Norfolk Regiment in a Japanese camp. When she realised that it was her father's diary, she tried in vain to buy it back from the person who had purchased it. It was only after the BBC became involved and made a documentary about the diary that Mrs. Cooper was able to acquire the diary for herself.

Subsequently, the BBC took Mrs. Cooper to Thailand to retrace her father's steps as recounted in his diary, taking the route of the Burma-Thai railway. The Imperial Japanese army built the railway from 1942 to 1943 from Ban Pong in Thailand to Thanbyuzayat in Burma, with the intention of supplying the large Japanese army that was stationed in Burma. The railway was 250 miles long and was built through some of the most inhospitable and disease-ridden terrain in the world. There was little mechanical construction and its completion was achieved mostly through human effort. The project resulted in a huge loss of life for both prisoners of war and the Asian forced labour used to construct it.

About 13,000 POWs and 80,000 Asian labourers died from disease, sickness, starvation and brutality. One commentator has written that the

"railway was built at the cost of a life for every sleeper."

That could certainly be true of the section of the railway that was hacked out of the jungle-covered mountain area at Konyu-Hintok where it is known that 700 prisoners of war died building just three miles of railway. A huge cutting was gouged through the mountainside in just 12 weeks. This is the infamous Hellfire pass, which got its name after someone looking down at the skeletal figures slaving at night by the light of bamboo fires remarked that it must be like working in the jaws of hell.

I should like to read an extract from the diary of Lance Corporal William Smith so that hon. Members can begin to understand the conditions in which these men tried to survive. The entry is dated Sunday, 22 August 1943. It reads:

"What a night and what a result. I hardly know how to write. It started last night actually. Reg, poor old chap complained of feeling cold and everything he had was more or less messed and wet because he couldn't control himself. He went into a coma and rambled about eleven. We covered him and made him as comfortable as it was possible. I kept up and kept the fire at the end of the tent going to help warm us and keep the mosquitos etc away. I didn't like the look of him when I went and looked at him about 2.30 so I called the orderlies. We done our very best all night for Reg but I'm sorry to say he passed away about ten past eight this morning. It was approx. ten minutes after the check so he had to lay all day in the tent with us until after the 4 o'clock check. Just a Jap method. I'm just back from carrying him to the cemetery and it's a sort of coincidence but when passing the isolation hospital there was a service on and the hymn 'Abide with me' was just being sung.

Reg had a very few personal things having sold his ring, pen, watch etc but I have his photos and a few letters which I asked permission to be allowed to keep so I may return them to his wife personally.

Another man also passed away out of our party after I got back about ten minutes ago so that makes eight in all we have lost in a fortnight and now it leaves 46."

What struck me when reading Bill Smith's diary was the incredible bravery shown by the prisoners of war. After one year and one month as a prisoner, Bill wrote:

"What a life this is but one mustn't grumble I suppose."

I cannot even begin to imagine the conditions those men lived in or the pain that they suffered. Although he begins the diary by counting the weeks and days he has been imprisoned, by the end Lance Corporal Smith is counting the number of his fellow soldiers and friends who had fallen.

Although we must not forget the allied troops and civilians who were imprisoned all over the area in Java, Sumatra, Singapore and Taiwan, Hellfire pass is favoured by many of the veterans and relatives of those imprisoned as a memorial site due to the particular hardship suffered by those who worked there.

The Australian and Thai Governments have co-operated on building a memorial complex at Hellfire pass, but there has been, as yet, no contribution from any British Government. That is despite the fact that more than double the number of British soldiers died there compared with our allies. Although the Government fund the upkeep of the cemeteries, and they are beautifully kept, there is no memorial to honour the sacrifice that those soldiers made for their country.

After the war, the British Government sold the railway to Thailand for £1.5 million. A memorial to the men who lost their lives building it would cost merely a fraction of that amount. Currently, visitors to the site are faced with a plaque that commemorates a great "feat of Japanese engineering", but does not mention the human cost of the project. The Royal British Legion is working to raise funds for a museum that will tell the true story of the far east prisoners of war from all over the area, and which will serve as a tribute to lost comrades and loved ones. It should be a place of meditation and reflection. It would also stand as a reminder of the terrible inhumanity inflicted on those prisoners of war, and ensure, by remembering their sacrifice, that such atrocities are never allowed to happen again.

The memory of these events will not disappear with the last of the veterans. The sons and daughters of the soldiers lost in the far east, like my constituent Mrs. Cooper, have begun their own organisation to ensure that the sacrifice of those men is never forgotten.

On Wednesday 27 October 1943, the day before his and his wife's birthday, Bill Smith wrote:

"Up to today there have been 573 deaths in this hospital camp. Well Ida dearest tomorrow is the one day of our lives and I only wish I could send you a little something but I'll make up for it later. It won't be long now."

Just over a month later, Lance Corporal Smith died. He was never able to make up for missing his wife's birthday, but we have a chance to make up to the relatives of men such as Bill Smith for the loss of their loved ones.

I ask that the Government give serious consideration to contributing funds for the building of a memorial museum to the British soldiers who died while imprisoned in the far east. A country can ask no more of its citizens than that they lay down their lives in its defence. Surely those men could expect that country to honour their sacrifice in a way that gives comfort to those loved ones they left behind. Such a memorial would demonstrate the gratitude that this country holds for the men who have fought to defend it.

[Mr. Anthony D. Wright]

I want to end with, once again, the words of Lance Corporal William Smith, from a poem written in his diary:

"There'll come a Bright Day
When Love and Peace will stay
They will not have died in vain
nor have suffered that great pain
For greater Love hath no man
Who died that his Brother might live."

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) on securing this debate and on his choice of subject for his maiden speech. We were pleased to hear his vivid description and interesting historical examples of his home town, which is also his constituency. I suspect that he will be representing its interests for many years to come.

The people in Great Yarmouth, like all of us, are rapidly approaching the millennium with considerable optimism and the cautious expectation that this country will enter the new century during a relatively stable period of world peace.

As my hon. Friend has reminded us, 50 years ago things were vastly different. The United Kingdom had withstood the onslaught of belligerent powers and, with her allies, won through to ultimate victory. But at what cost? Half a century on, it is perhaps too easy to forget the tremendous impact that the second world war had on all aspects of our society, and the suffering that had been endured by so many.

It is right, in these last years of the second millennium, to focus our attention on the veterans of both world wars, but it is equally important for us to remember those who were not so fortunate and who never returned home to their families after the victory. The moving poems and the extracts of the diary read by my hon. Friend brought that home starkly and graphically.

However, some suffered far more than others. One group in particular stands out as having suffered to an extraordinary degree during the second world war. I refer of course to those who were captured in the far east. Many prisoners of war were forced to work in appalling conditions, with inadequate food, medical supplies and shelter. As my hon. Friend has so eloquently reminded us, many died in what is now Thailand, building the Burma-Siam railway: the so-called death railway immortalised in the film "The Bridge on the River Kwai".

I must make it clear at the outset that the nation and the Government have the utmost respect for, and are grateful to, all those who fought and died in the far east during the second world war. Despite the passing of more than half a century, we are all still very much aware of the tremendous hardships endured by the 61,000 British, Australian, Dutch and American prisoners of war, and the Asian labour, who were forced by their captors to build the Burma-Siam railway using the most primitive tools in the most primitive conditions.

However much we may try to understand two generations later, no memorial can ever adequately reflect their suffering, or the debt that we owe those men, particularly the 13,000, including Lance Corporal Smith, who lost their lives so far away. I assure my hon. Friend that every effort is made to ensure that they are all properly commemorated. In recognition of their sacrifice, the Government will continue to honour their obligation to fund the United Kingdom's contribution to the commemorative work carried out by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I thank my hon. Friend for the kind references that he made to the excellent work undertaken by the commission in Thailand and around the world on behalf of our war dead.

As elsewhere throughout the world, the commission does sterling work in the Commonwealth, often in spite of less than perfect conditions, especially climatic conditions. A relevant case in point is their work to maintain more than 15,000 war graves in Thailand, as well as memorials to those who were missing or who died and have no known grave.

The graves of those who died during the construction and maintenance of the Burma-Siam railway—except Americans who were repatriated—have been transferred from the camp burial grounds and many solitary sites along the railway line into three war cemeteries. I apologise to the House if my pronunciation is not accurate. The Kanchanaburi and Chungkai war cemeteries are in Thailand; the third cemetery is at Thanbyuzayat in what was formerly Burma but is now known as Myanmar. Chungkai war cemetery is the original burial ground of one of the prisoners-of-war base camps, and many of the burials are of those who died in hospital. Kanchanaburi war cemetery contains the remains of those who died and were buried along the southern half of the railway from Bangkok to Nieke. Those who died along the northern half are buried at Thanbyuzayat in Burma.

The Government also give assistance to the war widows grant in aid scheme, which is administered by the pilgrimage department of the Royal British Legion. It was introduced in 1985 to provide financial assistance to enable any service widow whose husband was buried overseas between 1914 and 1967 to visit his grave. Since 1967, the practice has changed in that the next of kin of those who died while serving overseas have had the option to have the remains repatriated if they so wished. The grant contributes seven eighths of the cost of a pilgrimage organised by the Royal British Legion pilgrimage department, which has done an excellent job. The remaining eighth of the cost is borne by the widow.

Since its inception in 1985, the scheme has enabled more than 3,000 widows to visit their husbands' graves in some 40 different countries. There have been seven pilgrimages to Thailand during that period, which have enabled 84 widows, who would not otherwise have been able to visit their husbands' last resting place, to pay their final respects. The scheme has been extended three times because of the sheer number of widows who wished to avail themselves of the opportunity to visit war graves throughout the world, and it is due to end on 31 March 1999. I am pleased to say that the Government have allocated £297,000 to fund the scheme during the last two years of its operation.

I must again stress that we have the greatest sympathy for those men and their families, and we acknowledge the need for remembrance and commemoration, but it has been a long-standing policy of successive Governments of different political persuasion that the cost of memorials

to the dead, both service and civilian, are traditionally erected following a public appeal for private donations. Public funding is not usually made available.

The only exception, where we understand public money was used, is the memorial plaque to those killed in the Falklands war, which was erected in St Paul's cathedral in the mid-1980s. The then Prime Minister expressed the wish that the memorial be funded by the Government. The memorial to those killed in the Gulf war was funded by public subscription, primarily by British expatriates who were resident in Kuwait, which re-established previous practice.

As we all know, war memorials are a familiar part of the landscape of the majority of towns and villages throughout the British Isles. They also stand on many former battlefields and near war cemeteries overseas. They are a firm and lasting testament to the spirit of the nation, and a tangible tribute to those who fell in battle in two world wars and other conflicts. Their value to successive generations is obvious. We must not forget the sufferings of our forebears. The names engraved on the countless monuments here and overseas should force each new generation to think before acting, lest we repeat the errors of the past.

Responsibility for the maintenance of war memorials in the United Kingdom rests with local authorities. The War Memorials (Local Authorities' Powers) Act 1923, as amended by the Local Government Act 1948 and the Parish Councils Act 1957, governs the care of war memorials. Councils are empowered to spend public funds on war memorials from money that is raised through the council tax.

After both world wars, memorials have often been raised overseas by regiments or formations such as divisions in recognition of their fallen comrades. Those memorials are usually located on former battlefields or near the official war cemeteries maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Responsibility for funding the maintenance of those memorials rests with individual regiments or formations where they still exist, such as the world war two memorial to the 2nd Division at Kohima in India. For the older first world war memorials, where regiments have been disbanded or the division no longer exists, the British Government have undertaken to fund their maintenance through the commission. That ensures that those commemorated on such monuments of both world wars are not forgotten.

My hon. Friend will understand that the Government and the Ministry of Defence in particular receive many requests from individuals, ex-service men's groups and charitable organisations for assistance to fund war memorials. It would not be possible, nor would it be fair, to be seen to support one group rather than another. The vast majority have understandable and worthy goals and can make an equally compelling case for support. It could be divisive, and open to criticism from unsuccessful claimants, if the Government were to pick and choose projects to support.

Even in connection with the proposed Hellfire pass memorial, it would appear from recent correspondence that there may be slightly differing views among ex-service organisations as to how best to commemorate the far east prisoners of war. Therefore, the erection of a war memorial may not necessarily be everybody's first or preferred choice.

I should like to mention one further point, which was recently mentioned in the press and was also referred to by my hon. Friend. Following the end of the second world war, the assets of the Burma-Siam railway were indeed sold to the then Siamese Government for £1.25 million. However, the bulk of that sum was used to recompense the identifiable owners of rolling stock, locomotives and rails, which had been removed by the Japanese from Burma, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Some £175,000 which remained was added to the reparations of more than £4.5 million which were offered by the Japanese Government, and accepted, in 1951. That fund was subsequently distributed to some 59,000 former prisoners of war and civilian internees through the Department of Health and Social Security and the International Committee of the Red Cross. In addition, some money was distributed to voluntary funds for the general benefit of former Japanese prisoners of war.

We fully appreciate the aims of those seeking support for the memorial at Hellfire pass. I am grateful for this opportunity to wish the organisers every success in their endeavours, and we will be happy to provide representation at any dedication ceremony, should the necessary funding be raised. We will also be more than willing to suggest avenues to explore as part of the fund-raising efforts.

I again congratulate my hon. Friend on raising the case so movingly and effectively, putting his constituency on the map, identifying his constituents' interests and showing how closely he has identified with them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 4 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

The Minister was asked—

Fishing

1. **Mrs. Humble:** When he last held discussions with representatives of the fishing industry. [17665]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I regularly meet fishing industry representatives and I last met the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations on 19 November.

Mrs. Humble: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. He will be aware from our recent correspondence that the Fleetwood fishermen welcome some aspects of the new decommissioning scheme but are concerned about the separation of licence and track record from the value of the boat itself, which may result in loss of quota to the port and, indeed, to the country. In his discussions with representatives of the fishing industry, has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to consider this matter?

Mr. Morley: This year's decommissioning round was a pilot scheme. It allowed for the first time the separation of track record from the value of the vessel. This was generally welcomed by the industry. There is an issue, however, about the socio-economic effects of this approach. My hon. Friend has been a leading campaigner on the issue, along with the local authority in the area she represents, and she has convinced me that it is a matter that we need to bear in mind in future to ensure that we protect the interests of fishing ports along our coasts.

Mr. Gill: In the Minister's discussions with the industry, has he found anyone who supports the notion of reducing the minimum landing size of plaice, for example, from 27 cm to 22 cm? Given that so much of the regulation that stems from the common fisheries policy is ostensibly to do with conservation, how can the Minister justify reducing the minimum landing size to below that at which the fish could reasonably be expected to breed? What will he do about it?

Mr. Morley: I do not justify that. I spoke against it at the Council of Ministers, and submitted a reservation on the basis that the minimum landing size was too low. I argued that it sent out all the wrong signals to the fishing industry at a time when we were arguing for conservation. The logic behind the move was to match mesh size with discards so as to reduce discards, which is a sensible objective. The answer, of course, is to increase mesh sizes if we want to increase the minimum landing size. Fishermen can do that voluntarily now and I hope that more of them will follow the example of those who do, who are concentrating on quality, not quantity.

Bananas

2. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** What actions he is taking to ensure that the terms of United Kingdom agreements with the Windward Islands regarding banana imports remain in force. [17666]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): When I met the Prime Ministers of the Windward Islands recently, I gave them my assurance that I will do all in my power to ensure that we meet our historic obligations to their countries. I have told Commissioner Fischler and my colleagues on the EU Agriculture Council of my concerns and of my determination to do everything I can to secure agreement on acceptable new arrangements during the UK presidency in the first half of next year.

Mr. Chapman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. May I say how disappointed we are at the World Trade Organisation's decision in relation to banana producers in the Caribbean? I thank my right hon. Friend for his principled stand on the issue and urge him on in his efforts to ensure that our European partners join us in seeking a solution to the problem. What progress is my right hon. Friend making in getting backing from our European partners?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I share his disappointment at the World Trade Organisation's ruling against the existing banana regime, which is so important to the Windward Islands, Belize, Jamaica and other African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

The reality is that we shall have to negotiate a new regime that, first, is agreed by our European partners and, secondly, is agreed by the WTO. It is our determination that we should succeed in these objectives.

Mr. Wells: Does the Minister realise that it was a commitment by the Labour Government of 1945 to 1951 that enabled the Windward Islands to diversify out of sugar and into bananas and that that is the historical background against which he is working? Does he also realise that only he, with his enthusiasm, drive and determination, can get a satisfactory settlement out of Europe?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, and I recognise the hon. Gentleman's personal experience and expertise in these matters in the Caribbean. He is right. We have an historic obligation to these tiny countries. I cannot for the life of me see why the powerful nations of the west, with their

huge economies, should take any satisfaction in placing in jeopardy the economies of these tiny Caribbean countries. We shall work, as the hon. Gentleman has suggested I should, to seek a satisfactory solution to the problem. I have already made it clear to my colleagues in Europe and to the ambassador of the United States that we shall look to them for help.

Hill Farming

3. **Mr. Greenway:** If he will visit the North Yorkshire Moors national park to discuss the current state of hill farming. [17667]

Dr. John Cunningham: I have no immediate plans to visit the North Yorkshire Moors national park, although I do admire it. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has a number of visits planned to Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Greenway: If and when the Minister comes up to North Yorkshire, I think that he will find the farmers there more responsible, perhaps, than some of their Welsh colleagues, but every bit as angry. I have never known them so angry. Let us be clear: they are angry with him for his failure to take any action in response to the rapid decline in hill farm incomes of recent months and the fact that many farmers now face bankruptcy. It is not just about beef; lamb prices are also under pressure. I appeal to him to use the hill livestock compensatory allowances and the European monetary compensation arrangements. Frankly, if the present unprecedented crisis does not justify the use of those schemes, how bad must things get before he will act?

Dr. Cunningham: I am well aware of the problem with the incomes of farmers in less favoured areas generally and of beef producers on the hills in particular. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but total livestock subsidies to all farmers in the less favoured areas are estimated to be worth about £530 million in the coming year. I hope to make an announcement about hill livestock compensatory allowance decisions soon. He is wrong to imply that we are doing nothing about this matter. As he would expect, these matters are under active discussion with my colleagues. As for his point about agrimonetary compensation, I remind him that because of the Fontainebleau compromise negotiated by Baroness Thatcher, for every £100 that we might pay under that heading, £71 would have to come from the United Kingdom taxpayer.

Mr. Quinn: Does my right hon. Friend agree—I am sure that my colleague from North Yorkshire, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) does—that the real challenges facing hill farmers lie in the future of the common agricultural policy? Farmers in my constituency, which is not many miles from that of the hon. Gentleman, are concerned that we are throwing the baby out with the bath water. I commend to my right hon. Friend an early visit to North Yorkshire, as suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend that at the root of these problems—and the causes of the difficulties that farmers face—is the failure of existing provisions in the CAP to provide a long-term, viable income for farmers. It is to that problem that we must look in the longer term, although we shall try to deal with the immediate issues in a different way.

Mr. Curry: When the Minister visits North Yorkshire, will he make two very important points to farmers and consumers? First, it is undoubted that scientific research has shown that bovine spongiform encephalopathy is a much nastier disease than we first thought but, secondly, exposure to it is dropping like a stone because of the measures that have been taken. There is therefore no reason whatever why people should cease to eat beef or to regard it with suspicion.

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with everything the right hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Is not the Conservative party's concern about hill farm incomes rather synthetic? Only two years ago, the average net income of a hill farmer was £10,500 and at the beginning of the decade, under the Conservative Government, it was just over £8,000. Is it not a bit rich for Conservative Members to complain about hill farm incomes?

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is astonishing how quickly Conservative Members have flipped. Each time we come to the Chamber, they demand more and more public expenditure at the taxpayer's expense.

Mr. Jack: Is the Minister aware that North Yorkshire hill farmers looking at cattle prices in Banbury yesterday would have realised that they had hit a 20-year low? Does he recognise that, 20 years ago, there was a Labour Government? That is why beef farmers have lost all confidence in the Minister. Will he give us his reaction to the leader article in *The Daily Telegraph*, which yesterday accused him of going over the top? Instead of pouring more tea and sympathy down the throats of hard-pressed beef farmers, will he tell the House what he intends to do to help them? Will he maintain the level of hill livestock compensatory allowances? Will he remove the extra costs of the Meat Hygiene Service from the backs of farmers? Will he get rid of the upper limit on weight in the over-30-months scheme? Will he mitigate the effects of the new cattle passport scheme on hard-pressed beef farmers?

Dr. Cunningham: No.

Mr. Jack: The Minister has just shown a "couldn't care less" attitude towards the British beef farming industry. He knows, because he and the Treasury have confirmed it to me, that Britain's Fontainebleau rebate will increase next year due to underspend on community programmes in dairy, cereals and livestock. Those are the facts. Why is the Minister not asking for this money for the beef industry now?

Dr. Cunningham: As ever, the right hon. Gentleman has not only got the facts wrong, he cannot even present them coherently. He has just made, yet again—for the fifth or sixth time—a long list of demands for more and more public expenditure. The previous Government,

of which he was a member, made no provision for that expenditure. Not for one penny of it did they make any provision. We are operating on the plans that the previous Government prepared for this financial year and for which Conservatives Members voted. It is a bit late for them to change their minds now.

Farmland Birds

4. **Ms McCafferty:** What measures he is putting in place to protect and encourage birdlife on farms. [17668]

Mr. Morley: Extensive measures are currently in place to protect and encourage birdlife on farms.

Ms McCafferty: Although I congratulate the Government on their commitment to biodiversity, which is in stark contrast to the almost lack of interest shown by former Conservative Ministers, I urge my hon. Friend to take particular account of the rapid decline in certain species of bird. In particular, the skylark population has declined by 54 per cent. in the past 20 years. *[Interruption.]* What further plans do the Government have to protect endangered species, so that bird lovers—*[Interruption.]*—can continue to enjoy all the species that are found in our country? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should be able to put her question properly. I shall have no nonsense from male Opposition Members. Put your question properly, Ms McCafferty, and do not be intimidated.

Ms McCafferty: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am not intimidated—perhaps slightly confused, but certainly not intimidated. What are the Government's further plans to protect endangered birdlife so that it can continue to be enjoyed by bird lovers not only in my constituency but throughout Britain? What measures will the Government take to encourage farmers to take up such schemes?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend asks an important question about the decline of many formerly common farmland species. The Government are to introduce an arable stewardship pilot scheme that is designed to assist farmland bird species. We are also encouraging the pesticides forum to promote integrated crop management, which will reduce the amount of pesticides used. In addition, we are supporting a number of research and development schemes that address some of the issues behind the decline.

Mr. Baldry: The Minister will appreciate that it is much easier for farmers to have regard to birdlife when their holdings are being run profitably. It is difficult for many beef farmers to concentrate on birdlife or anything else when they face considerable economic difficulties. That was clearly evidenced by the prices in Banbury market yesterday because they were the lowest that anyone has known for a long time. Farmers are entitled to know what help the Government intend to seek for them from the European Union.

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not relevant to the question, which was about birdlife on farms. We shall take the next question.

Common Agricultural Policy

5. **Mr. Robathan:** If he will make statement on progress on reform of the CAP. [17669]

Dr. John Cunningham: The November Agriculture Council called upon the Commission to table early proposals for CAP reform. I will aim to make as much progress as possible on these proposals during the UK presidency of the EU.

Mr. Robathan: I wish the right hon. Gentleman well. Does he agree that birdlife is being damaged by the intensive practices that are encouraged by the CAP? Gentlemen farmers—*[Interruption.]* Ordinary farmers from Ireland and, I am sure, gentlemen farmers who attended a meeting of the British-Irish parliamentary group this week told us that their landscape, their environment and their birdlife are being damaged by the intensive farming practices that are encouraged by the CAP. As the Minister knows, farmers' incomes are being dramatically damaged by the CAP and the consumer is paying through the nose for it. What dramatic steps does the Minister intend to take to reform the CAP because some of us think that it is not reformable in its current form?

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. He is right: under the CAP as presently constituted, we spend about £30 billion a year and end up damaging the environment, threatening wildlife and infuriating farmers and consumers alike. It must be a fairly stupid policy that, at such a cost, produces such results. We are seeking dramatic reforms to the arable, beef and dairy regimes. The hon. Gentleman must know our position, because it is almost completely coincident with that of the previous Government. We must get agreement, or at least a majority, for reform among the 15 members of the Council. That will not be easy.

Mr. Pike: What are my right hon. Friend's priorities for CAP reform in the context of eastern European nations that are on the fast track for joining the Union?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government seek and are working for a successful enlargement of the European Union into central and eastern Europe. However, unless we take action now, as the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) said, to change the common agricultural policy, that successful enlargement will not be possible.

Mr. Tyler: Does the Minister agree that whatever may be happening to the incidence of BSE, the incidence of memory loss among former Tory Ministers is quite dramatic? Does he acknowledge that within the framework of the CAP, under the previous Government and, I fear, under the present Government, competitor countries have received a great deal more assistance in dealing with the livestock sector than we have? Does he agree that a number of countries, including Ireland, are effectively subsidising their beef farmers to export their products to this country? Does he agree that other countries are taking similar steps to assist their livestock farmers in a way that our farmers are not assisted, and that in other countries hill support is much more effective than it is in this country?

Has the Minister seen this morning's headline in *The Western Morning News*: "For God's sake help us"? Does the Minister acknowledge that we now have a major crisis in the livestock sector? Although it is true that the former regime must bear their share of the blame, some responsibility now lies at his door.

Dr. Cunningham: I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's view that collective amnesia is a dangerous form of affliction on the Conservative Benches.

I recognise that the problems described by the hon. Gentleman are extremely serious for hill farmers in particular. I emphasise that we are discussing how and whether we may be able to provide extra support for them. When I am able to make an announcement about that decision, I shall do so.

Beef Ban

6. **Mr. Ainger:** What progress has been made on lifting the European ban on the export of British beef. [17670]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): We expect the Commission to present a draft proposal for the export certified herds scheme to the Standing Veterinary Committee shortly. This UK-wide scheme would operate initially only in Northern Ireland until the British computerised tracing system is fully functional.

In October, we submitted proposals for a UK scheme to export beef from cattle born after 1 August 1996. We are expecting an opinion from the Commission's Scientific Steering Committee on that proposal next week.

Mr. Ainger: Both sides of the House will welcome that statement, as it clearly indicates progress towards a lifting of the beef export ban. I have two questions following my hon. Friend's answer. First, can he assure the House that the beef quality standards now enforced in Britain will be rigorously enforced on any meat imported into this country? Secondly, bearing in mind the crisis that is hitting beef producers, will he review the current compensation regime—within the cash limits that he inherited—to ensure that compensation is targeted at beef producers who are clearly suffering enormous difficulties?

Mr. Rooker: On my hon. Friend's first point, the statement made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food included imported beef. It remains the case that, from 1 January next year, the decision made in the summer regarding the removal of specified risk materials by importers must apply, so that all beef sold in this country from January will be of the same high standard as beef grown in this country.

The answer to my hon. Friend's second question is yes, we would review the compensation scheme within the totality of the existing spending limits. We are constantly searching for alternatives, although few organisations are proposing alternatives. Last week, in Crewe, members of the National Farmers Union pointed out that, in the old days, a clapped-out old milker at the end of its life would be worth a fiver, whereas under the over-30-months scheme it is worth several hundred pounds—money that could equally be transferred to beef cattle.

Mr. Tom King: Does the Minister accept that, in his efforts to have the export ban lifted and in his consultation about further potential problems associated with BSE, there will be wide public support for the adoption of option 1—informing the public of the minute risk that might exist, but not introducing further measures that might inhibit the activities of the meat industry and of farmers?

In my experience as a Member of Parliament for more than 25 years, I do not recall such a serious crisis in the farming industry as the one now facing it. I say to the hon. Gentleman and to the Minister that this is a time when the concerns of the farming industry must be recognised. I strongly urge that efforts be made to help with the compensatory amount. I believe that sterling will stay high, so the problems of the farming industry will continue.

Mr. Rooker: I respect the point made by the right hon. Gentleman. In my modest 23 years' experience in the House, no Minister would have been taken seriously if he had stood at the Dispatch Box and said that he had knowingly allowed infected material into the food chain.

Judy Mallaber: I welcome the statement made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that the Government are considering the case for a full inquiry into the development of BSE and its links with CJD, as requested by families such as the Warnes in my constituency whose son, Chris, tragically died a few weeks ago. Does my hon. Friend accept that that could help to restore confidence in the beef industry and in our standards of safety? Will he ask our right hon. Friend for an early statement on whether there will be an inquiry, because many families will be waiting for such a statement?

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend raises the issue in another way. This is a moral issue; people are dying. I know that that is dismissed by Conservative Members, but people are dying. It is incumbent on the Government to take all possible steps to find out how this came about. We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I welcome the confirmation from No. 10 Downing street this morning that, in due course, there will be an independent inquiry into the whole tragic history of BSE. However, will the Minister acknowledge that, although we hope that that will bring clarity to bear, it is a matter of profound regret that the statement made yesterday by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did not bring such clarity to bear on the issue with which he was dealing? That is clear from the overnight surveys conducted among the public, supermarkets and restaurants, for example.

Against the backdrop of the deepening crisis at our ports, the statements made in the Dail today by the Irish Premier, the fact that the Irish Agriculture Minister is having discussions today with officials from the Minister's Department and the fact that farmers in Scotland, Wales and England have been moved to such uncharacteristic behaviour during the week—a situation that is liable only to be inflamed by yesterday's announcement—will the Minister recognise the deep seriousness of the issue?

Will he perhaps go further than his right hon. Friend and say whether, in terms of HLCAs, the cuts that the Government have proposed and implemented on the

OTMS or the access to European funding because of green pound revaluations, there was a hint that something will be done as a matter of urgency to help the income problem now and to try to calm events at the ports, which is liable only to thwart national efforts to lift the BSE ban?

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Gentleman asked about an inquiry. I can tell him that the report this morning is clearly not true because no final decision has yet been made. When we are able to make a decision—it is being actively considered across Whitehall—about an inquiry into the BSE legacy that we inherited on 1 May, we will be at the House pretty quickly to announce it. I can give the House that promise.

On the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, we cannot govern by hint. Yesterday's statement was crystal clear about the proposals that had been put, the recommendations that had been made and the Government's action. We have to condemn, as I hope would all hon. Members, illegal activities taking place at the ports.

Mr. Beard: Can my hon. Friend say what progress has been made in developing a means of diagnosing BSE before the symptoms become obvious?

Mr. Rooker: I cannot give details on that, but plenty of scientists are looking into it. There is to be a meeting shortly of independent scientists, my officials and independent assessors, who will examine a protocol to take forward a particular experiment in which it is claimed that there may be some advance warning of BSE. This is an issue about which the scientists have been arguing among themselves. I have done everything I can to facilitate progress on this matter, and as soon as we have anything to report, we will do so.

Mr. Paice: Contrary to what the Minister said a few moments ago, if there is an underspend on European programmes leading to an increased rebate, using the increased rebate to support agriculture will not be an increase in public expenditure.

On yesterday's statement, now that the Minister has admitted that there will have to be consultation on the deboning issue—*[Interruption.]*—he said it yesterday, and he admitted it again this morning—will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why the Minister did not consult before choosing the most extreme option? He knows full well that he is consulting on green top milk, because he has received a recommendation that it should be banned. He is consulting ahead of a ban in that instance. Why did he not follow the same pattern in considering the matter of deboning beef and BSE?

Will the new consultation include a review of the Government's decision in the light of the three other available options—realising, as the Minister of State rightly says, that every Minister must have the utmost regard for human health, but also that the proportionate risk is very small compared with many other issues? Will he now re-examine the three options, perhaps ask the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee to re-examine them, and narrow them down to one recommendation—particularly because of widespread concerns expressed today by industry, the media, consumers and almost everyone who has been affected by yesterday's decision?

Mr. Rooker: I have to dismiss outright the hon. Gentleman's analogy between both consultations on green top milk and on SEAC's advice and recommendations, because there is no comparison, and the view that the Government should consult on all our decisions. We have made our decision based on common sense judgment and the independent scientific advice that we have received. We do not intend to review the decision, but we are consulting on the best way forward. It will be a very short consultation. My right hon. Friend the Minister made it clear yesterday that we would consult.

SEAC proposed options, and it was our responsibility as a Government to choose the preferred way forward—the one that would be most practical and most understandable by the public. We had to choose the option which placed public safety first and was easy for the public to understand—requiring all meat to be taken off the bone—and not an option that would be less than clear, because that way is chaos. I know that that it is difficult for Conservative Members to understand although they were in government a short time ago. The issue could have festered for weeks, causing uncertainty and massive damage to the industry. The Government are not prepared—as is implied in the hon. Gentleman's question—to put public health at risk.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is very real concern, approaching despair, in many less favoured areas—particularly in Wales—and among the ranks of beef producers? Does he agree also that, although there is real and genuine concern and hardship, it is in the best interests of those farmers to works together with the Government by refusing to take part in lawless acts and by developing a long-term strategy, including reform of the common agricultural policy and the restoration of confidence in beef products? Is that not the best long-term solution?

Mr. Rooker: I whole-heartedly agree with my hon. Friend's views, and I hope that everyone outside the House will take the message. Our beef—as my right hon. Friend the Minister and others have made it absolutely clear—is safe and, we claim, the safest anywhere in Europe. There are more checks on our beef before it reaches the shop than there are anywhere else. We have no problem whatsoever about that. The beef and beef products produced by farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency are good quality meat. Farmers damage their own industry and the confidence that we are trying to rebuild in it by actions at the ports.

Dairy Farming

7. **Mr. Gray:** What steps he is taking to support the dairy farming industry. [17671]

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend the Minister is pressing for radical reform of the dairy regime in Brussels. This will be in the long-term interests of the UK dairy industry as a whole.

Mr. Gray: Does the Minister not realise that the 250 dairy farmers in North Wiltshire are now close to desperation? Does he accept that his failure to apply for EU compensatory payments is painting the bleakest possible picture for mixed family farms in my constituency—the worst in the history of modern agriculture—and that his

mishandling of yesterday's announcement will contribute to that feeling of desperation among my farmers? I challenge the Minister to join me in Chippenham market, where I shall be tomorrow, to explain to those farmers why he chose the safest possible option under the SEAC recommendations—the option that will mean more desperation for beef and milk farmers?

Mr. Rooker: We plead guilty to choosing safest options. I do not know the specifics of the hon. Gentleman's farmers—he seems to claim ownership of them—but the fact is that dairy farming is one of the most profitable sectors of British agriculture—*[Interruption.]* I repeat, it is one of the most profitable sectors of British agriculture.

The EU dairy regime is a major obstacle in the way of our dairy farmers getting their products on the world market. That is why my right hon. Friend is working hard in Brussels to remove that obstacle.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Was not option 1 the easy option—the option that the Conservatives adopted over the past 10 years and which created the crisis in agriculture today? Now they complain about it and demand that we spend public money on it.

Mr. Rooker: I completely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does the Minister accept that dairy and beef farming go together and depend on each other? There are a great many dairy and beef farmers in Macclesfield and Cheshire, and my family have been involved in and associated with farming for more than 150 years. I am deeply depressed by the problems facing the industry at the moment. I am pleased that the Minister of Agriculture is on the Treasury Bench to hear me say that every sector of the UK farming industry is depressed—a phenomenon that I have never known in my 25 years in the House, and which my family have not known in their 150 years of association with farming. Will the Government do something to alleviate the plight of agriculture?

Mr. Rooker: I will not bandy family memberships of this House with the hon. Gentleman, except to say that he does double up in a way that I cannot—

Mr. Jack: Cheap.

Mr. Rooker: It was not cheap: the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) raised the issue himself. There are problems with fluctuations in the currency. Livestock premium payments, however, will be wholly unaffected by the 14 per cent. change in the sterling rate this year, and arable payments for 1997 will be only 3 per cent. lower than in 1996. I repeat again: dairy farming is one of the most profitable sectors in British agriculture.

Animal Welfare

9. **Mr. Coleman:** When he last met representatives of the major animal welfare organisations. [17673]

Mr. Morley: My colleagues and I have had a number of meetings with the major welfare organisations.

Mr. Coleman: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Will the Government be supporting the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) to improve the welfare of animals in quarantine? Can he confirm that the days of animals being kept away from their owners for long periods will soon come to an end? That would be particularly welcome to elderly residents in my constituency.

Mr. Morley: I can confirm that, we support the principle behind the Bill—improving welfare standards in quarantine establishments. Furthermore, we shall publish a list of the establishments that have signed up to the MAFF voluntary code.

Mr. Blunt: Is the Minister aware that, when I go to my constituency tomorrow to meet representatives of the National Farmers Union—the organisation that looks after more animals than any other—I shall take a copy of today's *Hansard* to show how much the Government care about agriculture?

Mr. Morley: I am not sure what that has to do with the question. The message that the hon. Gentleman should take to the farmers is that the Government are aware of their concerns and are following the budget for farm support laid down by the previous Government.

Farm Incomes

10. **Mr. Prior:** What assessment he has made of the impact of the strength of sterling on farm incomes. [17674]

Mr. Rooker: Figures published earlier this week indicate that 1997 total income from farming in the United Kingdom has fallen by around 37 per cent. compared with 1996. It is exceptionally difficult to determine the extent to which that fall is due to currency factors or to predict how durable those income effects might be.

Mr. Prior: The scale of the problem facing British farming today is exceeded only by the complacency and indifference of the Government. Does the Minister accept that we have lost vital export markets and that our farmers are having to compete with heavily subsidised imports from Europe? What is he going to do about that?

Mr. Rooker: We are working for reform on a wide front. We are not wholly in control of the agenda. During our presidency next year, we shall push forward reform of many aspects of the common agricultural policy. The present system is unsustainable and very unfair to British agriculture. We believe that the Opposition agree with us on that.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The Attorney-General was asked—

Justice Ministry

29. **Mr. Burnett:** What discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues about the proposals to bring the justice functions of Departments which are at present separate under a single Ministry. [17694]

The Attorney–General (Mr. John Morris): I frequently discuss with colleagues possible ways of improving efficiency in the administration of justice. The Government have no plans to create a single Ministry of justice.

Mr. Burnett: During those discussions, I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be mindful of Sir Peter Middleton's recent report on the reform of legal aid and civil justice, which says:

"A single Government Department should be responsible for all aspects of civil justice."

The Attorney–General: Sir Peter Middleton confined himself solely to civil justice. The Lord Chancellor has responsibility for procedures in civil courts and their administration, so that is a matter for his Department. Sir Peter may have been casting his mind over a wider area and may have thought of tribunals and similar matters, which are without the Lord Chancellor's Department. We have no such proposals at present.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman make clear what is happening in his Department, let alone any other justice Departments, in relation to the Crown Prosecution Service? Does he accept that it is in a thorough mess, following the U-turn that he announced last week on the appointment of the 42 Crown prosecutors—one for each police region? Does he accept that he was hasty in ordering the Director of Public Prosecutions to implement that at the same time as setting up Sir Iain Glidewell's inquiry? He has had to back-track on the policy on Sir Iain's advice. Will he clarify what is happening, when he expects action to be taken and what regard he intends to have to Sir Iain's report? Will he publish the correspondence between him, the DPP and Sir Iain, or put it in the Library?

The Attorney–General: I will certainly put in the Library the letter from Sir Iain Glidewell, which went to every senior member who had applied for one of the new posts in the CPS.

The mess was created, I regret to have to say, by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) himself and those acting under his stewardship. It eventually emerged under Sir Iain's interim conclusions that he realised that for the job to be carried out properly and to ensure that the mess that we inherited was dealt with adequately, more important and greater figures were needed in each of the 42 areas than had been envisaged when we took office.

The problem is the magnitude of the task, the need to devolve, and the need to ensure that each of the 42 areas has a figure comparable with a chief constable so that the public know who is in charge of prosecutions locally. It is entirely due to the situation that we inherited.

Cruelty to Animals (Prosecutions)

30. **Mr. Baker:** in what proportion of police investigations into alleged cases of cruelty to animals referred to it, the case was prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service in the last year for which figures are available. [17695]

The Attorney–General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not record the number of prosecutions by offence type. The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost by a survey of case files held by the Crown Prosecution Service. Most cases of this type are investigated and prosecuted by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Mr. Baker: Does the Attorney-General recognise that the public give a high priority to cases involving animal welfare in general, and especially to cases involving cruelty to animals? I am sure that hon. Members have postbags full of letters of concern from constituents about instances of animal cruelty. Does the Attorney-General share my disappointment that so many prosecutions are left to the RSPCA? That organisation does a wonderful job, but in a sense the fact that the RSPCA rather than the police undertakes the prosecutions downgrades the seriousness of the offences in some people's eyes. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman make it clear that he and the Government take cruelty to animals extremely seriously, that they will do all that they can to ensure that there are more prosecutions with longer sentences, and that cruelty to animals will be eliminated as far as possible?

The Attorney–General: I fully share the hon. Gentleman's concern about cruelty to animals. Traditionally, the RSPCA has carried out investigations thoroughly and has prosecuted. The hon. Gentleman may have seen in *The Times* today a report of a substantial prosecution carried out successfully by the Crown Prosecution Service in which the RSPCA gave evidence. I myself used to prosecute on behalf of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; prosecution was the society's role and it was happy to carry it out. I am sure that if there is a need for further co-ordination, it can be done. The Crown Prosecution Service plays an important part, with the voluntary organisations, in the law enforcement steering group which co-ordinates the approach of all the agencies involved. I fully share the hon. Gentleman's concern.

Mr. Kidney: In Stafford the RSPCA does excellent work across the whole range of animal welfare including, as the Attorney-General said, the prosecution of cases of cruelty in the magistrates court. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the answer to the question put by the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) is that the Crown Prosecution Service should work closely with the RSPCA and similar organisations to ensure the prosecution of cases of cruelty?

The Attorney–General: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Crown Prosecution Service does so. As I said, there is a group called the wildlife law enforcement steering group, which was convened by the Department of the Environment some years ago. The Crown Prosecution Service is a member of that group, as are the Association of Chief Police Officers and the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies. I am confident that regular work has been done in the field; I rely on my professional experience as a young man.

Mr. Sayeed: I am sorry that the Attorney-General is following the example of his ministerial comrades and not answering the substantive question, which was a simple one about how many cases of animal cruelty were

prosecuted by the CPS. All that his Department needed to do was to pick up the phone and ring the RSPB and the RSPCA. The right hon. and learned Gentleman could then have said where the majority of cases came from and how many were being prosecuted. Why can we not have some clear answers for a change?

The Attorney–General: I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman either was not listening or is hard of hearing—*[Interruption.]* I am giving him the benefit of the doubt. I said specifically that the figures are not available. They were not available under the previous Administration, and they are not available now.

Rape Cases

31. **Mr. Lock:** What discussions he has had with the legal profession concerning cross–examination of complainants by unrepresented defendants in rape cases; and if he will make a statement. [17697]

The Attorney–General: This is an important issue, which is being carefully considered by the working group on vulnerable witnesses, on which my Department is represented. The group is consulting very widely with the legal profession. I personally have had discussions with counsel in the case that has recently caused such concern. One of the counsel is a chair-designate of the Bar.

Mr. Lock: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer and the care that is clearly being invested in the matter. It is very important that victims in rape cases should not have to undergo torture in court a second time unless it is absolutely necessary. Does he accept that a further problem is that counsel who prosecute cases for the Crown undertake a valuable job and are, to use an analogy from the other place, very much the thin cats of the Bar? Is there any evidence that cases—especially rape cases—are being lost because fees are too low to ensure adequate representation?

The Attorney–General: I assure my hon. Friend that the prosecutors are certainly not fat cats. They are very hard working and are chosen exceedingly carefully to ensure that the best counsel is available; they are sympathetic, understanding and have experience of handling exceedingly difficult cases, especially when the issue of consent is raised. That is certainly my professional experience.

There is no evidence whatever that cases are lost due to lack of remuneration. In fact, generally across the board, the conviction rate in contested cases is about 60 per cent.—five percentage points higher than in 1991–92. A recent survey of rape cases shows that the conviction rate in jury trials is 48 per cent., even though such cases are evidentially much more difficult to prove. That is certainly my professional experience.

Mr. Rowe: Given the very unhappy increase in the number of juveniles appearing in rape cases, does the Attorney-General agree that protection of juveniles in court cases is essential? Will he give an assurance that the Piggott report will be implemented in full? What other steps is he taking to ensure that juveniles especially are not subjected to such horrendous experience?

The Attorney–General: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. I was engaged only a year past July in a case involving a number of juveniles in his part of the world. There is a working group which deals with vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. It has consulted far and wide and asked for comments. It is examining and calling evidence from the Law Society, the Criminal Bar Association of England and Wales, the Council of Circuit Judges, the Association of Provincial Stipendiary Magistrates and the Magistrates Association, among others. I very much hope that the report will be available before too long.

A great deal can be done in the meantime. As regards children, applications can be made for evidence to be seen on video. As regards other vulnerable witnesses, applications can be made, in accordance with the guidelines of the Court of Appeal, for a screen to be erected to protect the victim witness from the defendant. That is frequently done and works exceedingly well. I am sure that the Lord Chancellor will listen very carefully to the working group if there are improvements to be made.

Perjury

32. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** What discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions in respect of bringing prosecutions for alleged perjury. [17698]

The Attorney–General: I meet the Director of Public Prosecutions frequently to discuss matters of mutual interest. It is not my practice to disclose the subject matter of our discussions.

Mr. Prentice: Why is it that journalists from *The Guardian* can research, write and publish a book called "The Liar" about the arms dealer and former Conservative Cabinet Minister Jonathan Aitken, but the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis seems congenitally incapable—six months after the trial, which collapsed when Jonathan Aitken withdrew—of getting a report to the Crown Prosecution Service with regard to possible prosecution? What is the problem?

The Attorney–General: My hon. Friend has been diligent and has tabled six questions for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. The matters that my hon. Friend raises are being investigated by the police and are entirely a police matter. If the time comes, the police will report to the Director of Public Prosecutions. There is no obvious reason why I should be consulted, and in this case it would be expected that I would not be consulted.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Can the Attorney-General seriously expect any improvement in morale in the Crown Prosecution Service until such time as its lawyers are given rights of audience in the higher courts?

The Attorney–General: The question is on the subject of perjury, and the hon. Gentleman raises a wider issue.

Mr. Taylor: It is about the DPP.

The Attorney–General: If the hon. Gentleman tables a question on rights of audience, I will seek to answer it. Procedures laid down by the previous Administration for consultation on rights of audience, including asking the views of judges, have taken an interminably long time; years and years go by before any determination. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman, as a former Whip, voted for that measure six or seven years ago.

Mr. Taylor: I am a Whip now.

Madam Speaker's Statement

3.31 pm

Madam Speaker: I wish to inform the House that I held a meeting this morning with the Members for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) and for Mid–Ulster (Mr. McGuinness), at their request. I do not normally comment in public on meetings that I have with Members, but I think it appropriate to do so on this occasion, as the matter is of general interest to the House. The Members concerned made representations to me about the restrictions on the use of House of Commons services and facilities at Westminster that apply to Members who do not take their seats.

Having listened carefully to their representations, I reaffirmed my decision of 14 May that those who choose not to take their seats should not have access to the benefits and facilities available in the House without also taking up their responsibilities as Members and participating in the democratic process. I reminded them that, as Speaker, I am bound by the law. Swearing the Oath, or affirming it, is a legal requirement that cannot be set aside by whim or any administrative action. Primary legislation would be needed to change the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 or the form of the Oath. I told them that it was their refusal to swear or affirm that prevented them from taking their seats, not any action by the Speaker.

I pointed out that my decision does not discriminate against Sinn Fein: it applies equally to any Members not taking their seats for any reason. Those who do not take up their democratic responsibilities cannot have access to the facilities at Westminster that are made available to assist Members who do. I declined to allow those Members passes to the Palace of Westminster, because that would provide automatic access to many of the facilities not open to them. I told them that they were in effect asking for associate membership of this House. Such a status does not exist. There is no halfway house: they are part of the all. I reminded them that they are allowed, of course, the use of free stationery and postage, which enables them to take up issues on behalf of their constituents, and they also have access to Ministers, as we all have.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): May I ask you a question arising from your statement, Madam Speaker? I appreciate the authority of the Chair, but I put it to you that, in May, the proceedings of the House were completely altered by your statement then, because the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) was previously a Member of Parliament under the rules which would have allowed him to take advantage of the facilities of the House.

The effect of the law to which you referred—the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866—is to deny people who have elected a Member of Parliament a Member who is able to use the House, and to deny us access to the views of Members who have been elected. The whole question of the Oath needs to be considered. At one time, Jews, Catholics and humanists were kept out of Parliament. There is no oath for the European Parliament. Privy Councillors take an Oath of obedience to the Queen, and then take contrary oaths when they go to the Commission and say that they take no notice of any other Government. The time has come for the matter to be looked at.

Finally, Madam Speaker, will you recognise that even your statement today is of such major constitutional importance that you would be helped if the House had a chance to debate it and to reach a decision, rather than rely solely on a statement made from the Chair?

Madam Speaker: I am not taking questions on my statement—I am simply reaffirming what I said in May. I met the two Members at their request, and it is right that I should tell the House factually about the exchanges that took place. If there are to be any changes to the Oath, that is not a matter for me. I am sure that the House has listened carefully to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—I certainly have.

Long-term Care

3.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

As people approach old age, many become anxious about how they will be looked after, how much it will cost and who will pay. At the general election, we promised that we would establish a royal commission to work out a fair system of funding long-term care for the elderly. Today, I can announce that the Queen has agreed to the setting up of the royal commission, whose terms of reference will encompass the United Kingdom as a whole. The new Government are keeping yet another of their election promises.

The royal commission is to be chaired by Professor Sir Stewart Sutherland, principal and vice-chancellor of Edinburgh university. I am confident that he will bring to the commission the skills and experience necessary to ensure rapid and vigorous scrutiny of the issues involved and practical cost-effective proposals to deal with them.

Sir Stewart will be joined by 11 other commissioners: Professor Dame June Clark, professor of community nursing at the university of Swansea; Sir Nicholas Goodison, deputy chairman of the Lloyds TSB Group and former chairman of the stock exchange; Dr. Iona Heath, a GP in Kentish town who represents the Royal College of General Practitioners on the British Geriatrics Society; Joel Joffe, a human rights lawyer, founder director and former deputy chairman of Allied Dunbar Assurance and chairman of Oxfam; David Lipsey, political editor of *The Economist* and a public interest director on the Personal Investment Authority; Professor Mary Marshall, director of the dementia services centre at the university of Stirling; Claire Rayner, writer, broadcaster and president of the Patients Association and a former nurse; Paula Ridley, the chair of the Liverpool housing action trust; Professor Robert Stout, professor of geriatric medicine at Queen's university Belfast; Robin Wendt, the former secretary of the Association of County Councils and a former civil servant at the then Department of Health and Social Security; and Len Woodley QC, a recorder who chaired the Laudat Mental Health Act inquiry.

Briefly, the commission's terms of reference will be to examine the short and long-term options for a sustainable system of funding of long-term care for elderly people, both in their own homes and in other settings, and to recommend how, and in what circumstances, the cost of such care should be apportioned between public funds and individuals. I have placed the full terms of reference in the Library of the House.

The commission will consider the implications of its recommendations for younger people who have long-term care needs because of illness or disability, and will have regard to the Government's continuing review of pensions.

The Government want both sound and swift advice, so the commission has been asked to report within 12 months—thus it will be different from previous royal commissions. This royal commission will be different from its predecessors in other ways, too. In the past, some royal commissions have included representatives of pressure groups that were involved in the topics to be covered. This one does not. The commissioners are not supposed to be representatives. They are there to take a fresh look. However, pressure groups and representatives of users and carers should have their say, so the commission will establish a reference group of organisations to help to gather views and receive advice.

The chairman of the commission is today inviting a range of organisations to serve on that reference group. It will include charities and other groups that are involved in long-term care, the financial services sector, the health service, local government and other service providers, together with representatives of the major religious faiths in the United Kingdom. By that means, the commission will be able to draw on the most up-to-date experience of users and carers.

The commissioners will make visits throughout the country to listen to other users and carers. They plan to be "out and about," so that they can really get the full flavour of the current concerns in different parts of the country.

The task of this royal commission is neither simple nor easy, but it is important. The present situation cannot go on much longer. People are entitled to security and dignity in their old age, so we must find a way in which to fund long-term care which is fair and affordable both for the individual and for the taxpayer. With the independent advice of the royal commission, I hope that we shall be able to establish a consensus from which we can fashion a sustainable system of long-term care that will meet the needs of elderly people well into the new century.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford–on–Avon): This is a very serious problem; a long lead time is required to do anything through policy changes. Before the election, the Labour party was critical of the means test and of people being forced to sell their homes, but its only policy was to set up a royal commission. I am concerned about the use of a royal commission. It is usually a way of kicking things into the long grass for a long time.

Will the Secretary of State assure us that he will ensure that it sticks to the 12-month timetable, unlike the previous royal commission that was set up by a Labour Government, which was asked in the 1970s to examine the health service, and which succeeded in reporting two months after Labour had lost the 1979 general election—although, if that sequence of events is followed this time, we shall be happy to wait five years for it?

We also need a cast-iron guarantee on the timetable because of the Department of Health's failure to meet its timetable on the White Paper, which we expected in September, were told we would get in October and were promised in November. Will the Secretary of State assure us that we shall have it before Christmas? Is it true that the Prime Minister is so dissatisfied with the White Paper that he has taken over the drafting? Does that mean that the Secretary of State will be overruled on this, as he was on the formula one exemption? Will he assure us that his Department will not make as big a shambles of this as it has of the tobacco advertising directive? Today, his party's proposals have been contemptuously rejected at a meeting in Brussels, where he has succeeded in putting a new blocking minority in place.

Anyone who fought the election knows how important long-term residential care is for the elderly. People feel that it is desperately unfair that the present system often

[Mr. John Maples]

requires them to sell their homes before they qualify for public funding, but we all know that, without a means test, public spending would soar, and, with an aging population, the problem is getting worse.

During the previous Parliament, the previous Government raised the means test threshold substantially and, in May 1996, they published a White Paper entitled "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age". We proposed a partnership scheme to encourage people to take out insurance, enabling them to protect an additional £1.50 of assets for each £1 of insurance. Our Community Care (Residential Charges) Bill would have achieved that.

As the royal commission will take some time to report, will the Secretary of State consider bringing that Bill back before the House as a Government Bill, because it would give relief to many elderly people who will not be able to afford to wait for the royal commission to report? Will he ensure that the Bill's proposals are put before the royal commission?

We know that about 5 per cent. of 75 to 85-year-olds and 20 per cent. of people aged over 85 go into care for an average of about three years, at an average cost of £15,000 to £20,000. Does the Secretary of State agree that that is a clearly insurable risk, and that the solution in the long term must lie, at least in part, in greater private provision, via increased saving through pensions or life insurance, or some similar arrangement? Will he ensure that the royal commission examines how private savings might help to finance long-term care for the elderly, whether such provision should become a required part of people's pension packages, and, if so, how that might be encouraged?

Saving against the possibility of requiring long-term care through a working lifetime is feasible for a great many people, but it will take a generation to have a noticeable effect. Does the Secretary of State agree that we need schemes now that will enable more people to bear the costs of their care, while protecting their assets from the means test? Will he ensure that the royal commission looks carefully into possible ways to achieve that?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also ensure that the royal commission looks objectively at the relative merits of local authority and private sector provision and, in particular, at the way in which such competition is often stacked by local authorities in their own favour? Is he aware that several Labour-controlled local authorities are flying in the face of the law by giving active preference to their own homes? Will he ensure that the royal commission considers our proposals to separate the functions of commissioning care, providing care and acting as the inspector of private care homes? Does he agree that it is not right for all those functions to be in the same hands?

Finally, will the Secretary of State give the royal commission an honest estimate of the additional cost of running such homes that will arise from the imposition of a minimum wage?

Mr. Dobson: The chairman of the royal commission has been asked to complete the work of the commission within 12 months, and has said that he will. I have a suspicion that he will convince the other members of the commission that they had better do what he wants, so I am confident that, subject to the usual caveats, they will do it within 12 months. I am not prepared to speculate on the conclusions that they may come to. There would be no point in appointing a group as distinguished and independent-minded as these people are, if I were to lay down the law as to what they could conclude before they had even met. We were used to the Tories as a Government of know-alls, and it appears that they are now the Opposition of know-alls and they want to tell the royal commission what to conclude. That is not our approach, even if it is that of the Tories.

We and older people in this country want a properly thought-out system—not a few spatchcocked arrangements— that will work to their advantage, will stay in place and will preferably commend the consensus support of all parties and thinking people at the end of the process. That is what we are aiming to do.

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the question to be addressed by the royal commission is not whether we can afford adequate long-term care, but how it is paid for? Does he share the view of the Select Committee on Health that we do not face a demographic time bomb that requires panic measures? Does he also share the view of that Committee that nursing care is a function of the health service and ought to be provided free, no matter what setting it is provided in?

Mr. Dobson: Again—forgive me for my laryngitis or whatever it is, Madam Speaker—my hon. Friend is certainly right to say that the question that has to be addressed is how we put in place arrangements for looking after elderly people properly. I am sure that that is what everyone wants. As for the demographic time bomb, it is worth pointing out that we expect an increase in the number of the very old of about 100,000 in the next decade, whereas that number has increased by 300,000 in the past decade. Therefore, in some senses at least, if one describes the next decade as the immediate future, the pressures will be declining rather than increasing. The object must be to ensure that all those who are growing old are looked after properly whatever their incomes, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): As distinct from the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, I welcome the creation of the royal commission and will not take issue with the Secretary of State today on matters that have nothing to do with his announcement.

First, can the right hon. Gentleman say whether the commission is to consider long-term care for the elderly alone, or whether that is intended to include the care of other members of society, such as people with disabilities and the frail, who are also in need of such care? Secondly, will he say that the commission has been asked to study the needs both of present pensioners, who are in an established position in terms of what they expect, and of those who will become pensioners, as the two groups are in different situations?

Thirdly, and very important, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the Commission pays particular attention to those who are being looked after at home?

That raises issues not only of domiciliary care and carers, but of the provision of care local to home. Take a constituency such as mine: many of the places to which one can go for care are in Eastbourne, which is hardly any good to someone who wants to stay with family in south London. The situation is the same in many other parts of the country.

Fourthly, will the commission have a remit to look into issues of prevention, rehabilitation and medication, which are relevant to how people can best be looked after? Is the commission to have the responsibility of ensuring that the quality of care is assured? I have been to many places that allegedly give care, but are more than grim and basically consign people to a live of inactivity—dead ends, which have nothing to do with care, loving support or attention.

Finally, I want to pick up on the question asked by the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin). Will the Secretary of State make it absolutely clear that, among the options that the commission may put forward, it will be able to include the option that either national health service care or all care should be publicly funded? Will he make it clear that there will be no assumption on anyone's part—not least that of the Government—that all future care for the elderly will have to be privately funded through private insurers? Unlike the Tories, we do not think that that is an automatic solution to everything.

Mr. Dobson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his general welcome. I thought that I had made it clear in my statement that, although the royal commission will focus on long-term care of the elderly, it will bear in mind the impact of any propositions that it puts forward or principles that it enunciates on other, younger people who are in need of long-term care. The commission will certainly address the needs of present pensioners and, even more certain, it will address the needs of those who, like everyone in the Chamber, have every intention of becoming a pensioner. We also want it to look at care provided either in people's homes or outside. That applies to local services that can make it possible for people to live in their own home, provided that it is just down the road and is of decent quality.

On the issues of health care and prevention, at least four people on the commission are professional experts in geriatric care and are concerned not only about the generality of provision, but about the quality of provision. I am sure that they will go into those issues. The question of funding remains open: we want the advice of these people of intelligence, who have knowledge of various spheres. It is fairly likely that, in the end, there will be a proposition that some of the funding should be paid by the individual and some by the taxpayer. I am not telling the members of the commission that they should come to that conclusion, but I would be amazed if they did not.

Audrey Wise (Preston): May I, too, give a fairly cautious welcome—but a welcome nevertheless—to the setting up of the royal commission? There are some knotty problems to be sorted out and, as long as the commission's work is not distorted into deciding how to design private insurance schemes, it might well be a valuable exercise. In the meantime, does my right hon. Friend accept the principle that there should be national standard setting and registration of those who go into people's homes to give domiciliary care? That is not currently regulated. Surely those who are vulnerable are entitled to that protection.

Mr. Dobson: I can give my hon. Friend the guarantees that she requires. We have already made it clear that we intend to put in place a national setting of standards and a national enforcing of standards for domiciliary care. That will be spelled out in a White Paper, to be published next year, before the royal commission has reported.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): The Secretary of State is right to recognise that the way in which we are enabled to provide for ourselves in old age is one of the great challenges of our generation. Therefore, we welcome his announcement to that extent.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise also that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has recently made a series of attacks on pensions and seems to threaten a series of further attacks on savings? Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the royal commission's recommendations are borne carefully in mind by the Chancellor before he makes any such further attacks, lest he should weaken the opportunity of individuals to care for themselves, which the right hon. Gentleman clearly recognises is one of the solutions to a difficult problem?

Mr. Dobson: I have noticed that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has attacked pensioners by giving them extra money for this Christmas. He has attacked them also by reducing the rate of value added tax on fuel. I cannot tell the royal commission what to do, and when it reports, I have no doubt that its findings will have an impact on what the Government do. If we are really fortunate, its report may influence even the Opposition's thinking.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): May I commend my right hon. Friend's statement, as will 20,000 elderly residents in my constituency? May I urge the royal commission to pay particular attention to the essential component of consulting both public and private providers of housing? Will my right hon. Friend undertake to consider transitional arrangements until any recommendations that the commission may make are put into place, which could be three or four years away?

Mr. Dobson: The royal commission will be putting in place, at my request, a great deal of machinery for consulting people in both the private and public sectors as well as the voluntary sector. I cannot give my hon. Friend any guarantees about putting temporary arrangements in place, because I do not know what the commission will recommend. As I have said, we believe that the present situation is so unsatisfactory that it cannot be allowed to continue for much longer.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Everyone recognises the importance of new policies and actions to deal with the new challenges that we face in these areas in the years ahead. However, there is often wide suspicion that setting up a royal commission is a means of procrastinating instead of introducing policies and actions. Can the Secretary of State possibly justify spending seven months setting up a royal commission and then asking it to report within 12 months? How can he possibly justify

[Mr. John MacGregor]

such a delay in setting up the commission? Given this further example of dither and delay on the part of the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, will he give an assurance that when the commission reports, he will demonstrate much more urgency than he has shown in setting it up?

Mr. Dobson: I shall quote some figures. We had 18 years of the Tories doing nothing, and within seven months the Labour Government have recruited an extremely distinguished group, led by an extremely distinguished chairman, who is happy with the proposition that the work should be done within 12 months. If the work is done within 12 months, that will be 18 times better than that which the Tories did.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the constant problems of Members of this place is dealing with the complaints that we receive from our constituents whose relatives are residing in residential homes that are not run as well as they should be? Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that that is a likely area to be examined, given that there is a distinction between homes that are controlled by the local authority and inspected by it and those that are controlled and inspected by the health authority, where there is no democracy?

It is my experience that I can cause inspections to be carried out much more quickly when the local authority has accountability and there is democracy than I can when the home comes under the health authority, where those responsible are either indirectly elected or not elected at all. Will the royal commission's attention be drawn to that matter, so that we can assure people in future that we in this place will be able to take up their complaints in a proper manner?

Mr. Dobson: I can give my hon. Friend the guarantee that he requires. We are determined to improve the regulation of provision for old people in residential homes, whoever provides those homes, because it is not satisfactory at the moment. I shall go further and say that, because we are dissatisfied with the treatment of some old people in general hospitals, I have asked the Health Advisory Service to produce a report on the treatment of elderly people in general hospitals. The situation is simply not satisfactory, and must be changed.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I wish the commission well. Will the Secretary of State ask it to look urgently at the nightmare in Essex and some other places, whereby a huge amount of public money is wasted and a great deal of distress is caused within families because of people being retained in hospital beds for the simple reason that local authorities cannot afford to fund retirement homes? Will he ask the commission to look at that serious problem, which also existed under the previous Government, and, perhaps, consider whether the remedy might be to transfer the responsibility for paying for homes from local authorities to health authorities?

Mr. Dobson: I agree that the situation is unsatisfactory. Beds in general hospitals are occupied by people who would be better off, safer, more secure and healthier at home. We took considerable steps over the summer—in preparation for this winter—to try to make it easier to get people back into their own homes or other residential care. Some of the additional £300 million that we have given to the national health service for this winter will be spent on social services. I made it clear that no one would get any of that money unless they had a joint programme with their local social services department to stop old people being taken into hospital unnecessarily or staying too long in hospital unnecessarily.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. The timetable that he has set the commission is indeed tight, but is not one reason why we are having a royal commission the political dogma of the Conservatives when they were in government? They would not let local authorities keep homes that provided good accommodation and services, and they pushed everything into the private sector and caused a great deal of concern among elderly people.

Mr. Dobson: There is a great deal of truth in what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I personally, from the Conservative Benches, warmly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement. It brings the prospect of an end to the grotesquely unfair situation today, in which many elderly people who have worked hard during their lives, who have saved and been wise and thrifty, have to spend all their savings—sometimes including the asset of their own home—on paying for residential care. That is grotesquely unfair and causes a great deal of resentment.

I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the very talented people whom he has appointed to the commission. Professor Robert Stout, from Belfast, is a man for whom I have great regard, and Robin Wendt was not only the secretary of the Association of County Councils but chief executive of Cheshire county council. Will the Secretary of State give me an assurance that when the royal commission reports to him and to the House, legislation will very quickly follow?

Mr. Dobson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome and for his very appropriate but generous comments about the members of the royal commission, who, indeed, are very distinguished. I cannot give him a guarantee that legislation will immediately follow. He is an older hand than me, and he will know that I cannot guarantee parliamentary time, but I can say that my statement was made on behalf of the whole Government, and we believe that the present situation cannot be allowed to continue for much longer.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Is he aware of the fact that many social services departments are now under such pressure that they do not make assessments if they feel that they will be unable to meet the need? The Select Committee on Health intends to produce its report on the relationship between health and social services during the current Session. The timing of that report will ensure that it is available to the commission that he has announced. I hope that he will do his best to ensure that the commission is ready to take advantage of that thorough

study of the way in which the structures could help to provide for the part of the service that should remain in public hands.

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He draws on a vast depth of experience in those matters. I am sure that the royal commission will welcome the report of the Select Committee on Health as soon as it is available.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): May I say in passing that one of the right hon. Gentleman's political knockabout lines was extremely unfair to the dedicated civil servants in his Department? I know from first-hand experience that they have worked hard on long-term care.

Last winter, the previous Government made a number of announcements on regulation, registration and improvements on the split between residential homes and nursing homes. The Labour party, which was then in opposition, warmly welcomed some of those moves. Why is a White Paper required next year, given that time could be made up by going ahead with some of the proposals that the Labour party welcomed?

Mr. Dobson: I made it clear in reply to what was purported to be the Opposition's official response to my statement that we want a well thought out, comprehensive proposal, and not merely odd bits and pieces introduced as and when. We shall produce a White Paper that will spell out our comprehensive response on certain aspects. I expect the royal commission to do a good job, and we shall carefully consider its report. We are under an obligation to do something about this problem, which has gone on for far too long. It certainly went on for a long time under the previous Government, who may have made proposals, but they never got round to doing anything about them.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As a member of the last royal commission to be established by a Labour Government, may I say how much I welcome the announcement of this royal commission? I particularly welcome the speed with which it is to report. The commission of which I was a member spent three years working on its report. I remember the chairman saying that it would be different from all the others because it would not gather dust. That report had the misfortune to fall on the desk of an incoming Tory Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if that Government had acted on the report's recommendations, the NHS would not be in the mess that it is in today?

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I shall say no more, because I need to save my voice.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I know that the Secretary of State is aware of the difficulties that occur between health services and social services, especially when it comes to care of the elderly. Will he give us an assurance that the commission will examine ways of forging permanent links between health services and community health services, because that is where the delay occurs?

Mr. Dobson: I confirm that the commission will examine that issue. At the risk of falling foul of you, Madam Speaker, I predict that our forthcoming White Paper on the national health service will emphasise the importance of that issue, as will the other White Paper to which I referred.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In warmly welcoming the Secretary of State's announcement and in deploring the rather churlish and mean-minded response by the official Opposition, which shows that they have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, may I invite my right hon. Friend to ask the commission to consider that the founding premise, indeed promise, of the national health service—our insurance system of cradle-to-grave protection—has never, through its 50 years, been properly financed? In particular, the refusal of the previous Government to oblige all citizens to pay their fair share of inter-solidarity support has undermined it.

Can he assure me that the commission will look at collective provision, tax provision, mutual provision, compulsory insurance provision, such as exists for motor cars, and voluntary private provision? Finance is the key, and it must provide the answer. Labour can provide that answer, but the previous Government, because of their hatred of the NHS and local authority provision, refused to tackle the problem.

Mr. Dobson: I cannot guarantee what the royal commission's recommendations will be, but I can guarantee that it will examine all the options to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Does not the Secretary of State realise that his statement will be cold comfort to one of my constituents who, at the general election, was reduced to tears at the prospect of having to sell her home to pay for residential care? Does not he realise that the Prime Minister used exactly that kind of example at the general election and said that he would do something about it? A scheme based on partnership funding through insurance was available. The Secretary of State has said nothing to show why it is not necessary and desirable to proceed with exactly that kind of scheme, which would provide assets for long-term care and give hope to people in that situation. He took seven months to initiate the commission and is allowing 12 months for it to sit. Heaven knows how long the Secretary of State will take to act.

Mr. Dobson: All I can say is that the old people in the hon. Gentleman's area and in the rest of the country will not be impressed by a Tory party that apparently thinks that it can carry conviction when it shifts from being Genghis Khan to Mother Teresa in the space of seven months.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. While he is wise not to seek to prejudge the royal commission's conclusions, will he put it on the record that the terms of reference allow a thorough study of the private insurance and personal provision options? Will he take this opportunity—one that he has not been afforded to date—to acknowledge that much of what is already provided by the public and private sectors is admirable and that those who provide it should be congratulated? Does he accept that I genuinely

[Mr. John Bercow]

hope that he shortly recovers from laryngitis, because we on the Conservative Benches wish him a long, healthy and happy retirement from the Front Bench?

Mr. Dobson: I can guarantee few things in this world, but I can guarantee that the royal commission will look at all the options that have been mentioned and perhaps many more. I certainly pay tribute to the quality of care and treatment that are provided for the majority of old people. Sadly, not all are in that majority. There are failings, and the present regulatory system has been quite unsatisfactory for a long time. We are sorting it out before the royal commission reports.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): I am sure that anyone who has had to work within the present muddle of continuing care will welcome the statement. Will the royal commission also consider day care and its quality and funding as part of the continuing care package?

Mr. Dobson: I can guarantee that it is imperative that the commission looks at all aspects of care. Most people would rather stay in their own homes, where they have lived for donkeys' years and where they feel comfortable and know the neighbours, than have to be moved out because they are no longer capable of being sustained at home. The ambition of all hon. Members is to stay in their own homes, and that is what most other people want. We must provide services to people's homes and perhaps local services that they can just about toddle out to, provided crime and disorder are not at such a level that they are frightened to do that. That is a major consideration for old people. We must improve the quality and availability of those services. I expect, but I cannot guarantee, that the royal commission will make recommendations on those lines.

Business of the House

4.14 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 8 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Government of Wales Bill.

TUESDAY 9 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Government of Wales Bill.

At 10 pm, the House will be asked to agree the winter supplementary estimates, the votes on account and supplementary defence vote A.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 DECEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Social Security Bill.

THURSDAY 11 DECEMBER—Remaining stages of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

FRIDAY 12 DECEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week is as follows.

MONDAY 15 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill.

TUESDAY 16 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the National Minimum Wage Bill.

WEDNESDAY 17 DECEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on a motion for the Adjournment of the House, which will include the usual three-hour pre-recess debate.

Until 7 pm. there will be a debate on the common fisheries policy, on a Government motion.

Progress in Committee on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

THURSDAY 18 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Public Processions etc (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 19 DECEMBER—Debate on welfare to work on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 22 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the School Standards and Framework Bill.

The House will rise for the Christmas recess.

The House will also wish to be reminded that on Tuesday 9 December there will be a debate on Agenda 2000: structural and cohesion policy, in European Standing Committee B.

On Wednesday 10 December, there will be a debate on Agenda 2000: reform of the common agricultural policy, in European Standing Committee A; and a debate on Agenda 2000: a new financial framework, in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Tuesday 9 December:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 9984/97, Agenda 2000: Structural and Cohesion Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-vi (1997-98).

Wednesday 10 December:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 9984/97, Agenda 2000: Reform of the CAP. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-vi (1997-98).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 9984/97, Agenda 2000, New Financial Framework. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-vi (1997-98).]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I thank the right hon. Lady for her statement. I also thank her for arranging that there should be no Government statement on last Monday's Opposition day.

I note that the right hon. Lady announced provisional business for Monday 22 December. As she knows, my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) expressed concerns last week, which I share, about the necessity for making the House sit on that day, causing unexpected inconvenience for those who serve the House. However, a debate on educational matters would put the day to good use, although I note that it is only provisional at this stage.

I should be grateful for information from the right hon. Lady on her proposals for handling the Welsh and Scottish devolution Bills. As she knows, the Opposition feel strongly that all stages should be taken on the Floor of the House, as they are self-evidently Bills of major constitutional importance. She has mentioned some ideas to me on the matter, and I should be grateful if she would tell the House where matters stand.

I think that the right hon. Lady was present in the House yesterday for the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who pointed out that journalists had been faxed at 3.55 pm full information on the statement made by the Secretary of State for Scotland in the Scottish Grand Committee at 4.30 pm. She will also recall that yesterday I complained to her and to you, Madam Speaker, that Opposition Members read on Ceefax that there was to be a Government statement on BSE, some 20 minutes before the Government told us about the statement.

The Government persist in treating the House, its procedures and its Members with contempt. We know that the Government have a large majority, but that should mean that they respect parliamentary democracy, not that they despise it. I continue to be saddened by the fact that the right hon. Lady does not answer straight questions on such matters from me and from others and that, unlike her distinguished predecessors, she seems to see her role as defender of the Government and not defender of the House and the interests of its Members. I hope that this afternoon the right hon. Lady will address those points and the others that I intend to raise.

Will the right hon. Lady arrange for a statement by the Paymaster General on individual savings accounts? He should have made his announcement on Tuesday to the House rather than outside it. Had he done so, he might have been able to give some helpful advice on avoiding tax to the nearly 1 million savers with savings of more than £50,000 who will be worse off as a result of his proposals. I am sure that all those savers will have been interested to hear themselves described as rich by someone who has his savings safely locked up in a £12 million offshore trust.

Will the right hon. Lady please explain to the House why the Secretary of State for Social Security is the only such Secretary of State in the past 10 years not to have bothered to make the social security uprating statement to the House? Was it because she was too busy; was it because she could not quite manage the detail; or is she merely discourteous? We should be told.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the right hon. Lady for the compliments at the beginning of her comments. As I said to her hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) last week, we will try to avoid statements on Opposition days, but, as she knows from the previous Administration, sometimes situations arise in which that is unavoidable.

I am glad that the right hon. Lady thinks that we are putting Monday 22 December to good use. As she said, the business is provisional, but I do not expect it to change.

The right hon. Lady asked about the handling of the Wales and Scotland Bills. I cannot yet say anything about the Scotland Bill because it has yet to be published and we have had no discussions with the Conservative party or any other party about its handling. I said last week that we would consult other parties in the House on the handling of the Government of Wales Bill and we have done so. That is one reason why we are now providing two days for its Second Reading debate next week.

Many people in the House have strong views. The right hon. Lady has outlined her strong view that the entire Bill, in all its stages, should be completed on the Floor of the House. Others have equally strong views that better scrutiny would be achieved by using the procedure adopted for the Finance Bill and splitting consideration between Committee of the whole House and a Standing Committee, taking points of principle on the Floor and the detail upstairs.

The majority view expressed to us is that the Committee stage of the Bill should be split and that that would achieve better-quality legislation. We intend to hold discussions with other parties about how that might be achieved and what issues need to be discussed on the Floor of the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will tell the House at the opening of the Second Reading debate on Monday how we intend to proceed.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the social security statement that was made on Tuesday. Usually, such a statement is made at the time of the Budget. This year, because the Budget was at a different time, different arrangements were made. It was appropriate for a junior Minister to make that statement. He was available to make that statement on Tuesday, the day on which we thought it appropriate for the statement to be made.

The right hon. Lady also mentioned the short notice given of the statement on BSE made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday. I know from speaking to her that she understands the difficulties that can arise with that particularly difficult issue and that she understands why decisions sometimes have to be made late in the day if information becomes available, as it did yesterday.

I thank the right hon. Lady for mentioning the point of order raised yesterday by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). I, too, was concerned—as I know

[Mrs. Taylor]

you were, Madam Speaker—by the events that he related to the House. Somehow, however, he got his facts wrong. The information that the journalist showed to him at 3.55 pm had been available to every Member since 3.30 pm—when it was distributed as a parliamentary answer and was therefore in the public domain.

On ISAs, the Chancellor intends to include enabling legislation in next spring's Finance Bill. I remind the right hon. Lady that one of her noble Friends in another place said that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has acted as Ministers in the previous Administration had.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): We are to discuss the remaining stages of the Social Security Bill on Wednesday. Even at this late stage, I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will explain to Ministers how much many hon. Members hope that the Government's policy on single mothers can be changed. We do not want to be facing an undoubted dilemma. Speaking for myself, I will be faced with such a dilemma. Therefore, I trust that, even at this late stage, it will be possible for Social Security and Treasury Ministers to reconsider, and to consider the feelings of a good number of hon. Members.

Mrs. Taylor: As my hon. Friend knows—he is a regular attender in the Chamber and will have heard most of the exchanges in recent weeks—the simple fact is that we inherited a difficult situation and have had to make very difficult decisions. One thing is clear: under Conservative Governments, lone parents never had a choice, because training, child care and employment opportunities were not available. That is why the Government have set in train the mechanism to ensure that such a choice is a reality.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I thank the Leader of the House for acceding to some requests for minor changes in provisional business. It will help not only Liberal Democrat Members but those in other parties. Specifically, I thank her sincerely for affording two full days for the Second Reading of the Government of Wales Bill. It will be very helpful and much appreciated.

May I press the right hon. Lady on how the Bill will be handled thereafter? Does she accept that there seems to be a strong consensus on both sides of the House—which was represented fairly by the majority view in her Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons—that sensible programming at the outset of the Bill's Committee stage on the Floor of the House, followed by a sensible programme of detailed consideration in Committee upstairs of its specific points and schedules, would be a much better, mature and more intelligent way of dealing with it than to impose a guillotine halfway through its passage, with inadequate consideration in some of its latter stages?

Will the Leader of the House explain the apparent confusion over the Government's response to our request for an inquiry into BSE? Yesterday, in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the Prime Minister said that no decision had been taken. This morning, No. 10 Downing street briefed the press that a decision that there would be an inquiry had been taken in principle, and that it was simply a question of what type of inquiry would be held. This afternoon, a Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and said that no decision had been taken. Is she aware that there is not only confusion over the matter but pent-up anger on both sides of the House, represented by early-day motion 413?

[*That this House welcomes the confirmation of the President of the Council that the Government is actively considering the case for a judicial inquiry into the decade of mishandling of BSE; and urges its early establishment to reassure both farmers and consumers that objective lessons have been learnt from this catalogue of disaster.*]

The motion has been signed by hon. Members of all parties and urges that it is time to get on with the job, so that we can learn the lessons.

Will the Leader of the House give the House an undertaking that early-day motion 451—a humble prayer to the sovereign to have the council tax benefit regulations re-examined—will be discussed fully on the Floor of the House? That motion also expresses cross-party concerns and requires urgent attention in the House.

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his earlier remarks. I announce business provisionally in the hope that it will not be changed, but also with a willingness to listen to representations.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there has been some strong feeling about how the Government of Wales Bill should be handled. Many hon. Members have said that the Bill would be better scrutinised if part of it were dealt with in Committee but the principles were clearly established on the Floor of the House. I agree that if we can pace consideration of the Bill in what the hon. Gentleman described as a mature and intelligent way that will be to the benefit of all concerned. I will certainly bear his comments in mind.

The hon. Gentleman used the word "anger" in the context of BSE. There is anger in all parties and in Government circles at the fact that the situation is so desperate and is causing so many problems for consumers, farmers and taxpayers. There is still a lot of information that has yet to see the light of day. We should all like to know more about exactly how the crisis developed in the early stages. I can say no more than my right hon. Friends have said about the timing of any decision on an inquiry.

Any debate on council tax benefits would be subject to decision through the usual channels. I will await the hon. Gentleman's representations.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is there to be a statement on the Further Education Funding Council and on certain decisions that were made before 1 May? It seems that many of the qualifications that were supposed to be handed out to tertiary colleges using FEFC money were taken up by a firm called Link, which was a subsidiary of CRT, which in turn is backed by the junk bond dealer Michael Milken from across the water. Under the Tories, hours were being duplicated across the country and there was fraud on a massive scale.

I want the matter dealt with now because people such as Milken, and others, might want to get their greedy paws on the windfall tax and make a lot more money.

Mrs. Taylor: I cannot comment because I do not know the details of the specific allegations that my hon. Friend

has made. He has had a good opportunity to voice his concerns, and I will make sure that the relevant Minister is aware of what he has said.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Allowing for the excellent way in which the right hon. Lady has enunciated the difficulties of BSE—anyone who has had anything to do with it will appreciate the difficulties faced by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday on receiving the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee's advice—is it not important to have a debate in the House on the problems facing the beef industry, and on the process of decision making?

The decision taken yesterday dealt a further body blow to the beef industry. Would it not have been better—this could be discussed in such a debate—if the Secretary of State had advised consumers of SEAC's recommendations, acknowledged that the risk involved was infinitesimal, and left it to consumers to make up their own minds? Will not yesterday's announcement lead to further destruction and to many of our wonderful specialist butchers, who have had such a difficult time in the past few years, being put out of business?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman raises serious matters of concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Earlier today we had Agriculture Question Time, and Madam Speaker rightly allowed yesterday's statement to run longer than usual because of its significance to so many people.

There will be opportunities in the next couple of weeks for the hon. Gentleman and others to make their points about this issue. Indeed, today we have a debate on the European Union, and next Wednesday morning there will be one on the rural economy.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Following your ruling, Madam Speaker, that the Oath for Members wishing to take their seats in the House can be changed only by legislative action, should we not have a debate on that? There is a precedent in the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to change the Royal Ulster Constabulary oath from an oath of allegiance to the Crown to an affirmation to one's duty.

Constituents' cases should be dealt with by their Member of Parliament. The rest of us should not be expected to pick up cases from West Belfast and other areas, as some of us have had to do in the past.

Mrs. Taylor: Your said in your statement, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Members concerned could take up case work, that stationery would be provided for that and that they would have access to Ministers. My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 18 June;

"there are no plans to change the oath of allegiance."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 305.]

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): In the light of your ruling yesterday, Madam Speaker, in answer to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), does the right hon. Lady recall that at 4.30 pm on Tuesday the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) made his statement on uprating?

Unbeknown to hon. Members, an hour before, at 3.30 pm, the Secretary of State issued a press release to journalists outlining all the uprating details, as well as a written answer to the hon. Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell). As the right hon. Lady knows, no other hon. Members have access to those written answers, because many of them are not put in the House of Commons Library or on the letter board at 3.30 pm on the dot. The answer in question has not yet been published in *Hansard*. Does she accept that the press were given the information an hour before hon. Members on the Floor of the House? Will she apologise for what I suspect was a cock-up rather than a conspiracy?

Mrs. Taylor: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Normal practice was followed. The full technical details were given in a parliamentary answer at 3.30 pm. A press notice was issued at the same time. In an effort to be helpful, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State circulated letters to all Members at the same time, outlining the changes. I have checked that advance copies of the statement and the letter were given to the Opposition through the usual channels at 3.30 pm.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Further to the points raised by the right hon. Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) on behalf of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), will my right hon. Friend arrange for time—even Government time—to be made available for a debate on the misuse of the privilege of raising points of order, through the raising of points that the hon. Member concerned knows to be bogus?

The hon. Member for Woodspring is an experienced Member. He was a Minister in the last Conservative Government and he knows how the system works. I tabled a priority written question for 3 December asking my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to give details of his further expenditure plans for the years ahead. That was on the letter board and available to other hon. Members at 3.30 pm.

If my right hon. Friend cannot find time for a debate, the hon. Member for Woodspring should apologise to the House. The embarrassment caused to you, Madam Speaker, and to the House is clear from today's press. We require an explanation from the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure that I shall be able to provide time for a debate. I think that the events were very unfortunate, although I do not know whether the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) knew that his point of order was bogus. However, all of us have a duty and responsibility to check with any journalists who supposedly give us facts that are not known to everyone else whether those facts are in the public domain. It is important that we try to follow procedures. Part of the problem may be that the hon. Member for Woodspring and other Conservative Members are not used to being in opposition.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): With the permission of the Leader of the House, I should like us to have a proper debate on the Crown Prosecution Service. At every Attorney-General's Question Time, we hear that there are great difficulties in the CPS. My conviction is that the

[Mr. John M. Taylor]

CPS will not recover its morale unless it is given rights of audience in the higher courts. A debate on the subject would be of great importance to the justice system.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I have heard criticisms of the Crown Prosecution Service on a number of occasions. I cannot promise the specific debate that the hon. Gentleman mentions, but I know that he has been able to raise the issue several times.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Will we have an opportunity in the near future to discuss the excellent news that after-school study clubs will be established at some of our leading football clubs? Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Pele, who is arguably the finest living footballer, on his recent award of an honorary knighthood?

Mrs. Taylor: The after-school care club initiative is extremely good. There are many ways in which we can encourage children to take their studies seriously. The endorsement of such activities by someone of the Pele's stature is significant; I am sure that it will have the desired effect. I understand that Pele is visiting the House today to meet some Members; I regret that I shall not be able to be there. I will not be drawn on other footballing points on this important day in the world cup competition.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I support the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames) for a debate on the BSE crisis as soon as possible? I will go further than my hon. Friend and say that there is a crisis facing United Kingdom agriculture as a whole, as every sector is depressed for the first time in living memory and farming incomes have been dramatically reduced. There is a crisis.

On the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), I do not want to enter the debate about the Paymaster General and offshore trusts. What concerns me is the statement that the Paymaster General made outside the House about the taxation of savings, bearing in mind the fact that that is tantamount to legislation which will affect decisions already taken by people about PEPs and TESSAs—especially PEPs.

May we have a debate on savings, because the proposed changes are critical for the way in which people plan their future? We have just had a statement on long-term care, and I believe that savings changes will have an impact on that as well.

Mrs. Taylor: On the hon. Gentleman's first point on BSE and farming, he is a very experienced Member of the House, and I think that he will have no difficulty in finding opportunities to participate in debates in which he can raise those concerns.

In respect of the new savings plans that have been announced, as I said earlier, the Treasury hopes to introduce the appropriate legislation next spring and there will be plenty of time to debate it then. The basic policy is extremely welcome because it will help the many and not the few.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My right hon. Friend will know that, some time ago, the Department of Trade and Industry carried out a consultation exercise on opencast mining. When will the outcome be reported? Can she promise an early debate on opencast mining, because it is critical to the deep mining industry?

Mrs. Taylor: I know full well, not least from my constituency interests, of the concerns that many people have about opencast mining. The consultation period finished at the end of October and I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will make a statement on the matter early in the new year. There are opportunities to raise the issue in the near future, not least during the three-hour Adjournment debate just before the recess.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Concerns have already been expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) about the conduct of Ministers. The Leader of the House will be aware that the code of conduct was reissued in June or July this year and that it is now called the ministerial code. May we have a debate on the ministerial code? Does the right hon. Lady agree that the reputation of the House is put in doubt when Treasury Ministers have tax avoidance plans for £12 million and statements are made outside before they are made in the House? Those actions may have been taken in ignorance; perhaps such matters should be included in the code. They could well be included in the debate that I have suggested.

Mrs. Taylor: I agree with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) that there is no need to discuss those issues.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for outlining the work of European Standing Committee B next week. Yesterday, documents on shipbuilding were listed on the Order Paper. Will that matter be debated before the recess?

Will my right hon. Friend write to Liberal Democrat Members to remind them of their membership of European Standing Committee B, given that they have been absent, to all intents and purposes, from the past six sittings?

Mrs. Taylor: I am pleased that a new Member has so quickly come to terms with the detail of European Standing Committee B; I recommend that to others. The only debates that have been scheduled for that Committee so far are the ones that I have announced. The debates over the next week or so are extremely important. I remind the House that European Standing Committees are open to any Member of any party.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): It appears that the right hon. Lady made an illegitimate inference from the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). Has she seen this morning's leader in *The Daily Telegraph* which is headlined "Let them eat cake"? She should have seen early-day motion 555 on the conduct of the Paymaster General.

[That this House, mindful of Labour's pledge not to 'permit tax reliefs to millionaires in offshore tax havens', notes that the Paymaster General is simultaneously

abolishing PEPs and TESSAs, and is a beneficiary of the offshore Orion Trust; and calls upon him to clarify why he sold his rights to £10 million of Trans Tec shares to Stenbell, and how much of the latter he owns, and why these shares were then passed to Orion, whether he holds any other of his 30.4 million shares in Trans Tec in offshore trusts, whether Orion was the family trust noted in Trans Tec's 1996 annual report in which he held 9.8 million shares, and who increased this holding to 12.7 million shares in September 1997, and whether Orion holds any other assets, why and when he made a personal loan of $1 million to Roll Centre Inc. before its purchase by Trans Tec and whether any similar loans are extant, whether he is still in receipt of pension certification or other emoluments for Trans Tec, what agreement was conducted with the late Robert Maxwell on the 1991 company merger with Trans Tec, and why the latter sold back his shares just before his death.]

A debate on the taxation of savings next spring is not soon enough. I would welcome the opportunity now to discuss the possibility of giving England the same tax status as Guernsey, so that Treasury Ministers can invest in my constituency.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should have taken the advice of his hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton.)

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Will the Leader of the House provide time for a debate on the number and range of experiments carried out on animals? Is she aware that, according to Home Office figures, 3 million animal experiments are carried out, many of which are repetitive, unnecessary and probably unreliable? I welcome the fact that the Government have banned cosmetic testing, but that will reduce the number of experiments by only about 200, leaving a huge number.

Is the right hon. Lady also aware that at Porton Down, the Ministry of Defence has almost trebled the number of experiments carried out on animals in recent years, many of which are deeply unpleasant and very painful for the animals concerned? Is she aware that the number of animal experiments there is now at its highest since 1982? Does she understand that this is a serious matter for the public? What steps can she take to ensure that hon. Members can debate the issue?

Mrs. Taylor: Again, the hon. Gentleman has used his time well to make his points. I cannot promise time for a debate. Many hon. Members on both sides and members of the Government are concerned about the total number of experiments, but it is never easy to reduce the number overnight. The hon. Gentleman has pointed to some of the facts that have led to the increase in recent years. Some progress has been made by the ban on cosmetic testing and I hope that there are other ways in which we can continue to improve animal welfare.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Will the Leader of the House vouchsafe a debate on the quality and consistency of legal advice offered to the Government, especially in relation to European legislation? I understand that the reason why the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food rejected the first option under the SEAC proposals, and did not take the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), was that he had received legal advice against imposing a ban on under-30-months beef from outside the UK? That seems to fly directly in the face of his earlier threat to ban beef if it did not meet our stringent health requirements. There seems to be substance for a debate on legal advice.

Mrs. Taylor: I do not think that that is necessary. My right hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that he would have been acting irresponsibly if he had not taken the advice that he was given yesterday. To act quickly was absolutely essential. He also had to consider the options and decide which one was most practical and which one could be easily understood and implemented. On that basis, he made the right decision, he made it quickly, and most important, he published the advice—unlike the situation under the previous Government.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): First, may I make it clear to the Leader of the House that, in the comments that I made yesterday, I was not referring to the usual channels. I was referring to how, as an hon. Member, I was able to read not the written answer to which she referred—I apologise for missing that—but the text of the Minister's statement, which he was due to make in the Scottish Grand Committee later that day.

We would welcome a debate on the release of information to the House. There is a difference between a broad briefing—or even embargoed information—to journalists in advance and the ability of those outside the House to read full texts of ministerial statements before they are made.

The point is not one of Government against Opposition but of the reputation and standing of the House. I accept that embargoed pieces of information were made available to journalists when we were in government. The speed of, and the change in, the process are important. Debates are being conducted on ministerial statements outside the House before they are debated inside it. It is the standing of the House which matters. If we cannot control the release of information and defend the rights of Members of Parliament, who on earth will do so?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman doth protest too much. The simple fact is that the statement to which he referred was entirely based on the information that was available in the written answer, which was available to the public at 3.30 pm. He made a great deal of that yesterday, implying that my right hon. Friend the Minister had broken the conventions of the House. That was a serious charge, and I think that he ought to apologise for it.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On behalf of the official Opposition, may I say first, as the matter was raised during Question Time, that we are extremely grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for your clear, unambiguous statement earlier? That leads me to my next point.

Second only to you, Madam Speaker, in defending the interests of the House, is the Leader of the House. Her prime responsibility is to all of us. Will she rethink what she has just said to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)? Will she please take on board the very genuine concern among all parliamentarians—I use that word deliberately—at the manner in which several Government announcements have been made recently?

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

Will the Leader of the House also clarify her comments in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) on the Government of Wales Bill? She referred to consultation and a majority opinion among Opposition parties, or words to that effect. What does she mean by a majority opinion among Opposition parties? Her Majesty's official Opposition comprise the majority on the Opposition Benches, and significantly so. We are emphatically of the opinion that the traditions of the House should be maintained and that all stages of all first-class constitutional Bills should be debated on the Floor of the House. We have had no full consultation with the right hon. Lady on this point. Will she clarify her position and assure the House that no final decision has been taken on the matter?

Mrs. Taylor: On the first point raised by the hon. Gentleman, the vast majority of hon. Members welcomed your statement, Madam Speaker. I pointed out earlier that we have no proposals to change the legislation on oaths of allegiance. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

In respect of yesterday's statement and the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), Opposition Members ought to cast their minds back. Being in opposition is different from being in government. One cannot assume that one knows everything all the time. The procedures that have been adopted by this Government are no less respectful of the House than any previously adopted. The hon. Member for Woodspring simply made a mistake yesterday. There have been occasions when Ministers have made mistakes, and I have stood at the Dispatch Box, acknowledged that fact and apologised to the House. Yesterday was not one of those occasions.

There have been discussions on the Government of Wales Bill through the usual channels with the party of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and minority parties. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that his is the only party which has expressed reservations about taking the Bill partly on the Floor and partly in Standing Committee. All the parties that are represented in Wales are in favour of splitting the Bill.

Mr. Burns: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. There seems to be some discrepancy in an answer given by the Leader of the House. She seems to rest her argument on the fact that written answers are put on the board for hon. Members at 3.30 pm. That is not so. The vast majority of written answers go on the board after 3.30 pm and at any time up to early evening. So that we can get to the bottom of the issue, would you, Madam Speaker, make inquiries of the House authorities about when written answers generally go on the board and when they did yesterday—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman talks about "generally go on the board" and precisely "at 3.30 pm". What is his point of order? It is either precise or general. Which is it to be?

Mr. Burns: The point that I am trying to make, however inadequately, is that the Leader of the House said that written answers go on the board for hon. Members at 3.30 pm. They do not. They might start going on the board at 3.30 pm, but they do so throughout the afternoon and early evening—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is an administrative matter, not a point of order. Of course, I always want to be helpful to the House. We have had a good exchange on this matter, and the hon. Member might leave it at that. I shall see what I can do, without any commitment. I always seek to protect the procedures of the House and to be helpful to hon. Members.

BILL PRESENTED

School Standards and Framework

Mr. Secretary Blunkett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Davies, Mr. Stephen Byers and Estelle Morris, presented a Bill to make new provision with respect to school education and the provision of nursery education otherwise than at school; to enable arrangements to be made for the provision of further education for young persons partly at schools and partly at further education institutions; to make provision with respect to the Education Assets Board; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 95].

European Union

[Relevant documents: Developments in the European Union, January-June 1997 (Cm 3802), the Commission's Work Programme for 1998, the Political Priorities (Com(97)517), the Commission's Work Programme for 1998, new Legislative Initiatives (Sec(97)1852), European Community Document No. 9984–97 "Agenda 2000"and minutes of evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 December, HC 387.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

4.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Last week, on behalf of the Government and Britain, I visited three of the larger countries in central Europe that are seeking membership of the European Union: Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland. I commend a similar experience to Conservative Members, who bring to this debate doubts about Europe, suspicion of foreigners and anxiety to have as little as possible to do with either of them. If they visit the countries that are trying to enter the EU, they will find a consensus across the major political parties, which is in no doubt about the importance of the EU and shows a determination that their country will acquire full EU membership as soon as possible. Nor do politicians alone share that ambition. The people also share that ambition.

In the relatively intimate setting of this debate, I can risk sharing with the House the news that there was an internal split in the Foreign Office on the way to Poland on to what extent I should be frank with the Polish Government about the discriminatory duty that they apply to Scotch whisky. There was a strong view that we should tell it like it was and that such duty could not survive EU membership. There was a contrary view that that would compromise our attempt to establish warm friendship with the Polish Government. I finally decided that I had to tell it to them like it was and, if they wished to join the European Union, they had to drink whisky. Therefore, at a conference on Britain and Poland attended by 400 people, I took a deep breath and said that it was wholly unacceptable that a bottle of whisky should cost twice as much in Warsaw as in Prague.

I have to report to the House that the roof caved in under thunderous applause from all 400 present. It turned out to be the most popular statement that I made in my three days in central Europe. It underlined the fact that the ordinary people also see attractions for themselves in membership of the European Union, as workers who can export to it, as travellers who can move more freely across it and as consumers who will have easier access to the goods produced within it.

Britain has an opportunity in central Europe to strengthen our standing in Europe. English is by far the second most common language of those who live in those countries, easily eclipsing German. Older residents of those countries have memories of the historic role of Britain in defeating fascism. Indeed, the Foreign Minister of Poland recalled as a child demonstrating outside the British embassy in support of our decision to enter the war as a result of the invasion of Poland. The younger people of those countries have great enthusiasm for the authentic western culture that they identify in Britain.

Britain has a strategic opportunity, especially during our presidency, to emerge as a sponsor and a patron of membership of the European Union for those countries seeking to apply. However, one condition applies—those countries must be convinced that we want them as members of the European Union to strengthen it, not to dilute it. I allow that the previous Government supported enlargement of the European Union. Unfortunately, they took little trouble to disguise that they wanted those countries in as part of a looser, wider and weaker Europe. Those countries do not want a weaker Europe: they want to be members of a stronger Europe. That is what we want too, and that is why we give priority to enlargement.

We want a bigger, stronger Union with 100 million extra consumers, who will make even larger what is already the wealthiest single market in the world and give us a bigger voice in the world and in trade talks. A bigger, stronger Union will end the unacceptable model of a fortress Europe in which affluent countries are within and poorer countries are outside. That model is unacceptable and, as we are discovering, unsustainable, as organised crime, money laundering and drugs trafficking undermine the walls we build around the fortress.

It is because we want those countries to join, to create that stronger Union, that repeatedly those whom I met in central Europe welcomed the fact that Britain is now back in Europe, playing the part that they want us to play as a leading partner in Europe—with influence, not isolation in Brussels and with respect, not resentment in other member states. *[Interruption.]*

As usual, the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) is making boorish remarks from a sedentary position, but if he does not believe what I am saying he should read what the European papers say about the new Labour Government in Britain. Let us review what has been written in those papers in the past six months. Those six months began with the Amsterdam summit. At that summit, Britain retained the legal right to retain border controls; we stopped the merger of the Western European Union with the European Union and prevented the European Union from becoming a defence organisation; and we secured new treaty language on our priorities of employment, the environment and fraud against the Union. On the Monday after the summit, *La Repubblica* ran the headline "Britain 4—Continent 0".

The past six months have drawn to a close with the special jobs summit in Luxembourg. Britain secured at that summit guidelines that fully reflect our economic priorities of raising skills, improving the labour market and raising competitiveness. On the Monday after that summit, *Le Monde* ran an editorial under the headline "Tony Blair's summit".

I know that it is too much to hope that Conservative Members read the leading newspapers of Europe. Probably they are right in suspecting that they are written by foreigners. However, Conservative Members are alone in Europe in representing the outcome of those two major summits as defeats for Britain. I know that Tories are in opposition, but they claim to be the great backers of Britain and the British national interest. Therefore, it is odd that they persist in seeing failure for Britain where the rest of Europe sees success for Britain.

A spirit of reciprocity is appropriate in foreign relations and I hope that that spirit will inform this debate. If we review the events of the past six months, I hope that it is

[Mr. Robin Cook]

legitimate to roam over what they have meant for the debate on Europe in the Tory party. Those six months started with the general election and finished with the Winchester and Beckenham by-elections. In those six months, the Conservative party lost 21,000 electors in those two constituencies.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): You lost your deposit.

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman consults the results, he will find that we substantially increased our vote in Beckenham and reduced the Conservative majority. The magnificent response to the loss of 21,000 votes in the country by the leadership of the Conservatives was to dismiss one of the voters that they have at Westminster and to oblige the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) to cross the Floor. We are grateful for the hon. Gentleman's presence and we appreciate the generosity of spirit with which the Conservatives have lent him to us.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): You are welcome to him.

Mr. Cook: Such generosity of spirit is the hallmark of the modern Conservative party. Indeed, it has resulted in its support narrowing to the size of that of a sect, instead of a centre party, and is accurately reflected in the comments by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). We could probably have got by without the vote of the hon. Member for Leominster. We now have a majority of 177, but we could possibly have scraped through with the majority of 175 that we had before. However, the hon. Gentleman's dismissal has sent a signal to all the sane people in the centre of British politics—who share his moderate views on Europe and know that Britain must have sensible relations with its neighbours—that they are not welcome in the Tory party, as the hon. Member for Teignbridge made clear a moment ago. I offer those moderate people a message today—they are all welcome as supporters of new Labour and we invite them to support us in building a modern Britain and a people's Europe.

I am beginning to believe that some Conservative Members—possibly even the shadow Foreign Secretary—suspect that the majority of the population are on our side over Europe. The shadow Foreign Secretary spent the summer roaming the land and loudly demanding a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty. Now that the House has returned, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has tabled many questions to me, but he has not once asked me to put the Amsterdam treaty to the vote of the people in a referendum.

As amendments to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill poured in, we mounted a Howard watch. We scoured the amendments for one from him to require us to hold a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty. I have to tell the House that none has come in. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) is rescued from his indecision by the courage and vigour of the Euro-rebels on the Conservative Back Benches, who have tabled new clause 47 which calls for a referendum. Those hon. Members belong to the same party and share, as yet, the same Whip as the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Those colleagues deserve to know how much support they will get for their new clause and I hope that, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman responds to my speech, he will tell the House whether he will vote for a referendum and recommend it to all his colleagues. I hope that he will tell us whether Conservative Front Benchers have the courage to demand a referendum on the treaty. However, the reality is that the Conservative party is now terrified of another drubbing in any test of electoral opinion and does not dare risk a referendum that would expose it as split from top to bottom. As Lord Howe wrote last month, Europe now presents a crucial litmus test of the Conservatives' capacity to act as a serious alternative party of government. So far, he added, it looked like a test that they were determined to fail.

By contrast, this Government will pursue a European policy that is in the interests of the British nation. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it clear in his recent statement on a single currency that we will judge whether we are to join on the basis of a hard-headed assessment of what is in the economic interests of the British people.

We will assess that by the five tests that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out: whether there is sustainable convergence; whether the single currency has sufficient flexibility; what its effect will be on investment; what its impact will be on financial services; and whether it will be good for employment. It is right that we should assess whether we join the single currency on those tests, which are in the real interests of the British people, not by the prejudice and dogma that obsess the Conservative party.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Why do the five criteria that the Chancellor is using not include the vital criterion of the currency of denomination of trade? Is that unimportant? I should have thought that the currency in which we trade is a vital element in making objective decisions on economic and monetary union. The currency in which we trade is as important as whom we trade with.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has a perfectly fair point, but it is adequately covered by our five points, particularly the test of whether the single currency will offer sufficient flexibility. If he looks at trade, he will see that the fact is that the majority of our visible trade goes to Europe.

Dr. Fox: Yes, visible trade.

Mr. Cook: We have been here before. If we include invisible trade, visible trade still accounts for 47 per cent.—not a pass mark, I grant you—of our trade. For the Conservatives to pretend that 47 per cent. of trade is meaningless and can be passed over demonstrates the extent to which they are out of touch with reality.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Before the Foreign Secretary leaves his five tests—one of which is the effect of the single currency on unemployment—will he remind all his right hon. and hon. Friends of the effect on unemployment of fixed exchange rates in the past? Will he tell his supporters in the country that, when we joined the exchange rate mechanism in 1990, unemployment was at 1.67 million and rose to 2.85 million within 23 months?

If they do not believe that, will he remind them of what happened when we were on the gold standard between 1925 and 1931, when unemployment rose from 1.25 million to 2.9 million? Will he—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Interventions must be brief, and not speeches.

Mr. Cook: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have been quite happy to let the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) continue, because he was referring to two miserable and unhappy experiences of two miserable and unhappy Conservative Governments, neither of which has any bearing on anything done by the present Government. Nor does a fixed exchange rate have anything to do with what one does within a single currency.

Mr. Gill: The right hon. Gentleman does not understand what he is doing.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand—the great shame is that the Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was a member did not understand what they were doing.

If, at a future stage, we should resolve to join a single currency, we will put that to a referendum of the British people and let them have the last veto. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made clear, that is not likely to happen in the next six months, or even in the next four years. There is quite enough to occupy us in our European debates in the next six months.

In the foreground is next week's summit in Luxembourg. The key issue at the summit must be to obtain a mandate to take forward during the British presidency the Commission's proposals under Agenda 2000. What we require from the Luxembourg summit is a practical railway timetable towards enlargement which will enable the British presidency to start the train on 31 March.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend has talked about enlargement and the countries that are on the so-called fast track. Does he recognise that countries such as Romania are anxious—and have overwhelming public support—to get into the strong European Union to which he referred as soon as possible?

Mr. Cook: I very much understand that. We must be sensitive and recognise the strong ambitions in those countries not yet identified by the Commission as yet ready for negotiation. I am strongly of the view that the way forward towards enlargement is to commence detailed negotiations with those five central and eastern European countries, plus Cyprus, that have been identified by the Commission as ready for negotiation. Any other course would not be fair to those identified as ready for negotiation, as they would need to wait for others to catch up—a point strongly made to me when I visited the countries. Nor would it be fair to those countries that have been identified as not ready for negotiation, because membership of the EU will be a challenging and tough discipline.

We do not do any favours to countries that are not ready to withstand the market pressures of membership of the EU by prematurely bringing them in, with the disruption to their economies that that could entail. To be positive to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), we must make sure that the enlargement process is seen to be inclusive and that those countries such as Romania that look to Europe for membership are given every possible encouragement, incentive and assistance to tackle the obstacles that still stand between them and detailed negotiations.

That is why the Labour Government, during the British presidency, will wish to create a permanent European conference to bring together all the applicants—including those that have not set out on detailed negotiations—and to hold political dialogue with them. Such a conference must be one of substance; it cannot fall into the popular model of a not-very-good family photograph followed by a rather good lunch. It must have real business and substance to it.

There are issues that we could discuss with those countries—organised crime and the drugs trade are obvious and relevant topics. The issue of the environmental problems and the pollution which we share is another that we could address without getting into negotiations about accession. There may be areas of common foreign policy that we could explore with those that are not in the front rank for membership of the EU. We need to make sure that those countries are given a real sense of belonging and welcome to the European family of nations.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Foreign Secretary said that the European Union had to be inclusive. Will he say a few words about Cyprus, which is divided? I understand that that may not be a barrier to Cyprus entering the EU. If that is the case, what will be done to ensure that the population of the northern part of Cyprus will be consulted about joining the EU?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising an important part of the enlargement debate. The Government strongly support the right of the Government of Cyprus to apply for membership. We recognise that Cyprus has done a large amount over the past three years to prepare itself for membership. Were it not for the division of the island, Cyprus would be a foremost candidate for membership. It would be immensely helpful to the debate if that division could be resolved within the context of the enlargement talks.

Enlargement may provide a catalyst to bring about the solution to the division of the island. Those who live in the northern occupied sector would benefit more than anybody else in Cyprus from membership of the EU, because their income is a quarter the level in the Greek Cypriot sector. However, if it is not possible to resolve the issue of the division of the island, it is the position of this Government that it would be unfair to the majority of the people of Cyprus if its Government were to be excluded because of the continuing division. I regret that the Turkish authorities in the northern sector have refused the recent approaches by Commissioner van den Broek to include them in the negotiating team from Cyprus. It would have been good both for the division of the island and the negotiation if they had taken up the offer.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, if this country enters the single currency at some point, its democratically elected Government would be legally prohibited from making

[Mr. John Bercow]

representations to the European central bank about its conduct of monetary policy and that a democratically elected Government who sought to do so would potentially be subject to fines?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure how that naturally arose from the discussion of Cyprus, but of course the principle established in the Maastricht treaty is that the central bank will be independent and will not be subject to political interference. In that regard, it will stand in relation to the Governments of the European Union in precisely the same way that the independent central banks of Germany and of other countries stand in relation to their Governments.

Enlargement is the prime objective that we seek to achieve at the Luxembourg summit. We must not be distracted from that No. 1 goal, but, if enlargement is to be a realistic prospect, other elements of the Agenda 2000 package must be supported and will need to be approved at Luxembourg. We will go to Luxembourg determined to maintain the budget ceiling of 1.27 per cent. of gross domestic product of the European Union. Britain comes 11th in terms of per capita income in Europe and is the fifth largest net contributor, even after the rebate. It is plainly in our interest to maintain realism in the European budget.

Retaining that ceiling has consequences. Enlargement will cost money. The countries coming in are poorer than the present member states—typically, their income is one third that of member states. They will require some major industrial restructuring and economic recovery. If the European Union retains the same budget and if that budget is spent in more member states as we enlarge, it arithmetically follows that less will be spent among the existing member states. If we are not willing to face that, we should not pretend that we are serious about enlargement.

That is why we will seek a mandate from the Luxembourg summit to take forward the Commission proposals on reform of the common agricultural policy and of the structural funds, which together make up some three quarters of the European budget. In any event, reform of the CAP is long overdue. It cannot be sustainable to continue to spend 50 per cent. of Europe's budget on an industry in which 4 per cent. of the work force are employed.

It is especially important that we achieve such mandates at Luxembourg because the British presidency will start the work to carry them out. That offers Britain a rich and exciting opportunity. Next April, for instance, London will host the Asia-Europe summit, at which countries representing half the GDP of the entire globe will be present. It is a great opportunity to take further the co-operation for stable growth throughout the globe and to tackle the environmental issues that are of mutual concern throughout the globe. The summit is a great opportunity for Britain to show skill and imagination in brokering global agreements. At summits during its presidency, Britain will also represent Europe in dialogue with Latin America, the United States and Japan.

I am indebted to the *Daily Express* for revealing that a Liberal Democrat had tabled questions that revealed that I had spent more on foreign travel than any other Minister. I appreciate the newspaper's understanding remark that, as Foreign Secretary, I have at least some excuse for foreign travel, but I warn both the *Daily Express* and the Liberal Democrats that there will be even more excuses for foreign travel as we take over the EU presidency next year. I hope that the House will appreciate the validity of that.

The British presidency presents another opportunity much closer to home. It provides us with a clear opportunity to demonstrate that Europe can deliver on the concerns of our people. On jobs, at the Cardiff summit, we will review the action plans that will flow from the guidelines approved in Luxembourg. On the environment, we will take forward what action Europe needs to take to fulfil the commitments that we took to Kyoto. On crime and drugs, we will launch the customs convention and see through European initiatives to interdict the drugs trade in central Asia and in the Caribbean.

Tomorrow, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will launch the British presidency and reveal its themes and objectives. They will confirm that we have one clear determination during our presidency: to make Europe work for the people. That will be our contribution to building the Europe of the next century—a Europe that has learnt the lessons of this century.

Last week, I laid a wreath in the Warsaw ghetto at the site of the station from which tens of thousands of people went to their death. This week, I started a conference to establish the truth about the gold that was looted by the Nazis. Truth is the least that we owe in justice to the people who perished under Nazi persecution. Recording and remembering what happened in those atrocities are the best protections against them ever happening again in our continent.

Putting the record straight about what happened 50 years ago has proved challenging. It has reminded me of how different the world was only 50 years ago. While I was in Poland and in Prague in the Czech Republic, the Foreign Ministers of both countries welcomed the ethical dimension to Britain's foreign policy. They said that countries that have been the victim of realpolitik welcome a foreign policy that includes the values of human rights and democracy and is not based just on the interests of power politics.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Foreign Secretary knows that he has our full support with regard to several of the policies that he is pursuing. One of those is to establish the European code of conduct on the export of arms. Is he making substantial progress on that matter, particularly in discussions with the French? Does he agree that we cannot travel at the speed of the slowest member state? We need firm criteria and firm treaty obligations at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Cook: The great majority of EU member states have spontaneously expressed interest in our code of conduct and are pressing us to bring forward our proposals. If possible, we should like to ensure that we have a common text with our French colleagues before we go before the EU because we are the two largest arms-producing and exporting nations, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that, during our presidency, that will definitely be taken before the Council and will undoubtedly have overwhelming backing.

I was reflecting on how much has changed in the past century. Fifty years ago, Germany and Italy were only just emerging from a war in which Britain and France had been their enemies. As recently as 20 years ago, Spain and Portugal were emerging from fascism. Only 10 years ago, Russia was regarded as a super-power and the countries that I visited were its colonies. I believe that the decades ahead will show change even greater than that which we have been experiencing in the latter part of this century. In the decades ahead, the peoples of Europe will become more cosmopolitan, travel more, work more in other people's countries and more often marry people from other European countries. They will expect their Governments to be as much at ease in dealing with foreign politicians as they will be in dealing with people from foreign countries.

Economic activity will increasingly transcend national boundaries. It will become more necessary for economic policy to be co-ordinated across those same national frontiers. Knowledge and information will be received as commonly through the fibre optic cable, the internet and e-mail as through the local evening paper. Political ideas and debate will belong not just to the domestic arena but to an international stage.

Britain needs a Government to prepare it for that modern world and to shape Britain's place in that Europe of the next century. Opposition Members, or at any rate those on the Opposition Front Bench, do not merely borrow their thinking on economic and social policy from the 1930s; they borrow a foreign policy to match from the same era—an era of splendid isolation, when Britain could stand alone. It is a fitting policy for a Conservative party that does not have a single sister party in the whole of Europe, but it is no service to Britain to offer it the policies of the mid-20th century for the world of the early 21st century.

Britain needs a Government who understand the modern world, who can command respect and influence in Europe and who can relate Britain to the world outside. That is what we offer Britain—a Government who offer active leadership in the world. *[Interruption.]* I must tell the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), who has decided to grace us with his presence for this closing moment in my speech but feels that he fully understands all that has gone before, that, if he reflects on what Ministers are doing, he will understand what I am saying.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for International Development signed the Ottawa treaty to ban land mines. It was the early change in British policy on land mines that made it possible for us to play a major part in drafting that treaty in Oslo. Tonight, the Deputy Prime Minister leaves for Kyoto to break the stalemate on climate change. Our ambitious target has made us a leading voice in the preparations for that conference.

Next week, the Prime Minister goes to the Luxembourg summit as a national leader who will get respect there because he commands a united party that understands the importance of co-operation within Europe. At Luxembourg, the Prime Minister can speak with a single, clear voice in place of the different, divided voices that we hear from the Opposition. That is the sound basis on which we look forward to the Luxembourg summit and that is what gives us confidence that in our British presidency we will make Europe work for the people.

5.31 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Despite the opening and the peroration of the Foreign Secretary's speech, there was much in between with which we Opposition Members could agree. In particular, we agree that foreign policy ought to have an ethical dimension. The foreign policy of this country has had an ethical dimension under Governments of both political parties—not simply the previous Government, but other Governments too. The trouble with the Foreign Secretary's approach is that he does his case no good by misrepresenting the past and making false claims on behalf of the present Government.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary never tire of telling the House that the election of their Government has fostered what they describe as a new spirit of co-operation between Britain and her European partners. It is certainly true that they have given up a good deal, scrapping our opt-out from the social chapter, signing up to a new employment chapter and handing over more powers to the President of the European Commission. What have they gained in return? Let us examine the so-called leading role in Europe on which the Government preen themselves so often.

On 20 June, the Prime Minister went to Strasbourg to meet his European partners and President Yeltsin. All appeared to go well until it was announced that Germany, France and Russia intend to hold annual three-way summits to improve their relationship. Britain was left out in the cold.

This week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer went to Brussels to demand that Britain be allowed to join the so-called Euro X Committee. As hon. Members will be aware, that is the proposed committee of Finance Ministers from the states that intend to participate in economic and monetary union. By going to Brussels, the right hon. Gentleman gave the impression that he had already decided to join the single currency—a little presumptuous, since the people of this country have yet to give their verdict in the proposed referendum. Leaving that aside, what was the response of his fellow Finance Ministers? How did they respond to the Government's attitude of never being isolated in Europe? They made a few sarcastic comments, brushed the right hon. Gentleman aside and pushed ahead without him. It was a complete humiliation for the Government. So much for Labour's Euro-sycophancy buying British influence.

Yesterday, we obtained further details of the shabby trick at Amsterdam of which the Government were apparently the helpless victims. The extraordinary story of the Government's own allegations that they were duped at Amsterdam deserves much greater attention than it has so far received. It speaks volumes for the way in which decisions are apparently now taken by the European Union. If true, and I have no reason to doubt what the Government say, the issue should certainly be raised in Luxembourg next week.

The story begins with the Government's wholly creditable desire to put into satisfactory words the agreement reached by the previous Government to exclude the United Kingdom from the frontier provisions of the Amsterdam treaty. One of the key issues that had to be resolved was what would happen if the United Kingdom ever decided to take part in any of those arrangements. The Government wanted to be able to opt

[Mr. Michael Howard]

in without any country being able to block them, and they thought that that was what had been agreed. As the Prime Minister told the House on his return on 18 June:

"We have the power within the treaty to go into any of these areas"—

that is, asylum and immigration—

"if we want to. If we do not want to, we need not, but if we do, no other country can block us going in."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 319.]

The right hon. Gentleman was wrong, but unwittingly so. He was telling the House what he genuinely thought he had achieved, but that was not the case at all.

The truth first came to light when the Foreign Secretary appeared before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on 4 November. In answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), to whom I pay tribute in his absence for his part in unearthing this sorry saga, the right hon. Gentleman was forced for the first time in public to concede that the opt-in to the Schengen acquis was subject to unanimity.

This may all sound a little technical, but it is vital. If, for example, a future British Government wanted to opt into the Schengen acquis, another member state could prevent them from doing so. If Spain, for example, wanted to extract concessions from us on Gibraltar, it could trade its veto for those concessions. That is often the way that business is concluded in the European Union. The Chief Minister of Gibraltar told the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of those concerns.

How did all this happen? According to the first account that the Foreign Secretary gave, there was "a misunderstanding". He told the Foreign Affairs Select Committee:

"our understanding of the discussions did not entirely tally with that of the Presidency."

He explained that that was because

"our satisfaction with the note keeping of the Presidency was not as much as we would have wished it to be and there are different recollections as to what was actually said".

That seemed bad enough, but worse was to come. At oral questions last week, the Foreign Secretary revealed a little more and alleged that Spain and the Dutch presidency had struck a deal changing the treaty after the negotiations had finished. He went on to explain that he knew nothing about the deal until the following week.

One would have thought that, on such an important issue and after such an unpleasant experience, he might have got his facts right, but no—as the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), was yesterday forced to admit—the deal was struck between Spain and the Dutch presidency not after the hearings had concluded but during the summit on the night of 16 and 17 June. Moreover, far from being left in the dark for a week as the Foreign Secretary had alleged, the Government knew what had happened the day after the summit was concluded on 19 June.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I want to develop my argument before giving way.

In answer to my question as to whether there was any precedent for that sort of hole-in-the-corner, bilateral deal, the Minister of State said:

"At negotiations such as the IGC, it is not unusual for the Presidency to reach tentative understandings with a Member State on how to handle a point of key concern to them. But such understandings would normally be considered subsequently by the full meeting."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. *122*.]

I ask the House to consider the significance of this extraordinary saga. The Government's allegation is that the text of the treaty was changed, to the detriment of the United Kingdom, as a result of a private deal between two member states which was not communicated to the rest of the council. What sort of decision-making process is that? How can anyone have confidence in the integrity of the European Union if that sort of thing can happen? What do the Government intend to do about it? The Minister of State tells us that there is no precedent for this, and it certainly did not happen under the previous Government. What sort of precedent does it set for the future? Do the Government intend to raise this matter in Luxembourg? I look forward to the Minister's answers at the end of the debate.

These are not my allegations: they are the Government's allegations, set out in detail in *Hansard*. The whole shabby episode gives the lie in the most vivid terms to the Foreign Secretary's claims about the wonderful new spirit of co-operation that the election of the Labour Government is supposed to have created.

Mr. Jackson: I join my right hon. and learned Friend in hoping for a full explanation of what happened. The general point of principle is that opt-outs are not always cost-free, which is something that we should bear in mind when pursuing diplomacy in Europe in future.

Mr. Howard: Any decision involves a balance of advantage and disadvantage, and few courses of action are entirely free of disadvantage, as my hon. Friend knows.

Britain takes over the presidency of the European Union on new year's day. We shall judge the Government not by their rhetoric but by the results that they achieve. The Foreign Secretary has today set out some of his priorities for the next six months. The Labour Government, he says, want to further the cause of enlargement. We agree. He says that they want an outward-looking Europe. We agree. He says that they want a competitive Europe in which business can flourish, creating jobs for the millions of people who currently do not have them. We agree. He says that the Government want to protect the environment. We agree—but how far does the Government's record live up to its rhetoric?

Let us first take enlargement. It is the historic challenge facing our generation. That phrase, or variants of it, has been repeated so often that its impact has been blunted by over-use, but it is none the less true for all that. The peace and stability of both eastern and western Europe depend on healing the division that has scarred our continent for so long. It is also our moral duty to welcome back into the European family those states which, at Yalta, fell into the hands of an alien tyranny. For 45 years, sometimes in horrifying conditions, the peoples of eastern and central Europe managed to preserve their humanity and their European identity. In 1989, by their own courage and determination, the people of the eastern bloc threw off that alien tyranny.

In 1990, I visited the very countries that the Foreign Secretary has invited me to visit once again. The sense of release, freedom and liberty that then was so palpable in those countries had to be seen to be believed. We have an absolute obligation to extend Europe's embrace to those people today. If the Prime Minister's "people's Europe" means anything, it should mean bringing the people of Europe together once again. Enlargement to the east is in our own interests, too: the trade opportunities are immense, and failure to include our eastern neighbours would simply undermine their political stability and bolster the most reactionary and anti-democratic forces in their polities.

Politicians throughout the European Union pay lip service to those sentiments, but the will to act on them has, alas, been lacking. Every member state, as well as the European Commission, is nominally devoted to enlargement, but there appears to be little political will to tackle the difficult issues that must be addressed before enlargement can take place: reform of the common agricultural policy, lower external trade tariffs, the streamlining of bureaucracy, and changes to the structural funds, to name but a few. The gap between the rhetoric of certain European statesmen and their determination to resolve some of those issues is damaging Europe's credibility in the eyes of the world. Sometimes, the Foreign Secretary himself appears to recognise that—last week, he told a Hungarian audience:

"I do not believe in grand gestures. I believe in getting things done."

But there are few signs that much will get done.

Last week and again today, without a shred of evidence to back up the claim, the Foreign Secretary said that the election of the Labour Government had brought new hope to applicant states. I suppose it sounded like a good soundbite at the time, but it is an extraordinary claim, given his party's record. No European Government did more to assist the liberation of the former communist countries than ours—it was a Conservative Government who stood firm in the face of the Soviet threat, while the Labour party was busy advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament, hoping that, by slinking weaponless from the world stage, Britain would cease to be a target. The truth is that Margaret Thatcher brought more hope to the people of eastern and central Europe than Labour ever did; yet the Labour Government now have the gall to pretend that they are the champion of the cause of eastern Europe.

Enlargement is possible only if the European Union changes the way in which it conducts its business. The common agricultural policy, which consumes a massive proportion of the European Union's budget, as the Foreign Secretary acknowledged, cannot be sustained in its current form with 20 members; nor is it realistic to expect applicant states to adopt in full an ever-expanding acquis communautaire. The more member states there are, the greater the flexibility we need within the European Union. Institutions and mechanisms designed in the 1950s for six similar western European states cannot effectively serve the new Europe in all its diversity. The fact is that the ambition to admit even the six states identified by the Commission for early membership is quite incompatible with the continuing centralisation of authority in Brussels.

The Amsterdam summit was an opportunity to put that right—to refashion Europe's institutions so as to make them appropriate to an enlarged Community. However, far from devolving powers, Amsterdam centralised them still further. It established common social and employment policies and widened the powers of the Commission and the scope of the European Court of Justice.

Amsterdam was a blow for enlargement on two counts: first, it failed to address the reforms needed to make enlargement possible and, secondly, it made enlargement more difficult by further deepening the Union. Despite all that, the Foreign Secretary persists in claiming that Amsterdam will make enlargement easier. I hope that the Minister of State will make some attempt to justify that claim later tonight. Perhaps he would do better to drop the subject altogether—it was, after all, the Prime Minister who admitted to the House that, at Amsterdam,

"not as much progress was made"

on enlargement

"as there might have been".—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 314.]

The Government claim that they want the European Union to be outward looking and there are two practical ways in which to test their commitment on that issue. First, have they entrenched Europe's place as part of a wider western security system? Secondly, have they tackled the impediments to world trade and investment between the European Union and the rest of the world? On the first, the Government agreed at Amsterdam that

"the Union should . . . foster closer institutional relations with the Western European Union with a view to the possibility of the integration of the WEU into the Union."

That would suggest bringing us closer to a common European defence than before.

If the Government believe that the European Union has specific defence interests, how exactly do they differ from those of NATO? If it does not, why can defence co-operation among the European allies not be pursued through existing NATO structures? Some have clear answers to those questions—they argue that the whole point is to enable the European Union to punch its weight against the Americans. That is the view expressed by the French Foreign Minister and by Chancellor Kohl. Do the Government share that view? If not, why did they accept further concessions to that view at Amsterdam?

On trade, perhaps the Foreign Secretary would tell the House what practical steps the Government are taking to ensure that the European Union does not retreat into protectionism. We on the Opposition Benches take great pride in our contribution to world trade liberalisation. Had it not been for the British Conservative Government, it is highly unlikely that the European Union would have agreed to the settlement reached at the final round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade. Where do the Labour Government stand on that issue? During the most recent European elections in 1994, the Labour party's manifesto stated:

"together we can face the economic challenge from both America and Asia . . . and act as a counterweight to the increasing power of international finance and the global activities of transnational companies".

Has the Labour party changed its mind? If so, what practical steps do the Government plan to eliminate the remaining external European tariffs?

What steps will they take to reform the common agricultural policy? We used to hear a great deal about the reform of the CAP when the Labour party was in

[Mr. Howard]

opposition. What will the Foreign Secretary do to counter the creeping anti-Americanism that is shared by so many of his European colleagues?

The Foreign Secretary was reported this morning as saying that the middle east peace process would be a top priority during the United Kingdom's presidency. The right hon. Gentleman made no mention of that this afternoon. Will he tell us a little more about how he intends to go about that? Will the Minister of State deal with that issue when he replies?

We are all agreed that job creation should be a priority for Britain's presidency. It is an area in which Europe has manifestly failed to deliver. Over the past 20 years the United States has created 36 million new jobs, of which 31 million were in the private sector. Over the same period only 8 million new jobs were created within the European Union, with no increase in private sector employment. There are now 20 million unemployed people on the continent of Europe.

European countries need to tackle head on the unpalatable truth that, unless they cut their social costs and free up labour markets, they will be out-priced and out-performed by the rest of the world, and unacceptable levels of unemployment will persist. Red tape and regulation are luxuries that Europe can no longer afford.

The Government pay lip service to the need for fewer burdens on business, increased labour market flexibility and reduced barriers to employment. However, one of their first acts in office was to sign up to the social chapter and to accept a new employment chapter into the relevant treaties. We are talking of measures that will increase social regulation, place further burdens on business and destroy jobs. Last week the President of the Board of Trade confirmed that the Government will introduce a statutory minimum wage. As the Deputy Prime Minister has admitted, "any silly fool" knows that it will cost jobs. How can the Government hope to influence the debate on this issue when they are in the process of adopting the European social model that has done so much to destroy jobs in Europe?

Will the Minister of State be able to tell us this evening exactly what proposals the Government intend to put forward during the British presidency that will help to deliver the flexible labour markets that his party now claims to support? How can the Government hope to prevent damaging proposals being foisted on Britain when so much social chapter legislation will be passed by the qualified majority vote? The hon. Gentleman was certainly unable to answer those questions yesterday.

In the first few months of next year, crucial decisions will be taken on the single currency. The Government have said that they are in favour of a single currency in principle, but that they want to see how it works in practice. The Chancellor of the Exchequer believes that Britain should be preparing to join early in the next Parliament. Yet even if the single currency starts on time, stage 3 will be fully complete only by the year 2002. Will the Minister explain how the Government plan to judge the success of the currency based on perhaps a year's operation? How can the Minister's party credibly be in favour of a single currency—which is for ever—but opposed to the temporary fixing of our exchange rate through the exchange rate mechanism?

Many European politicians speak openly of the need for fiscal union as well as monetary union. In other words, the wealthier countries in Europe would have to pay to help the poorer countries cope with a single currency. As the current president of the Bundesbank, Hans Tietmeyer, recently said:

"A European currency will lead to member nations transferring their sovereignty over financial and wage policy as well as in monetary affairs. It is an illusion to think that states can hold on to their autonomy over taxation policy."

Do the Government agree? If not, why not?

Will the Minister explain why the Foreign Secretary told the House on 28 October that the Government would not be making "any application" for European Union money to promote the Euro when the Chancellor of the Exchequer had just done precisely that? If there is to be a "general information" campaign, will both sides of the argument be presented? Will we hear the case for and against economic and monetary union? Or will there merely be a propaganda campaign for a single currency?

It is a proud moment for a country to hold the presidency of the European Union, and we wish the Government well. We want to see progress made on enlargement, on jobs and on reform of the CAP. Tackling crime and environmental pollution should also be priorities. Thanks to the legacy of the Conservative Government, Britain can now hold its head high in Europe.

Mr. Robin Cook: Surely the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not move into his peroration without giving us his latest state of thinking on a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty. Will he now answer my question? Will he be recommending that his colleagues vote for new clause 47?

Mr. Howard: I note with great interest that the Foreign Secretary did not rise to intervene in my speech when I described the shabby trick perpetrated on his Government at Amsterdam. He did not seek to challenge one detail of the recital that I set out. The referendum is the Government's problem, not ours. It is the Government who are so keen on referendums. It is the Government who are holding referendums on Scottish devolution, Welsh devolution, regional devolution and on whether there should be a mayor and an authority for London. It is the Government who are so besotted with referendums.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman demanded a referendum as recently as October. When did he change his mind and why did he change it?

Mr. Howard: As I have said, it is the Government who are besotted with referendums. If the Government are so keen on them, the logic of their position is that they should hold one on Amsterdam.

I was dealing with job creation. We in this country have a higher proportion of working-age people in work than any other country in the EU. On the environment, thanks to the action of the Conservative Government, we are meeting our Rio target for cutting greenhouse gases. On law and order, we have seen crime fall every year for the past four years, to a greater extent than ever before.

Our vision for Europe—the Conservative vision—is of an outward-looking, flexible Europe. The nation state must remain the basic building block of the EU.

People are naturally proud of their own countries and politicians who ignore that sense of pride do so at their peril. Trying to build new institutions or transferring wide-ranging powers from long-standing institutions to new ones will end in disaster if those new institutions do not have the wholehearted support of those whom they are supposed to serve. That is why we oppose the extra powers for the European Parliament and the extension of qualified majority voting as agreed at Amsterdam. It is also why we argued for reform of the European Court of Justice.

The Government have made an inauspicious start in their relations with the European Union. They have been cold-shouldered out of the Franco-German-Russian troika, blackballed from the Euro X Committee and duped over the opt-in to the Schengen acquis. It has been a sorry saga. The Conservative Government demonstrated that it is possible both to stand up for Britain's interests and to lead in Europe. The Conservative Government simultaneously fought for our rebate and created the single market. We obtained the opt-out on economic and monetary union that the Labour Government are using. We raised the standard for a dynamic, outward-looking, job-creating Europe. We shall continue to keep that standard held high in opposition, and we shall hold the Government to account.

5.59 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke eloquently about the need to ensure the enlargement of the European Union to bring in the countries of the former Soviet Union—the colonies, as he described them. We on the Government Benches do not begrudge him his travels to those countries to ensure that the principles of democracy are well founded and well established, but I could not help thinking—a little heretically, I have to say—that if we were not, member of the European Union, what would the Foreign and Commonwealth Office do, poor thing?

I shall concentrate my remarks on the budget. My right hon. Friend mentioned the budget and, quite properly, said that there have to be changes somewhere along the line. Chapter 3 of "Developments in the European Union" mentions the budget for the calendar year 1998 but does not mention—I make no criticism, as it had not been mentioned in previous years—Britain's net contribution. It is quite difficult to find out our net contribution in any particular year, because we still deal in fiscal years and "they over there" deal in calendar years, and because the payments coming in do not always immediately match the payments going out. It is not easy to forecast at the beginning of a year the projects that will be accepted and the payments that will come in.

I finally found some figures in the old-fashioned Red Book of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I am not sure whether we still have a Red Book—I found two red and green books. The figures were merely forecasts, and perhaps this year has been a bit better because of money coming in as a result of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy problems—I do not know—but over the next three years our average net contribution will be about £2.5 billion. That has, more or less, been the average figure over the past few years. That is a lot of money. The result of 1p on income tax is, I am told about £1.8 billion, so £2.5 billion every year comes close to 1½p.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is that all?

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend asks, "Is that all?" but we shall argue next week about £400 million in respect of single-parent families. He might not think that £1.8 billion or £2.5 billion is much, but compared to the £400 million they are large sums of money. Over four years, that £2.5 billion amounts to £10 billion.

Some of us go back a long way in the House. Indeed, some of us were at the Treasury when the transitional period came to an end. In 1978–79, our contributions shot up. Eventually—it took three or four years—Mrs. Thatcher, with considerable political will, was able to obtain the Fontainebleau agreement. If it had not been for that agreement, our contributions would now be about £4 billion a year. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister a rhetorical question. What will happen to the Fontainebleau agreement as we move towards 1999 and 2000 and the restructuring of the budget? I am sure that my hon. Friend does not know, and I do not blame him for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) might not think it a lot of money, but I found an article in *The Economist* of 9 August 1997, entitled "Who pays most?" It includes a table for the calendar year 1995. The figures were taken from the Court of Auditors report. To show that I at least try to do my homework, I looked through the latest Court of Auditors report to see whether there was a similar table, but I did not get further than volume one. There might be a second volume, but I do not think that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who has, perhaps, spent more time than I have studying this in the past few days, could find a similar table either.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): It may interest the right hon. Gentleman to know that various members of European Standing Committee B asked for those figures precisely because they could not be found. The figures have not been released, despite the fact that four weeks have elapsed. I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that that suggests that the figures are rather worse.

Mr. Davies: Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can supply the hon. Gentleman with the figures when he replies to the debate.

The article shows that, in 1995, Germany contributed 140.2 per cent. of total net contributions to the European Union budget. The gross domestic product per person in Germany, as a percentage of the European Union average, was 106.7 per cent., whereas France's percentage of total net contributions was only 18 per cent.—its GDP, at 107.2 per cent., was higher than that of Germany. Italy did even better with a net contribution of 6.4 per cent. and a GDP of 101 per cent. Chancellor Kohl has every right to complain, as do we, because according to the table, we contributed 49.3 per cent of total net contributions. Almost half the net contributions to the budget came from Britain, whose GDP per person was 98.2 per cent.

I understand how the budget works—we have all looked at it in great deal detail, and the position might be different this year—but it is extraordinary that we were contributing almost half the net contributions, yet, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, we are well down the line in terms of GDP per person.

[Mr. Davies]

I could not help looking at the figures for Ireland. I do not want to inflame Welsh farmers and make them throw any more very delicious Tesco beefburgers into the waters of Holyhead harbour, Fishguard or anywhere else, so I shall mention this quietly, but Ireland's net contribution to the EU budget was minus 19.7 per cent. In 1995 its GDP per head as a percentage of the EU average was 85.3 per cent., which is the same as the GDP per person in Wales. In fact it is probably slightly higher than in Wales. One can understand why Welsh farmers feel aggrieved when their incomes are going down and they have to endure imports of Irish beef. Welsh farmers contribute—perhaps they do not pay as little tax these days as they would like—to the European Union, whereas Ireland receives so much money back. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary well understands the problem, but we really must look at the figures.

It used to be said that these payments are for being members of the club. I have not heard the latest "clitch"—as Ernie Bevin used to describe it—recently, but the European Union used to be described as a club, and we had to pay a membership fee. Clearly some countries do not pay a membership fee; others pay a very large membership fee. That should be examined.

Local authorities and enterprise groups around the country set up projects so that we can get a bit of our own money back. I do not blame the Treasury for encouraging them to do so. Some very good projects are dreamed up. In a recent debate, hon. Members representing Liverpool were worried about the city losing its objective 1 status. I asked rhetorically, "How on earth did Liverpool obtain objective 1 status"? I am told that perhaps the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) arranged it, but I do not know. Parts of south Wales are much poorer than Liverpool: it is not the poorest region, area or town in Britain. Large parts of south Wales are much poorer in terms of gross domestic product than Liverpool, but they do not have objective 1 status. I mention that en passant.

We are always looking for projects. Many of them do not stand up to proper economic analysis. It is nice to have the money, but I get the impression that many of these projects merely provide work therapy for the middle-class people who run the enterprise groups. They are earnest, energetic men and women, who go off to Brussels with large folders. They try to pretend that this money is beneficial to their areas: perhaps much of it is.

Mr. Gill: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very interesting point. Should not that money be spent in accordance with the wishes of the House? The right hon. Gentleman referred to our net contribution to Europe, but surely we should concentrate on our gross contribution. That huge amount of money goes beyond these shores, and other people decide how it should be spent. That money must be raised from the British taxpayer, not just the net amount.

Mr. Davies: I tried to find out what our gross contribution is, but I gave up, because I could not work it out, so I shall leave the point there. Perhaps the hon. Member for West Dorset, who is itching to intervene, could tell us?

Mr. Letwin: As always, I have followed the right hon. Gentleman's remarks with great interest. Is he aware of a further problem that is dawning? It relates to the point that he has just made. The Community's budget has traditionally been adjusted from year to year on the basis of expectation. We discovered from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury that it now lies about 40 per cent. above actual expenditure in the past year. If, in this coming year, the European Community spends up to the budget provided for 1997–98 in the preliminary draft budget and the draft budget, the net and the gross contributions to which the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) referred would rise by 40 per cent.

Mr. Davies: Some years ago, the Treasury tried to explain to me about commitments and actual payments. In those days, the good old Treasury did not like this system. It did not like making commitments for future years: it likes to sow and reap in one year. The Treasury has been worn down, and has had to give in to this new fashion. I accept and understand the hon. Gentleman's point.

If we did not have to pay the £2.5 billion, there would be plenty of money for Liverpool. There would be no need to worry about losing objective 1 status, because the money would come from good, old-fashioned public expenditure.

That £2.5 billion is a charge on the Consolidated Fund, and we cannot do anything about it. All Chancellors and Chief Secretaries have to consider cutting public expenditure, but they cannot cut the £2.5 billion, because it is a charge on the Consolidated Fund. The Chancellor is keeping to the same control totals as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe. He has control over the vast range of public expenditure, but he has no control over our contribution to Europe: if the figure goes up, he can do nothing about it. It is a different type of payment.

During the debates on the treaty of Amsterdam, several hon. Members referred to qualified majority voting. As a matter of principle, I am not too happy about qualified majority voting. I take the old-fashioned view that international organisations should determine matters by consensus. We are told that, if there had not been qualified majority voting, the single market would not have been created. That is an a priori statement: I do not know how it can be proved. At the Uruguay round, a hundred countries were able to agree, not by qualified majority voting but by consensus, on the most major step forward in the freeing of international trade since the general agreement on tariffs and trade was established at the end of the second world war.

Britain could be outvoted on a matter involving expenditure. A few years ago, large sums of money were quite rightly spent on cleaning up our beaches and ensuring that our water was clean and fit to drink. Whether that expenditure was decided by qualified majority voting, I do not know. Britain could be in the minority on such a decision. That expenditure would become a charge on the Consolidated Fund. A future Chancellor could not take such expenditure into account when determining cuts in public expenditure. The area of public expenditure over which a Chancellor, and ultimately the House, has control would thereby be reduced. That is contrary to the democratic control that we like to think we have over expenditure.

We are a modernising Government: we are modernising the constitution, the welfare state and the electoral system. Let us have a bit of modernisation of the European Union. I know that it will be difficult. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) should not laugh, because this is a serious point, and I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends are taking it to heart. The Government's energy and desire for modernisation should be focused. It will be a hard battle. Baroness Thatcher managed it to some extent, but the Labour Government in 1978–79 failed because they lacked the political will at the top. If there is now the political will, we can modernise this wretched budget, so that we do not pay in any more than we take out.

6.17 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree on two points. The level of debate in this country on the subject of Europe has been far too low. It has been conducted at the level of five-year-olds wearing pro-European and anti-European badges. There is far too little debate in the public domain, as reported from this House by members of the press who are again absent today. There is far too little debate about the substantive issues involved in these complex subjects.

For a few days, I tried to look at the newspapers objectively to see whether I, as a member of the public, could glean any understanding of the issues. I was fully aware of who was on what side, who the personalities were and who their opponents were, but I was totally incapable of deducing from the written press what issues divided the individuals. I am afraid that that has been one of the pitfalls in recent years. We should take the debate to the level of the contribution of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). The Conservative party will be leading the debate in the next four years or so, while we wait to return to government.

There is another debate that we should have: the debate that dare not speak its name. We should determine the parameters in our relationship with the European Union. Both the Conservative party and the Labour party are split on Europe: they are the only two parties that matter, because they are the only two parties that will govern this country. The split is not down the middle.

There are splits on the fringes of the parties. Some people say, "We must get out of Europe because it is foreign." Others say, "We must accept everything with a Euro prefix because it is necessarily wonderful." The vast majority of us are in the middle, and we consider objectively what is in Britain's interests. We do not engage in knee-jerk reactions, pro or anti. An institution can be only what we mould it to be. Therefore, we cannot accept the words of those who say, "We must get out of Europe because we do not like some things in it," nor can we say that we must stay in Europe at any price, irrespective of what Europe dishes up. Those are not rational positions for a Parliament which says that it governs in the interests of the British people.

We must be frank about the good features of Europe. The Foreign Secretary spoke about Europe's ability to take Spain, Greece and Portugal within a short time from military dictatorships to stable democracies. However, we must also be frank about Europe's bad features. In countries such as Spain, there is utterly unacceptable structural unemployment. More than a third of young people are out of work, and that is quite unacceptable. In terms of enlargement, we must accept all those arguments, because, if there is to be meaningful and successful enlargement, there must be fundamental policy changes in Europe, not least to the common agricultural policy, which would simply be incapable of sustaining the strains that would result from the increase in membership from eastern Europe.

There must also be a change in the culture of the European Union. A good example of how that culture must change came to my desk when I was a Foreign Office Minister in the previous Government. The Germans, the French and others were championing the newly emerging democracy of South Africa. They said, "We want to help. We want to do everything possible." Their first chance to help was to open European barriers to South African trade. They said, "Of course we can open them, but not to agricultural products." That was the one area in which we could have helped that emerging economy, but we were incapable of doing it because, despite all the rhetoric about the EU having an outward-looking foreign policy, when it came to challenging the interests of small French and German peasant farmers, the politicians could see no further than their next election. That is the fault line in the enlargement process.

The European Union's approach to the third world needs a great deal of looking at again. If we are serious about helping developing countries, the one action that we in Europe can take is to open our markets to their goods. There is no point people in Europe saying that they want to help while operating protectionist policies. As a free-trading country, Britain must take the lead on that. We need a new outward-looking Lomé convention and a new African, Caribbean and Pacific arrangement, so that the ACP countries are dealt with on the basis of their economies and not their geographical locations. It is nonsense to treat a country with a single-commodity economy in the same way as one with a large complex economy and give them the same aid.

Britain can be proud of the quality of its aid. In my experience of dealing with that subject as a Minister, there is a great deal to be desired about the way in which the European Union manages its aid projects. There is a great deal more to be said for the cost-effective way in which we manage such projects than about the way in which they are managed through the EU. I hope that the Government will look again at the relationship between our bilateral and multilateral aid programmes, especially in terms of aid that goes through the EU and the quality of the aid that we can deliver relative to the size of our budget.

We have a pivotal role in Europe, because we are not just European—we have a wider perspective as a result of our history, our links with the United States and our membership of the Commonwealth. Those factors give us a different perspective from that of our European partners. In Europe, diversity is almost regarded as bad. We should be proud of the fact that we have a different perspective to bring to Europe. Perhaps the greatest feature that we can bring to it is that we are a free-trading nation.

I have great respect for the Foreign Secretary, but I was appalled when he tried to perpetrate the con that is so often perpetrated about the quantity of our trade and its

[Dr. Liam Fox]

relationship to Europe. He said that the majority of our trade was with Europe. It was only when he was pulled up about whether he was referring to visible trade that he gave way. For anyone to pretend in this nation in 1997 that our invisible trade is less important is utter nonsense. I think that it goes back to Labour's dislike of financial services and the City of London and to some of the basic character traits that no soundbite can quite excise. It shows that Labour is not as in tune with the importance of the City of London and our invisibles as it should be.

No matter how one looks at it, arithmetically, if 47 per cent. of our trade is with the European Union, 53 per cent. is with countries outside the EU. That means that it is far more important for us to have an outward-looking Europe and to move towards further trade liberalisation. We must take some matters on board. Since the beginning of the decade, only two countries in Europe have sustained their share of world trade. Italy has held its share, while Britain's share has marginally increased. Every other country in the EU has had a diminution in its share of world trade in this decade.

Why, oh why are the Government signing us up to the possibility of having legislation imposed upon us, when that legislation has led to the very Euro-sclerosis that has resulted in the other European countries losing their share of world trade? We have worked hard to deregulate our economy and to increase once again the proportion of world trade that we are able to call British. Why should we want to put ourselves at a positive trading disadvantage?

Mr. Bercow: Did my hon. Friend notice how the Foreign Secretary failed to respond to the point that in the United States between 1974 and 1994, some 31 million private sector jobs were created, whereas the figure in the European Union was nil? That is the comparison between the deregulated market in the United States and the over-regulated labour market in the European Union.

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Perhaps I may paraphrase what he said. The real people's Europe is the one in which people are working, not the one in which politicians get to fulfil the timetables of their political dreams. What we mean by a people's Europe is one in which prosperity and economic freedom are given to the people; not a Europe in which those who lead European political parties get to follow utterly false political timetables to bolster the political esteem in which they hold themselves rather than to help their nations.

One of the big problems is that Europe is driven by abstract political considerations. If Europe moves together at some time in the future, there may be arguments for structural economic change. But what if it does not? If we all move around more freely, learn to speak the same language, and have proper pension arrangements and genuine convergence, we can make appropriate arrangements. We do not close a hospital in the hope that people will get healthy next year. We wait to see what happens first.

What is currently happening in Europe is dangerous. I am not in any sense anti-European, but if the present process is driven too fast and too far, we risk losing all the good that Europe has done and which I mentioned earlier. There is a positive danger of driving Europe into a nationalist backlash, which will result in the resurrection of all the political traits that we sought to eliminate by having the European exercise in the first place. The Government are doing nothing to put the brakes on the current process: they are merely trying to gratify their own egos at European conferences.

Mr. Letwin: When the Foreign Secretary was speaking, there was an interesting example of precisely that problem. The Foreign Secretary systematically confused, did he not, the word "weaker" with the "word looser"? Is it not exactly part of our thesis that a looser union may be a stronger union and could be sustained?

Dr. Fox: The final part of my hon. Friend's intervention is exactly right: sustainability is the issue. There is no point in reaching a short-term solution that will enable pro-European Governments to rush to their electorates. What matters is that over the next 20 to 100 years we can create stable institutions. Just as there must be more flexibility in the wings of an aircraft as the aircraft gets bigger, so in Europe we shall fall out of the sky by trying to achieve too much, too fast.

We must accept that our European partners are not only partners; they are competitors on the world market. It gives me no great pleasure when a company locates in Germany or France, as opposed to the United Kingdom. I do not think, "Hurrah—more jobs have come to Europe." The job of the House is to defend British interests. I am not here to defend the economic interests of the electorate of Athens, South or Lisbon, West. Our job in this House is to do what is good for the British people. As long as we are competing, we must keep a competitive economy.

There is a fundamental difference of view between us—a free-trading nation—and some of our European competitors. Whereas we have always seen the European Union as a potential stepping stone to world trade liberalisation, there remain too many politicians on the European continent who see it as a means of protecting their own economies from the harsh economic winds that blow in a global economy.

We cannot be both a free-market Europe and a fortress Europe: only one of those views can prevail. We must ensure that a free, outward-looking Europe prevails. I have no great confidence at present that that view will prevail.

I look at the examples of how we have worked together in recent years, and I shudder at the prospect of EMU. One of the questions with which the Foreign Secretary did not deal adequately—I look to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), to deal with the matter this evening—is the currency of denomination of trade.

When I was a Treasury Whip, and subsequently, I believed that there were figures held in the Treasury that were unhelpful to those who wanted to push forward the EMU agenda, so on 2 May, or as soon as I could, I used one of the few advantages that we have in opposition, to try to get the whole answer out of our former civil servants, rather than half the answer, which we knew previously. I started to ask questions about currency of denomination.

On 19 June, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury replied:

"The most recent official data on the currency of invoice of UK trade can be found in the Central Statistical Office's Business Bulletin, Issue 12/89 'Currency of Invoicing', published on the 15 December 1989. The currency of invoice of UK trade is one of many factors the Treasury considers in assessing the short-run impact of exchange rate changes on the economy."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 268.]

I was a little perplexed. If the Treasury was using that to measure the short-run impact on the economy, but had no information since 1989, what on earth was going on? Either the Treasury used eight-year-old statistics to try to monitor the present economy—unlikely—or the Treasury has been gathering such information, but has decided that it is probably in our interests as a Parliament not to know about it, because it might not suit the Treasury's agenda.

I tried and tried, and with the open government that we now have, I have almost got there after several months. In November I received an answer from the Economic Secretary, which states:

"Publication of regular data on currency of invoice ceased in 1988"—

so the previous answer was wrong:—but

"the available evidence suggests that use of foreign currency is fairly stable over time."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. *625-26*.]

I am unable to get the data, but at least that one-sentence summary of the data shows where we were in 1989. The point is this: when a previous Chancellor followed the policy of shadowing the deutschmark, we were conducting intensive studies to show which currencies the UK traded in. The result was that at that time, with whichever trading partner and whichever goods we traded in, about 89 per cent. of our trade was done in sterling or in dollars. What proportion was done in deutschmarks? Four per cent. of our trade, and the Treasury says that that is stable over time.

That cannot provide an economic case for linking sterling with another continental European currency. If there is an economic case, it must surely be to link sterling with the dollar. If what the Treasury now tells us is true, we would merely substitute sterling-dollar volatility for euro-dollar volatility. Although the continental economies that trade in their own currencies would be protected from the uncertainties of interest rate changes, we would hand over a trading advantage while getting no advantage for ourselves.

I may be utterly naive, but I do not believe that we are here to provide our European competitors with a trading advantage. That may be helpful to the Prime Minister in gratifying his ego when he goes to shake hands with the masses on the continent of Europe, but our job is surely to protect the interests of those who take part in the British economy.

Mr. Gill: Would my hon. Friend be interested to know the answer that I received to a question only this week, when I asked what consideration the Treasury would give to linking sterling to the dollar? The Treasury's answer was,"None." Does that surprise my hon. Friend?

Dr. Fox: Frankly, I am surprised at any straight answers that come out of the Treasury. On that particular answer, it does not surprise me that the Treasury should say that. The essence of the argument is that EMU is not an economic case. It might be partly an economic case, but EMU is about politics. It is about whether we move to a united states of Europe.

If we have a single currency, we shall have a single issuing authority. If we have a single issuing authority, we shall have a single monetary policy. Sooner or later, we shall have a single fiscal policy, because the Commission will extend the current proposals on fiscal harmonisation, and we shall be in a united states of Europe.

I did not give up my relatively lucrative career as a GP to become a district councillor. I do not think that we should sit back while the argument is made about the diminution of our sovereignty economically and politically, and pretend that it is an economic argument.

Mr. Letwin: My hon. Friend suggests an extremely interesting line of argument. Does he agree that it could be taken one step further? It is a matter not merely of the trade weighting of our currency, which he so powerfully illustrates, but of convergence. If there is genuinely an argument for EMU in terms of economic convergence, does he agree that our convergence with the economy of the United States is at a far more advanced state of development than our convergence with the economies of continental Europe?

Dr. Fox: I am almost tempted to go down the line of debate that my hon. Friend suggests, but as he is far more expert in it than I am, I shall not do so, and also because I do not believe that we must link our currency to anything at all. I am quite happy for our currency to remain utterly unlinked. We have done dramatically well in the past decade using sterling in the current world trading environment.

For all the European dreams, oil will continue to be sold in dollars, and it does not matter how important Europe thinks it is. That is what the markets do. The commodities traded through the City of London will continue to be traded in dollars, because that is what the world does. It may be inconvenient for Europe to realise that it is not the centre of the world, and that what is said in Brussels will not be globally interpreted as the law.

There is a real world out there, and real markets that represent the cumulative economic activity of billions of people, and they are more important than what bureaucrats say in the European Union. We must understand that, because it will make the difference between our economic success in the future, and our economic failure.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I shall not interrupt him again. I was by no means suggesting that we should link our economy to the dollar. Rather, I was using that as an illustration of his argument that EMU is a political project, not an economic one. Were it a purely economic argument, serious consideration would be given to the two possibilities. Because it is being undertaken for political reasons, only the possibility of EMU is being considered.

Dr. Fox: There might be a point in the future at which such was the economic convergence that we would have

[Dr. Fox]

to consider whether the economic well-being of what existed in the real world outweighed the loss of political sovereignty, but we are not at that point now.

The project is being pushed too far, too fast, on a political timetable, not an economic timetable. That is where its weakness lies. It is not outward-looking. It pretends that Europe can do more in the world economy than it actually can.

My argument is not that Europe is foreign. My argument is that Europe is not foreign enough. It contemplates its own navel far too much, and looks to the outside world far too little. That is an inherent weakness in the European case. We need a Europe that looks outward, that is built on the nation state and that respects the nation state. I have no problem being Scottish and being British at the same time, and incidentally, representing a west country seat. At the same time, I am an unashamed Unionist. I have no problem being British and European, but I have no intention of ever being European first and British second. I am happy to co-operate with our European partners, to work with them and to share sovereignty when it is in our mutual interest to do so, but I do not want to be governed by them. Therein lies the difference.

New Labour talks about new influence, but we are sidelined and will continue to be sidelined. The people's party talks about a people's Europe, but it delivers a politician's jamboree. The Prime Minister talks about promoting Britain's interests, but he gratifies his own ego at the same time as providing us with a slow surrender. We have no confidence in the Government's ability to defend and promote our interests in Europe, but it gives us no pleasure that that is so.

6.40 pm

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I am pleased to be called in this debate, which is particularly appropriate for me. It is a sort of maiden speech mark II and it is many years since I made my first one. It is symbolic that I should follow three of what I would term Euro-sceptical speeches, albeit of varying intensity, and I would not say that I disagree with everything that was said in them.

It is symbolic, too, that I should follow the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)—I am sorry that he has chosen to go for a breather, or wherever he has gone—because he has been a personal and family friend for 37 years. During that time, particularly the latter part of it—this is necessary background—he and I have parted political company increasingly generally, but particularly on Europe in recent years. That is sad. It happened when I sat on the same Benches as the right hon. and learned Gentleman, both in opposition and in government. What I am going to say now is nothing different from what I have already said from the Conservative Benches, and I am sure that everybody is all too familiar with my views.

What ran through my thoughts and emotions as I listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe was that it is too distant a dream to believe that we could ever have a debate in the House, particularly between the two Front Benches, that is constructive about Europe; about Britain within Europe and advancing towards the leadership of Europe. I very much regret the fact that there is a gulf between the two major parties. I respect the strength of the views held by those who take a Euro-sceptic position—I have always respected their views and I have had many outings of various sorts with them over the years—but it is not healthy for British politics and it is not in the national interest.

This is obviously a bit of a personal statement. It is an opportunity for me to make a general speech about Europe. That is why I waited for this debate rather than indulging in debates in the Committee considering the European Communities (Amendment Bill), as that would have limited my comments. I value the opportunity to make this personal statement. I shall stick to Europe, but I shall include a little about what has happened to me in relation to recent events to do with the European Union.

I am sure that everyone will be relieved to know that my few words will not develop, in their motivation or intent, into any sort of attack on my former party. Obviously, there will be criticisms because, goodness knows, I made my views known when I was sitting with my former colleagues.

It is worth remarking that I have served in the House for nearly 24 years as a Conservative Member. Throughout that time, I have been a known and active pro-European. My views are the same now as they were when I first came to the Bar to take my seat. Goodness knows how many speeches I have made in the Chamber about Europe over the years, let alone the broadcasts I have made on virtually every aspect of the subject. One of the main things that brought me into British politics and into the Conservative party—I must emphasise that—was Britain's future within the European Union. Therefore, this is a sad speech for me.

I have dealt with my role in the Conservative party and with my increasing discomfort within it. I have not enjoyed, and have positively suffered over—this is a known fact and not a criticism—the fact that the Euro-sceptic drift of recent years has become increasingly pronounced. I believe that, during the previous Parliament, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—I say this as a tribute to him—had a miserable time. In my estimation—there is a reasonable chance that he would agree with me—I think that he found the Conservative party virtually impossible to lead on European matters.

I believe fundamentally that the trend within the Conservative Government, and now the Conservative Opposition, is profoundly against the national interest. I believe that Britain belongs in Europe and should be a leader of Europe. We have a unique contribution to make, and I am delighted that we are now setting the stage for actively making that contribution.

I have been overtly in favour of a single currency in principle for many years. I said that on at least two occasions in the House while still belonging to the previous Government—I have held my view for a long time. I campaigned overtly in favour of a single currency in principle during the general election, and, for the first time, for obvious reasons, I had a personal election message on my election address, which was sent to all my electorate. I came out in favour of a single currency, in spite of all the clamour and drama that was going on with

millionaires' money going around the place. I campaigned publicly in that way and I am pleased that I did so in view of what I have now felt obliged to do.

I have now come to the more recent run of events, but I cannot give the House the whole saga of what I have gone through. The culmination almost came some weeks ago when I was in Dublin with the Foreign Secretary. In fact, it did not come then; because of events, it took place just two weeks later.

I find totally unacceptable the shadow Cabinet decision of 23 October that, put simply, Britain should be outside a single currency for 10 years or at least the next Parliament. I am told that I had a freedom to express my views within the Conservative party—although the action towards me does not seem to suggest that—but I could not put myself forward as some sort of licensed dissenter. By standing as a Conservative candidate, I would be campaigning for a party to be elected to the Government of this country when it had views with which I was licensed to disagree. I cannot accept that shadow Cabinet decision in principle. It is totally the wrong decision.

The decision is that we should be outside a single currency for 10 years and then, apparently, we might be able to join after 11 years. The decision to be out for good and to be against a single currency in principle—I believe that many of my former hon. Friends think this anyway—is something which one could respect and with which one could disagree. Just clutching 10 years out of the air is politically irresponsible, because circumstances could change. If one is not against it in principle, it seems peculiarly foolish to set a time limit when circumstances might change. Within those 10 years, it may become manifestly in the national interest to join a single currency. If, by some accident of fate, we had a Conservative Government during that time, the country would be gravely disadvantaged.

Dr. Fox: The Government are preparing to enter the EMU after the next election without knowing what the risks might be. That system is unproven and there is no exit mechanism. Is that not an infinitely greater risk?

Mr. Temple-Morris: I will deal with the Chancellor's statement later in my speech, but I agree with it. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the grounds for joining were set out very thoroughly in the statement. Any delay in the matter, which may not be in the national interest, has very little to do with the Government and virtually everything to do with the legacy that they have inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Is there really all that much difference between the Government's position—which is to hold a referendum in perhaps five or six years, after the next general election, and to join a year or so after that—and that of the Opposition?

Mr. Temple-Morris: There is every difference between the two positions, most especially because the Government have made a decision in favour, in principle, of a single currency. It is as simple as that. There is now—since day one after the general election—a totally different attitude in virtually every Government pronouncement on Europe, in marked contrast to the previous Government's constant hostility over things European large and small, which did this country absolutely no good. The previous Government's pronouncements were made for petty and party advantage, and their strategy did not work in the general election, which was the ultimate proof.

I have been obliged to state, because of interventions, that I can easily accept the Chancellor's statement of 27 October. I welcome a decision in favour in principle of a single currency. The decision is vital. I cannot understand how Conservative Members can say that—somehow, by using some miracle or conjurer's smoke—they are anywhere near the Government's position on the matter. Anyone who has listened to the early speeches in the debate, Front-Bench or Back-Bench, will be very clear about that.

The statement on the Government's position was pragmatic and sensible, and its timing was utterly understandable. As I began to say earlier in my speech, a referendum on joining is to be won. Anyone who believes in Britain's joining a single currency realises that rigorous terms will have to be met before we can do so, and that we will have to win that referendum.

Any fair observer will have to agree—it is widely acknowledged in the press—that the Government's inheritance has not been a good one. Years and years of constant Euro-bashing, which continues, has had its expected influence on the British public. Moreover, the Government's task has not been made any easier by large elements of the media, tabloid or broadsheet. The views of one or perhaps two newspapers almost make the Conservative party sound like Euro-enthusiasts, which is quite an achievement in this day and age.

The referendum is an important factor for the Government. I provide a case in point on a referendum, because of the considerable correspondence that has come my way over the past 10 days. My view—both personally and from the sensible contents of that correspondence and having talked to people in all walks of life—is that the British people are coming round sooner than expected on the European issue.

I accept entirely the pragmatic nature of the Chancellor's statement, but I am also a personal example. I think, and I hope, that the change in public opinion will accelerate. All I say to Ministers is to get us into that single currency as soon as is practicably possible. I have deliberately used the word "practicably"—because it is in the national interest for us to be in there sooner rather than later.

To escape the lock of my own position and of the single currency, I should like to make some general points on Europe. Although I will start with issues relevant to the single currency, I will not repeat myself. There are two additional points, one of which—the Euro X Committee—is extremely important and has already been dealt with partly in the debate. Unlike the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe, I welcome the Chancellor's attempts to get on the Committee. It was very much in the Government's and the nation's interests that he should try to get on it, and I hope that there will be a change of mind and that he will be able to do so. Goodness knows, however, it will not be an easy task because of the position on that issue with which the Government have been left.

I am not alone in thinking that it is inevitable that the X Committee will develop into a power centre with interests way beyond the affairs of bankers and currency

[Mr. Temple-Morris]

dealers and that it is the beginning of an inner core or a first tier. As the committee will deal with the enormously important issue of the single currency and form an inner group that will meet in an only semi-institutional manner, in which national bonding will occur, it is but the beginning of something which will go far further. It is important to join the single currency so that we can be part of that committee and all the developments that will flow from it.

Another point to consider on economic and monetary union and the single currency is that our interim situation should be as short as possible. During the interim period, we will inevitably—the Governor of the Bank of England was talking about it only recently—be tied to decisions taken within the currency, even if we are outside it. The single market, for example, will ensure that that is so. It is not advantageous to the United Kingdom to be tied to decisions that we do not play an intimate part in formulating. Therefore, I hope that the interim period will be as short as possible.

All hon. Members know—I am sure that the Foreign Secretary, in his six months in office, has had abundant examples—that the common foreign and security policy is a very nationalistic issue. By no means, however, is the United Kingdom nationalistic in our foreign and defence interests. The policy is too important for this country to be left out of any developments that may, and eventually will, occur under it. It is in everyone's common interest to get together on the issue, simply because—it is common sense—the members of Europe have far more clout as a whole than does any individual member, however historic its world role may be.

In defence, we have already had an active and positive example of collective interest. We have worked bilaterally, most particularly with France. It is evident that European co-operation is necessary, and painfully evident that it is in our financial interests.

Flexibility, concentric circles, tiers—or whatever one calls it—will become inevitable within the existing, let alone a larger, Union. The temptation for our Government, or any Government, will be to be left behind by the excuse that any flexible system provides. As a general criterion, we must be active in any top tier of authority that will have serious effects and consequences for the British people. I believe that, as matters develop, there will be ever more tiers of authority. Such tiers will be positively encouraged by the doctrine of flexibility.

Britain is in Europe, and we will stay there. Thank goodness we have given up shouting from the sidelines. Under this Government—who are very much one of the principal reasons why I sit on the Government Benches—Britain can now begin steadily to return to the leading position in Europe that we should have firmly occupied many years ago.

6.58 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a pleasure to speak in a debate in which most of the speeches have been constructive and lucid. After four debates on Europe in the House in one week, enthusiasm for speaking about Europe has not waned.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): For some.

Mr. Heath: Yes, for some.

I tell Ministers and the Foreign Secretary, who has left the Chamber—

Mr. Robin Cook: I am here.

Mr. Heath: I beg the right hon. Gentleman's pardon.

I welcome the new sense of engagement that the new British Government have brought to Europe in recent months. We must play a full role in Europe and make Britain's voice heard in the councils of Europe.

I hope that, in doing so, Britain will not just adopt a comfortable position. A huge agenda has opened up in recent months since the conclusion of the Amsterdam summit. I trust that Britain will be asking some searching questions about current European structures and how they relate to ordinary citizens.

I do not begrudge the Foreign Secretary his peregrinations, the aim of which should be to improve Britain's influence and to make the ethical foreign policy of which he speaks better understood. There are a great many reforms of the EU which urgently need implementing. Indeed, we have reached the point where the institutions of Europe need a complete makeover if they are truly to reflect our chief objectives: openness, accountability, maximum efficiency and making subsidiarity more generally understood. Subsidiarity should mean decisions taken not just at the level of nation state but at the level of the regions, too.

Over the next few months, we shall be applying a number of tests to the Government's performance as they take up the UK presidency. I do not use the word "test" in a censorious fashion; we simply want to determine the progress that may or may not be made during the next six months. Equally, we do not intend to make impossible demands. We certainly do not go in for the collective amnesia that seems to have gripped some Tory Members, who forget that, during their 18 years of government, very little progress was made on several areas in dire need of improvement.

The first such area is employability and the single market. Britain must give a clear lead on deregulation, where progress seems to have stalled in telecoms, energy, air transport, pensions, banking, insurance and biotechnology. Deregulation of all these areas needs to be revitalised.

I should like there to be more cross-border training and mobility of training opportunity. There may be scope for a vocational training exchange programme, just as exchanges operate in higher education. Britain must be at the forefront of attempts to cut unnecessary labour on-costs, in the context of pragmatic labour laws that recognise that deregulation does not mean no regulation. We need progress on developing a European company statute as well. So the first test will be whether there is a substantial reduction in red tape—or at least a consensus on how that can be achieved in the next six months.

The second test concerns preparations for economic and monetary union. Setting aside my doubts about the geometric possibilities of sustainable convergence, it is still clear that Britain will have a key role, whether or not she is an early member, in establishing the ground rules on which monetary union will take place. We must act as an honest broker, insisting on strict adherence to the convergence criteria while not agreeing with some

elements—Germany, for instance—that would seek to exclude the southern states almost on principle instead of on the economic facts.

We should press for a British seat on the Euro X Committee. Similarly, we should press for genuine accountability on the part of the European central bank. The first head of that bank is soon to be appointed. Let us have structures that make the bank accountable to someone—anyone—instead of leaving it to sit in splendid isolation. So our tests will include whether there will be a British seat on the Euro X Committee, and whether the central bank will be made more accountable.

My third area for discussion is sustainability and the environment. Britain has a good record of taking the lead in climate change measures—

Mr. Letwin: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that he is making a well-nigh impossible request of the type that he was earlier asking the Government to forswear? Would not the argument for a European central bank and EMU virtually collapse if the central bank were accountable to political forces in Europe and could thus distort interest rates in favour of one part of Europe or another? Is not the bank meant to be a far-seeing body entirely divorced from politics?

Mr. Heath: It is right that the bank should be independent of political pressures, but it should also be accountable for the exercising of its functions. It should report to the European Parliament or the Council of Ministers, or both, on the exercise of those functions and on the decisions that it takes.

To return to the environment, it is important to hold hard to the principle of the 15 per cent. cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2010. Following the Kyoto conference, I believe that Britain should seek to establish a special conference of the European nations to determine how we can make practical advances towards that objective. We must take action to clean up the environment of the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe, which suffer terrible environmental degradation, and which will need help in the short term to bring them up to the standards of the best of the western European countries.

There must be progress on implementing the habitats directive, and a commitment to more renewable energy sources. The next test, therefore, will be whether the British Government, during their presidency, introduce a practical measure to bring about advances in sustainability.

A great deal of lip service is paid to cutting the costs of the EU, yet there is little activity—even though there are some obvious targets. At the risk of incurring the charge that I am asking for the impossible, I point out that certain questions need to be asked repeatedly. For instance, why does the EU continue to subsidise the growing of tobacco to the tune of £750 million? It is absurd that European taxpayers' money should be used to subsidise a crop whose use we want to reduce.

Why do we not try to end overpayments to cereals growers, who are over-compensated to the tune of £12 billion owing to a miscalculation of cereal prices? Savings of £1 billion are to be had there. I accept that it will not be easy, but it could be done in the common interest.

Although administration costs are sometimes exaggerated, it worries me that Commission staff are paid a 16 per cent. allowance for being based abroad, even though many of them are based in Brussels all their working lives. That alone costs £86 million a year; it could easily be negotiated on. I will not today go into the question of the European Parliament's dual seats, but I strongly believe that it should have a single site—a point to which we must return during discussion of the Amsterdam treaty.

As for cracking down on crime, I was accused in Committee this morning by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), of being a friend of international crime for daring to suggest that we in Britain might resent large-scale immunities for Europol officers when they are not granted to our own constabulary. I was surprised to receive scant support from the Conservative Front Bench. I thought that the Conservatives were interested in such issues. We must balance stronger international co-operation on crime with the rights of the individual, ensuring that civil liberties are maintained. Europol must be operational at the earliest opportunity, with those safeguards in place. We also need greater customs co-operation to reduce drug smuggling and the use of drugs.

I mentioned in an earlier intervention the importance that we attach to the European code of conduct on arms exports. We wish the Foreign Secretary well in his negotiations with other member countries on establishing that code. We should be considering other aspects of the arms trade and looking for an opening up of arms procurement. That would have two beneficial effects—cutting costs, and promoting the consolidation of the arms industry across Europe, which must be to the benefit of companies such Thomson Marconi in my constituency, which has already taken such a step to an extent in its co-operation with its French counterparts.

I agree with the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) about the need for a fair deal on trade and aid and for the liberalisation of trade between the European Union and the Lomé countries. However, on farming and fishing perhaps we enter the sphere of the impossible.

We all agree that fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy is necessary. There is a blueprint for that in the Agenda 2000 document. The Government would do well to persuade partners to attach their names to the principles of that document. We also need the entire common fisheries policy replaced by a regionalised fisheries policy. We should look for the short-term savings to which I have referred in the agricultural policy so that we have the headroom in which to make progress.

Open and accountable European institutions are important to us. The Amsterdam treaty refers to open access to European Union documents in two years. Britain does not need to wait two years to promote that objective. There should be more transparency in the operation of the institutions. We should back the European ombudsman—an institution put in place by Maastricht which almost nobody knows about, partly because it is hidden in Strasbourg. It should have a Brussels base, it should co-operate with national ombudsmen and there should be greater public awareness of access to it. There should be better co-ordination among the Commission, the European Parliament and national Parliaments to ensure better scrutiny of European measures.

[Mr. Heath]

I do not want to repeat points made by other hon. Members about enlargement. It is incumbent on the British Government during their presidency to make every effort to accommodate and assist the negotiations of the applicant countries. That should go beyond the initial five plus one. It is equally important that the interests of the second tranche of applicant countries are properly catered for. We must provide a clear process and a clear timetable so that no one is under any illusions about where they stand and how to make progress towards their objective. We must also calculate the genuine costs of enlargement so that no one has any illusions about what is needed to provide for it.

The last in my compendium of tests is that the United Kingdom must be properly prepared. We need to enhance our arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny of measures that come from Europe. We must enhance our data protection arrangements to bring them up to the standard of the best in Europe. We must work with the European Court of Auditors to ensure direct connections with our excellent local and national auditing processes, so that European money is traceable from source to its final point of—one hopes—productive use. That would set an example to other countries and encourage them to make the same arrangements available to the European Court of Auditors.

The Council of Ministers must also be more transparent to this House and to the other Parliaments of Europe. It is appropriate to ask Ministers to report fully, at the earliest opportunity after a meeting, on what they have done on behalf of the House and the British people .

I have listed 10 areas in which we can apply objective tests of the Government's progress during their presidency. We wish them well and hope that they will make progress in several of those areas. The responses of Ministers in recent months have given us reason to believe that they share several of our priorities to make the European Union more transparent and accountable, so that citizens will feel reconnected to the European process.

The most important aim is to re-establish the principle that Europe should proceed by the informed consent of the people on any issue, be it monetary union or constitutional change. Britain should make it clear that further progress requires the informed consent of the British people. Informed is the operative word, because the debate in this country has been debased in recent years. The arguments have not been properly articulated. Informed consent would ensure that either the European Union progresses with the support of the British and other people or it does not progress.

7.17 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): We should start from what people are saying in the streets. During and after the election campaign, they said to me, "I thought we joined Europe so that we could have a trading partner and so that we could have jobs and employment." At the time, the other markets of the world were closing against British and European products. Our natural trading partner—apart from third world countries, which were closing their doors at the time—was Europe.

A referendum was held and a yes vote was achieved. The Conservative party led Britain into Europe to expand the opportunities of people in this country to work, to be fully employed and to sell their goods freely to Europe without tariff barriers or any inhibition to trade or the expansion of our industry. Joining Europe enabled Britain to make use of its undoubted talent, initiative and enterprise and to continue to grow and fulfil the ambitions of the people of this country.

My constituents say, "Why are we going to substitute such a Europe for a Europe in which we are ruled by bureaucrats from Brussels, bureaucrats from Strasbourg and now bureaucrats from Frankfurt, who are entirely unaccountable to our House of Commons to which we elect Members of Parliament? That is not what we voted for in the referendum." In bewilderment they ask, "What is happening to our policy on Europe?"

At the heart of the change is the politically led drive by Chancellor Kohl, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) referred. That move is driven by political reasons which have their origins in the second world war and the fear of further war. The drive is towards a political union which is seen as somehow binding Europe together so that European countries will never fight again.

To reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring said, the idea that one can combine Europe by huge steel girders is an illusion which will lead inevitably to conflict. Europe is a series of peoples who are proud of their cultures and who have their own languages and their own history. If the House really thinks that it can wipe all that away, it should look at our relationship with Northern Ireland and the effect that that has on the people of Britain. One cannot wipe away the history and culture of a people; one has to respect them. That means that Europe has to be a series of proud and self-confident nations which are respected by their neighbours. They have to have their own processes of gaining the consent of their people to Government actions and taxation.

The country that exemplifies such a democracy, with responsibility and accountability to its people, is Britain. No other country in the European Union has not experienced dictatorship of one kind or another, be it communist, fascist or military, within living memory.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North–East): What about Sweden?

Mr. Wells: It is true that Sweden has been democratic in recent years, but it does not have a democracy of the length and type that we enjoy. Anyway, that example does not disprove what I am saying. Sweden is a proud nation with its own culture and language; it certainly does not want to be absorbed into a girdled, centralised state which is not accountable to its people.

There is a fear of a bureaucracy that is not accountable. It is no good wishing, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) did, for it to be accountable. Monetary union, with a central bank, is designed to be independent of politicians. The central bank will be very much more independent than the Bundesbank because there will be no powerful Parliament to which it has to be accountable or responsible. The Bundesbank can be influenced by the federal parliament in Bonn and it was demonstrably overridden on the value of the western and eastern mark. Let that be a lesson to the House. What did that political decision achieve? It annihilated industry in east Germany and resulted in high unemployment.

Unemployment in Europe should be our major concern. It is the major concern of our people who want jobs and that is why they joined the European Union. Our people do not want a centralised and unaccountable bank which will dance to the tune of the strongest and largest economies in Europe. Monetary union is inevitably a highly centralising factor.

If the House wants a recent example of monetary union, it should look at the history of the United States dollar. The United States dollar was not the universal currency in the 13 states that won the war against Britain at Yorktown. Between that time and the civil war, several state currencies operated in the United States. The ending of the civil war imposed the Yankee dollar on the southern states. What is the history of the southern states after that imposition? There was a period of serious economic difficulty and decline for more than 100 years.

After monetary union in Europe, the south-eastern and southern states and Britain will find themselves on the periphery of the central states—the strongest economies—of Europe. That is why monetary union is wrong for Europe. It will also lead to violence. Unemployed people will try to move, but will we allow them to cross the boundaries of Europe? Britain certainly will not. Mass movements of people will be resisted and that will result in violence. Anyone who doubts that should look at the arrival of the Czech gipsies in Dover within the last month. Monetary union will result in violence.

If there is an increasingly unemployed periphery of Europe, there will be riots in the streets of the southern countries that are being deprived of employment. That is why we must be seriously concerned about monetary union.

Dr. Fox: Does my hon. Friend accept that, until we have completely free fiscal transfer—free from national considerations—and the completely free movement of peoples, we shall never be able to make the case successfully for economic and monetary union?

Mr. Wells: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. That point is what I am trying to explain to the House.

We shall not have the free movement of people. What can we do to compensate areas that suffer from high unemployment? We can transfer huge sums from the richer states to the poorer to try artificially to create employment there and to compensate people for their lack of capacity to move. War did not take place in the United States because people could move across state boundaries.

Dr. Fox: And there was one language.

Mr. Wells: Indeed, there was one language. The language was going to be German, but a majority of one vote made it English so we are lucky in that. The United States had a common language and people were able to move around.

We cannot transfer money because none of the nation states will contribute enough to compensate for the lack of employment in the peripheral areas. That rigidity will lead inevitably to the pulling apart of Europe rather than its joining together. That is why I am fundamentally against it.

In addition, monetary union is fundamentally undemocratic. Democracy in Europe is achieved, admittedly not terribly well, through national parliaments. This Parliament does not do its job well enough in relation to European legislation, but most of the other European parliaments do not scrutinise such legislation at all. Europe is not fully democratically accountable. The European Parliament does not have the ability to call Ministers to account; it can call to account only the European Commission.

The House would not expect me to sit down without saying a brief word on the European Union's external relations, especially concerning the renegotiation of the Lomé agreement. The International Development Committee, of which I am honoured and proud to be Chairman, visited Brussels only last week. It discovered that the EU's plans are very alarming. The EU is trying to divide up the old relationships of the European states, especially France and Britain, and treat the countries concerned as though they were just any other country with which the EU would like to have relationships. It wants to enhance its relationships with the Mediterranean group of north African countries. The Germans want to enhance the relationship through aid and trade with eastern Europe. The EU also wants third-world countries which are not encompassed in the Lomé agreement to be made equal with those which are, as well as to divide up the African, Caribbean and Pacific nations into four regions, combine them with other countries in the same geographic area and treat them all the same.

Such behaviour on the part of the EU will break traditional ties and trading arrangements, which will seriously undermine some of the poorest countries in the world in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. When that is combined with the proposed reforms of the common agricultural policy, which reduces commodity prices—that is its objective—it will lead to the decimation of the sugar, rum, banana and textile industries of the third world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring said, such industries are the only means by which they can climb out of poverty.

When we take up the EU presidency in January, we shall be able to influence the EU's negotiating position on renegotiation of the Lomé agreement. It is absolutely vital that our Ministers reverse the European Commission's policy trend. If they do not, they will decimate the very vulnerable economies of our long-time friends in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. They will break the unity of those countries into competing groups and thus weaken them and their capacity to negotiate with the EU.

It is extremely difficult for those countries to devote the necessary human resources to negotiate on a one-to-one basis with the kind of talent among EU representatives. The African, Caribbean and Pacific countries will not be given the remotest chance of continuing their relationship—or, indeed, enhancing it—with Europe, which is a matter not just of aid but essential investment and trade access. Action to prevent that should be one of the British presidency's primary objectives.

We are members of Europe. We need to play a full-blooded, robust part in Europe. We must respect European traditions and each country's history and culture. We must work together, but for an outward-looking Europe, a Europe that offers people opportunity of employment—both internally and to our traditional partners in trade the world over.

7.33 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Although what I plan to say was devised before the debate began, it follows very naturally on what my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) has said about the importance of the role of the nation state in Europe.

In its ruling of October 1993 on German accession to the Maastricht treaty, the German constitutional court focused on the question of the legitimation of the decisions of the European Union. Although it foresaw a growing role for the European Parliament, the court insisted that there was a limit to that body's legitimising capabilities. The European Union, it stated,

"is not a state based on a European people"

or Europäisches Staatsvolk, but rather an "inter-state community" of Staatenbund. It concluded that the community is based "first and foremost" on legitimation deriving from the citizens of member states which express their will through national Parliaments.

Mr. MacShane: What about a translation?

Mr. Jackson: I have noticed that French phrases are occasionally used in the House, so perhaps German may also be permitted from time to time. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I was translating accurately.

Such high-level German concern about legitimacy should find a ready echo in every Tory breast. If there is any single value that can be said to underlie the long history of the Tory party since its remote origins in the 1640s, it is its concern with the principle of legitimacy. For the constitutional Right, of which the British Conservative party is the paradigm, one of the highest values is that the authority of government should be such that its acts enjoy the trust and spontaneous consent of the people.

It is, however, fair to say that some of those, even in my own party, who are most enthusiastic about Europe have been too slow to recognise the relevance to the EU of the concern about legitimacy. "Full-hearted consent" is not just an empty phrase. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) correctly remarked, it should be regarded as a prerequisite in the development of European structures.

For instance—here I strike a personal note—I concluded very early on after Maastricht that there should be no question of Britain joining European economic and monetary union without a prior referendum, even if, due to the natural scepticism of the British people about speculative projects, that made it inevitable that Britain could not join in the first wave. Here I find myself at variance with the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris).

European monetary union is a big step; it is an inherently risky venture and it has major constitutional implications. That is undoubted. It is a step that we should take only after the British people have given their informed consent, which was also a phrase used by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome. This concern with legitimacy also makes me more sympathetic than some of my hon. Friends to the idea of a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty—however divisive such a referendum might be between and within the parties.

It is not enough, however, simply to say that the further development of the EU poses a problem of legitimacy, as though that were enough to [illegible] development. The plain fact is that, in a union of 15 different states, with 15 different histories and cultures and 15 different public opinions, there will be at least 15 different concepts of the limits of legitimacy in relation to the EU.

There is a group of states—Britain, the Scandinavians and perhaps Greece—where the threshold of legitimacy might be said to be relatively high, in the sense that there is a high level of concern about the issue. There is another group of states—Germany, Italy, the Benelux countries and the Iberians—where the threshold is relatively low. Finally, there is a swing state—France—where the opinion of the political classes may be running ahead of popular consent, but where raison d'état seems likely to prevail.

All of this creates a very difficult situation for those of us in Britain, in a high-threshold country, who are concerned that the developing structures of the EU should function on the basis of genuine legitimacy.

We face proposals and developments that pose legitimacy problems for us but it seems not for others—at least, not yet, despite the warnings of the German constitutional court, or not yet to the same extent as for us.

What, then, are our options? One option, which undoubtedly commands some support in the House, both overt and covert, is withdrawal—the most drastic resolution of our dilemma. I shall not say anything now about the costs and the risks of withdrawal from the European Union after some 30 years of membership. I merely observe that the only time that a political party—the party now in government—has fought an election on the basis of withdrawal, after only 10 years of membership, it suffered the second most humiliating defeat in recent political history.

I also make the perhaps novel point that attitudes to Europe differ among the nations of the United Kingdom, to the extent that it is now a real question whether the British Union would survive withdrawal from the European Union. Although there is a legitimacy problem with advancing in Europe, there is also a legitimacy problem with going backwards.

A second option, favoured by some, is that Britain should simply exercise the veto it undoubtedly enjoys under the treaties over future developments in the European Union. But this is only an illusory solution. No veto in the existing European Union structure can stop the other member states from exercising their sovereign right, if they so choose, to develop new structures among themselves for working together. That is precisely what is now happening among the EMU "ins". We may seek to prevent them from meeting in the Council buildings in Brussels, but they will simply drift across to a restaurant or another meeting room outside.

The same drawback arises in relation to a third possible option—the one favoured by the previous Government—that is to say, variable geometry or the negotiation of national opt-outs. The difficulty with that—it was graphically illustrated in the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)—as in the case of the imposition of vetoes, is that if, whether inside or outside the structures of the Union, a substantial number of states create among themselves a critical mass of policy especially in the [illegible] sphere [illegible]

pressures which any opted-out member state will eventually find irresistible. That is what happened to Britain in relation to the Common Market in the 1950s and 1960s. It has just happened in relation to the social chapter opt-out of 1992, and a realist would probably recognise that it is highly likely that the same thing will happen in due course to our EMU opt-out.

I do not know that divine providence intended that the world should always be a comfortable place for us British. If my analysis is correct, we face a painful tension—perhaps more painful for some than for others—between realism about the correlation of forces and interests in today's Europe, and our well justified concern for the continuation in these islands of forms of government that enjoy a high level of legitimacy.

Obviously, our objective must be to persuade our partners to change the European Union so that we can be more comfortable in it. How that might be done is a subject that I might hope to address if I caught the Speaker's eye on another occasion. Tonight, I shall say only that there are many factors on which we can work in the longer term, notably the impending generation change in German politics; Germany's shift to the east; the increasing tensions surrounding European policy in France; and the growing scale and diversity of the European Union. We will have to think much more penetratingly and realistically about how to influence the balance of European politics than we are yet accustomed to, and with much more cool calculation and a lot less barely suppressed resentment and offended amour-propre.

I wish to pursue my theme of the problem of legitimacy in the European Union. I offer the perhaps radical suggestion that, if the European Union has a problem of legitimacy and if we cannot simply stop Europe and get off, our duty is not to complain and denounce and make the problem of legitimacy even worse, but actively to promote a sense of legitimacy for the structures that now play an ineluctable part in our government. Such a concern to promote the legitimacy of the Union of which we are a part is not by the way—as I would say to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring if he were in his place—it is not inconsistent with criticism. However, our criticism should always be balanced, tempered and constructive.

Legitimacy is not static or something that one acquires and then keeps—it is dynamic, and it can be lost and won. It also changes the way in which it is expressed. In the long history of my party, we have successively envisaged the basis of legitimacy as the divine right of the monarch; the union of the throne and altar; the sovereignty of the Crown in Parliament; and—in the dawning era of referendums—the sovereignty of the people.

What we in the political class say and do can have a large impact on the evolution of public opinion, which is the ultimate source of legitimacy in democracies. Politicians on both sides of the House have a choice. We can choose an ultimately impotent hand-wringing about the real challenges that the European Union poses to our current understanding of the legitimation of government—a posture that is ultimately self-defeating in terms of our concern that government should be legitimate. Or we can deliberately try to build legitimacy for the new structures, from which it seems, realistically speaking, there is no getting away.

An important source of modern legitimacy is, for example, the perception of benefits. Thus we could deliberately seek to focus the public's attention on the substantial interests that are at stake for our people in the European Union, rather than suggesting, as is sometimes done, that those interests are nugatory in a global setting. Perhaps nowadays we may hear a little less about how Britain's future lies among the Asian tigers.

Another important source of modern legitimacy is respect for law and due process. Thus we could set out deliberately to encourage a greater public understanding of the essential rule-boundedness and rationality of the European Union's structures, rather than promoting, as is sometimes done, the idea that there is an inherent judicial bias against Britain.

Yet another modern source of legitimacy is trust. We could make a serious effort to promote the idea that our partnership in Europe is based on mutual trust, rather than implying, as is sometimes done, that in the battles of Europe we have enemies who are looking for every opportunity to do us down.

Then there is the legitimacy that comes from vision. We could try to encourage our people to understand just what a remarkable and beneficent phenomenon is the coming together of the great historic nations of the old world—something we sometimes take too much for granted or even allow to slip from our minds.

In conclusion, I wish to address one or two words specifically to my party. Our leadership has indicated that, while it is sceptical about EMU, it wants to be robustly positive about Europe in general. I welcome that and I will strongly support it. In a well argued speech to the Confederation of British Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) amply justified his caution about EMU.

It is a perfectly reasonable position for the Conservative party to wait for EMU to prove itself, although we must be realistic about the potential costs for British influence that may arise from not participating in the crucial early phases of its developments. The question arises, however, of what the other limb of the policy—being positive about Europe—will mean. Uncomfortable as it may be for some, I dare to suggest that such a positive approach cannot be followed without making something like the analysis that I have sought to make in this speech, and reaching something like the conclusions that I have reached.

7.48 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris), my constituency neighbour, is not in his place, because one of life's ironies is that I take such an interest in European affairs because, 10 years ago, he recruited me to the Conservative Back-Bench European affairs committee. The more I saw, studied and analysed what went on in Europe, the more I concluded that European union, by which I mean economic and political union, was not in the United Kingdom's best interests.

I invite the House to look at the events of this week, because we have seen in Great Britain a development of great significance. Although I will not pretend that it is unprecedented in the annals of British history, it is novel in my lifetime. I am referring to the action of Welsh farmers at Holyhead and Fishguard which is now replicated at ports in Scotland.

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

Farmers are acting out of frustration or sheer desperation as they see their livelihoods taken away from them. Their action is prompted by a slump in cattle prices, and is compounded by the Government's refusal to make compensation payments for the strength of sterling or to increase hill livestock compensatory allowance payments. In addition, the Government have terminated rendering subsidy, imposed arbitrary weight limits on over-30-months scheme cattle, reduced the rate of compensation and declined to renew the £60 million special assistance paid by the previous Government.

One might ask what this has to do with the European Union. I shall demonstrate as I go along that it has everything to do with the European Union. I am not talking about the export ban—which, as we all know, was imposed not for any scientific reason or any consideration of human health, but purely for political reasons. Nor am I talking about the European directive on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. I am talking about developments in the European Union that have so undermined the process of democracy—the House will have been interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who referred to legitimacy in the process of government—that farmers have been driven to their action this week.

The farmers may not necessarily see it in these terms, but, by their actions, they are demonstrating their recognition of the fact that the conventional democratic process cannot solve their problems. They have lost confidence in the traditional process of democracy to obtain redress, for the simple reason that, as far as farmers are concerned—the same applies to fishermen—the conventional and traditional democratic process no longer exists.

Gone are the days when convincing a sufficient number of Members of Parliament of the strength of an argument produced change in agricultural policy. Gone are the days when Agriculture Ministers would use discretion in dealing with genuine mistakes made by farmers in filling in forms, for example. Gone are the days when Ministers who failed to measure up would be dismissed. It is probably true to say that Edwina Currie will go down in history as the last Minister to be drummed out of office on an issue affecting agriculture.

Nowadays, there is a grim realisation that neither changing the Minister nor changing the Government has anything other than the most marginal effect on agricultural policy. The reality is that agricultural policy is determined in Brussels. Under qualified majority voting, the United Kingdom currently has only 10 votes out of 87.

To those politicians—there are many of them—who say that reform of the common agricultural policy is the answer, I invite them to explain how that can be achieved. How will they achieve unanimity for any radical change, given that the French, for example, oppose Agenda 2000? How will they stop the creation of a blocking minority in circumstances in which several countries are such net beneficiaries that they would not dare to bite the hand that feeds them? When we talk about reform, it must not be thought of as a panacea because of the difficulty in achieving that reform. Talk of reform is merely a placebo—in other words, a medicine given to humour rather than to cure.

I return to my theme, which is the significance of the action taken by Scottish and Welsh farmers. By dint of the failure of the now virtually defunct traditional conventional democratic processes, they are driven to take direct action. They have seen that simply replacing a Conservative Government with a Labour Government has not in any way changed agricultural policy, which is dictated from Brussels and is not decided where it should be decided—here in the Westminster Parliament.

The failure of political parties to give satisfaction—because they have surrendered the power to do so to a higher authority—is leading inexorably to anarchy. Hon. Members may not wish to contemplate the fact that in the areas most affected by this week's disturbances, the electorate has already explored the whole gamut of party political possibilities. The voters are now discovering that, whereas they previously concluded that none of the major parties could satisfy their aspirations, the nationalist parties that represent those areas cannot do so, either.

In those circumstances, the farmers have taken direct action. They have gone to the barricades, driven there by the craven action of successive Parliaments here in Westminster which have given away—and continue to give away—the sovereign right of the British people to be governed by their own laws, made in their own Parliament, in accordance with their own free choice expressed in British ballot boxes.

The new Labour Government—still in a euphoric mood as a result of their success on 1 May—will not be disposed to heed my warning, but the writing is on the wall. Just as the previous Conservative Government were swept away on May day, so too will new Labour be driven out of office when it is seen that, in spite of wrapping itself in the Union Jack, adopting the British bulldog as a mascot and generally playing the patriotic card, it intends neither to stem the flood of parliamentary sovereignty away from these shores nor, least of all, to reverse a process that has already gone too far.

There is a notion in the minds of people who should know better that, in making an ever-closer union with the other nations of Europe, we are simply exchanging one sort of democracy for another. Nothing could be further from the truth. However else one might describe the EU, one cannot pretend for one moment that it is democratic. Labour Members have described it in previous debates as corporatist. I prefer to describe it as collectivist. How else can one describe a regime that tells the farmer what he may or may not grow, in what quantity, to what standard and at what price? How else can one describe a system that tells a fisherman what he may catch and where he may catch it, and results in hundreds of tonnes of perfectly saleable fish being dumped back dead into the sea?

The lesson for politicians is this: if neither they nor the parties they represent reflect the aspirations of the people they purport to represent, they deserve to be swept away, and swept away they will be. The precedent was created on 1 May. If, in turn, each party—because of its dalliance with European union—is seen to have rendered itself incapable of responding to the British people's natural and legitimate aspirations, the people will despair of the whole democratic process and turn to anarchy. That is the lesson of Holyhead, Fishguard and Stranraer, a lesson that the House ignores at its peril.

I, for one, stand four square with the farmer and the fisherman—mere pawns in the game of politics, but without whom we would all starve, just as surely as

the people of North Korea starve today because of their Government's rigid adherence to the failed policy of collectivism.

I am not a collectivist; I am a Conservative. As a Conservative, I want to see the restoration of the situation in which I can act as a Member of Parliament on behalf of the people whom I represent and give them satisfaction. Within the collective in which we now find ourselves, neither I nor any other Member of Parliament can do that, because, by definition, the collective can act only in the interest of the collective and not in the interest of its component parts.

Almost more than any other, this week represents a watershed in our political history. Turn one way and we descend, sooner or later, into anarchy. Turn the other way and we will be greeted by a joyful nation. For the sake of our children and our grandchildren, I implore the House to recognise that even good government is no substitute for self-government. At the end of the 50th year of making a reality of self-government for hundreds of millions of people throughout the world, how can any hon. Member want this once proud nation, which 60 years ago stood as a beacon of hope in a troubled world and as a last bastion against tyranny, to be relegated to no more than a province of Brussels?

8 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I share many of the views that my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) expressed. The democratic deficit is perhaps more structural—because of the wide diversity of culture and the distance of the population in the centre of Government—than my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), in a characteristically intelligent and illuminating speech, allowed, but it is not to that, or to any of the important matters in the Amsterdam treaty and in the many directives that we have considered in European Standing Committees, that I wish to allude today. We have ample opportunity to consider those matters in other places and at other times. I should like to sketch a matter that is of moment to the House, if not to the European Union as a whole: the attitude of Her Majesty's Government, as illustrated by their attitude to the Amsterdam treaty and to directives that have been considered by the House recently.

When I was somewhat younger, I was instructed by a great British statesman in the extraordinary feature of our constitutional arrangements: each Department of State sponsored someone. I was told that the Department of Trade and Industry sponsored British business, that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—perhaps less under the current Administration than hitherto—sponsored farmers and that the Foreign Office sponsored foreigners.

That is a travesty. In many respects, the Foreign Office has acted zealously to defend British interests for many years, but I fear that the current Government are coming close to making a reality of that unfair truism. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) illustrated clearly that the Government's actions have brought no greater influence over events in Europe. On the contrary, as he eloquently described, the Government appear to be entirely stranded. Their actions have led in other directions and it behoves the House to note two or three things to which the Government's attitude is leading.

Recently, we had occasion to debate article K.7 of the Amsterdam treaty. I endeavoured to persuade the House that there was a problem with paragraphs 1 and 6 of that article. In his closing remarks, the Minister entirely failed even to advert to my remarks or to challenge them. My assertion was—it was of some significance in the sense that it was either true or false and, if true, important—that, on 18 June, the Prime Minister had made an entirely false statement when he told the House that the European Court would not intervene in United Kingdom criminal justice as a result of those paragraphs.

I may be wrong about the matter. Goodness knows, a young Back Bencher, uninformed by the weight of legal opinion in the civil service, may make a terrible error. Why then did the Minister not take the trouble to say why I was wrong, or to defend the Prime Minister's position in the House? That oddity suggested that the Minister did not consider it important whether my assertions were true or false.

It is noticeable that, during the entire proceedings of the Committee when it considered the social chapter, no Government Member made the slightest allusion to paragraph 1 of article 109p, which states:

> "The Community shall contribute to a high level of employment by encouraging cooperation between Member States and by supporting and, if necessary, complementing their action."

Anyone remotely familiar with the progress of European law and the European Court in interpreting treaties, and with the way in which the Commission uses treaties—which is subject to the Court's interpretation—will be fully aware of the effect of paragraph 1 of article 109p. It will be a Christmas tree on which many currently unpredictable directives, decisions, framework decisions and regulations will be hung. In short, it is an analogue of the famous article 100, on which so much that was unpremeditated has been hung.

I am not raising that point to comment on the substance of article 109p. My comment is merely that the article is of the highest importance and that Ministers have not so much as alluded to it. I have gone through all—I hope—the statements by the Prime Minister and other Ministers since the Amsterdam treaty was under consideration and finally signed and I have not found the slightest reference to the article. I take it, therefore, that the Government consider that it is of no importance whether there is an article in the social chapter on which much else can be hung.

There is an oddity about European Standing Committee B. Although the Labour Members appear, they are broadly silent and, although there are only some 160 Conservative Members, the Conservative party regularly brings between five and 10 members to the Committee—about a 15th to a 30th of the party's strength. By and large, the Liberal Democrats are not present. The Committee's task is to vet a lot of important European legislation. Some hon. Members do not believe that it is necessary even to be present. Often, Labour Members do not believe that it is necessary to speak about those matters.

The situation is much worse than that. The Government bring explanatory memorandums before the Committee. Associated with those are compliance cost assessments and risk assessments. In a recent example—for the sake of brevity, I give just one—the Government brought before the Committee an important constituent of the

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

social chapter, the parental leave directive, and a compliance cost assessment, in which they calculated the effect on British industry of unpaid parental leave.

The calculations, which I take it the Government asked some official to perform, were based on the assumption that the replacement cost of the labour—the marginal cost of the labour—was £1.70 an hour. Why is that of any importance? Only because, if the marginal cost of the labour is £1.70 an hour, the Government's minimum wage, which is always rumoured to be a multiple of that figure, would entirely destroy this country's employment base. The importance lies in the fact that the Government do not believe their own figure of £1.70 an hour.

When the Minister was pressed on the matter in European Standing Committee B, he showed every sign of not having the slightest idea whether that was the figure, why it was the figure or whether it justified the directive. Again, I allude not to the substance, but to the form.

In those three examples, we see a Government who are so cavalier about the extensions of the European Court's powers that they do not bother to answer a serious allegation. They are cavalier about the widespread, long-term effects of clauses in the Amsterdam treaty to the extent of not even mentioning them. They are cavalier about the way in which they bring directives before the House to be vetted, to the extent of offering justifications that they cannot possibly believe are consistent with the rest of their policies.

Why are the Government cavalier in those ways? Since 1 May, I have sat here in the House desperately trying to find out what motivates them in that pursuit and that attitude. I have been able to discern only one recurrent theme—a search for modernity. It is a search to be in tune with the piper and not to be left behind. In all the statements from right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Front Bench I have discerned that sense of a search to be modern. Above all, the House and the country need to guard against that attitude.

The desperate desire to be modern today and, hence, not to consider the long-term effects of major constitutional changes goes against the nature of those changes. Constitutional changes have their effects over, not five or 10 years, but 50 or 100 years, or even several centuries. The House and the country have much to fear if a Government pursue constitutional change and undertake such a major programme—that it is a major programme for constitutional change must be common ground on both sides of the House—in the earnest desire to be modern in 1997, with a view to advantages in 1998, 1999 or even 2000, but neglect to question whether the hundreds of years of history of this country and the others around it will be compromised in a future that might not contain the stability, freedom, democracy and rule of law to which we have become accustomed.

I hope that, as the Government move forward in the months and years ahead, they will change that attitude and investigate the long-term effects. I hope that they will take seriously the arguments that point to those effects, at least answer and explain if those arguments are wrong, and tell us why they are taking steps that could have long-term effects. That at least would be an improvement.

8.12 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South–West Devon): This has been yet another excellent debate on Europe, with many telling contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. In his opening speech, the Foreign Secretary was, as usual, clever and witty, but had nothing to say. This is a Government without value, without substance and without principle. Above all the rest of the Cabinet, the Foreign Secretary is, perhaps, the very symbol of that. He spends his time attacking the Opposition. That may be good sport, but his technique was simply a ploy to hide his lack of policy.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to new Labour's welcome in Europe and they have had a warm welcome—that tends to happen when one caves in on vital national issues. He offered no real solutions to European unemployment. He did not tell us how the Luxembourg summit would create a single job either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

The Foreign Secretary was followed by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who spoke as usual with great wisdom and accuracy. He has the respect of the House. He is one of the few Labour Members who is not dazzled by the bright lights of Brussels and he probed the Minister on the vital issue of the European rebate. I hope that the Minister will answer the questions put to him so robustly. I hope that he will be as diligent and robust in defending the rebate as we were when we were in government.

We heard an outstanding speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who applied his penetrating intellect to the vital issue of the future of Europe. It was one of the best speeches that I have heard in my time in the House. He spoke of the need for Europe to be outward looking and of the need for a sustainable Europe. He exposed the weakness of some of the economic arguments behind the single currency. His pursuit of the truth of Treasury statistics on the currency of invoice is a noble crusade, and I wish him well with it. He demonstrated that the single currency is a political and not an economic project, and he was right to open up the debate that dare not speak its name and to discuss the future of Europe in a mature and intellectual way.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple–Morris) followed my hon. Friend and set out his reasons for crossing the Floor. He is entitled to his view and to taking the action that he did. I do not suppose that all his constituents will see things as he saw them and he might be wise to reflect on whether it is a good idea to sell his shares in the company when it is at rock bottom. He may live to regret it when those shares are sky high again.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) gave us what I would describe—not unkindly, I hope—as the classic Liberal Democrat speech. He toured the houses of Europe seeing both sides of the street at the same time, stopping from time to time for a committee meeting here and there and then pressing on with his all-embracing federal agenda. At least he is honest about that agenda, unlike his coalition partners—the Labour party—who soothe the electorate with soft-sounding words, while pursuing a centralist and integrationist agenda.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) has, if I may say so, really come into his own since being released from his vow of silence. He reminded

the House of the importance of this nation's cultural heritage and how any future Europe must be a respecter of individual cultures. It must be a Europe of nation states. He spoke of democratic accountability, of the dangers of a single currency and the tensions that it may well create.

He must be right to say that those are issues of great concern and that whatever the ultimate response of this Government and this country to a single currency, any progress towards it must be undertaken in the light of all the circumstances and with the utmost caution. The single currency is a unique experiment, which has never been tried before in the history of this planet. Whatever else happens, the utmost caution must be exercised before participating. The party in government lightly brushes aside those concerns and yet they are fundamental.

My hon. Friend also spoke with great knowledge about the European Union's relationship with the developing world. I hope that the Minister will take on board the points he raised.

Mr. Doug Henderson *indicated assent.*

Mr. Streeter: The Minister nods. That is the first response that I have had from him all week, so I am encouraged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), in a measured and wise speech, spoke of the importance of legitimacy. I shall certainly read that speech in the morning. He was right to point out that a single currency is possible only if people have given their informed consent, and to make it clear that a referendum must take place on such a currency. He reviewed with great skill the options facing us in our relationship with Europe and discussed the problems of exercising each of those options. He made a compelling case for legitimacy. His speech is well worth a second look.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) spoke with his usual passion and conviction about the plight of farmers in the United Kingdom, which has provoked the recent actions in Wales and Scotland. He explained the consequences of the collectivist approach of Europe—the damage being done to our farmers and fishermen—and explained the dangers of going too far down that road.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) rightly probed the Government on their inability to garner extra influence abroad. He probed the Minister about the complete absence of a reply to the important point he raised a debate or two ago about the extension of the powers of the European Court of Justice into criminal law in this country.

The Minister is well known for his long winding-up speeches and we do not necessarily want a repeat performance tonight, but we want our questions answered. There is no point in Opposition Members asking the Government questions and holding the Executive to account if the Minister avoids giving us the answers. My hon. Friend is right to probe Ministers and to explain how cavalier the Government are when dealing with issues of vital national interest. He is right to challenge the Government to consider the long-term implications of some of the constitutional changes they want to make, reckless of the consequences.

We have had an excellent debate. It was started by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who spelled out our positive Conservative agenda for Europe. On enlargement, we must welcome into the family of Europe those central and eastern nations who languished so long under communism and so underpin stability and prosperity in greater Europe. On the single market, we must complete the task of making a true barrier-free trading area in Europe as part of our wider global perspective. On reform of EU institutions, we must streamline them in preparation for enlargement in the name of efficiency and value for money—especially the common agricultural policy.

On flexible labour markets, we must take our message and our experience of policies that really create jobs to every corner of Europe. I have heard the Minister of State and the Foreign Secretary say a great deal about flexible labour markets over the past few days and weeks, but it is apparent that they simply do not understand what flexible labour markets are. They seek flexibility by imposing additional burdens on management and companies—that is not flexibility, but more red tape. Conservative Members have a vital duty to the nation and to the people of Europe who have languished too long under high unemployment to explain what real flexible labour markets are all about. We shall carry on doing that while we have breath in our bodies.

Our Europe is a wider Europe, not a deeper Europe. Our Europe is an outward-looking Europe, as was so brilliantly expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring—I mention him again because he missed my earlier reference to him. Our Europe is not a fortress Europe. Our Europe is a flexible Europe, not a frozen Europe. We have a positive approach to Europe and my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage was right to make that point. We are positive about our membership, and we shall strive to make Europe work for Britain and all its people.

What a contrast that is to the new Labour Government, who are so starry-eyed and idealistic about Europe. We heard today, as we did throughout the Committee stage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, about Labour's new influence in Europe and how they are leading in Europe—all evidence to the contrary. New Labour is not leading in Europe, but losing in Europe; not making new friends, but making a hash of it. Let us look at the record of the past seven months—the seven long months since paradise was lost.

First, we have demonstrated again and again throughout our scrutiny of the Amsterdam treaty that the Government were taken for a ride at Amsterdam. So many concessions were made on qualified majority voting, the social chapter and extra vetoes for the European Parliament, more power to the President, but so little was gained in return. The Government called it a negotiating triumph, but it was in fact a complete failure of diplomacy. Secondly, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe exposed forensically this afternoon how the Government failed miserably to protect British interests over our border controls opt-in. The Government say that they are making friends in Europe, but the fact is that they were stitched up by the Spanish and the Dutch—a point to which I shall return at the end of my speech.

[Mr. Streeter]

Thirdly, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been keen to tell us about his new friends in the Economic and Finance Council. The Government say that they are leading in Europe, but—

Mr. Doug Henderson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: Ah, the Minister is rising in defence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Streeter: Let me just finish this point. The Government say that they are leading in Europe, but the other Ministers would not even give the Chancellor a seat on their Euro X Committee.

Mr. Henderson: Is not the hon. Gentleman slightly embarrassed by raising the question of the British opt-in to Schengen? The previous Government had such a poor relationship with their European partners that they could negotiate almost nothing that was to this country's advantage, including the insertion of British border controls protection in the treaty of Amsterdam. That is what really protects British interests, and it was achieved only on the last day of the Amsterdam negotiations.

Mr. Streeter: The Minister is doing his best to defend an indefensible position. He knows that we negotiated and agreed as early as March this year a complete opt-out from border controls. That was confirmed by many sources and well broadcast in the British press.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is coming to my rescue.

Mr. Davis: I simply want to add a few facts that the Minister can check for himself. He might care to look at the record of the meeting in Downing street attended by Prime Minister Wim Kok, in which the deal—a rather better deal than Labour arrived at—was proposed to the United Kingdom. The Minister can also check public information sources. The fact is that the deal the Labour Government came out with is worse than the one that was on the table before the negotiations on the Amsterdam treaty began.

Mr. Streeter: The voice of authority and authenticity—game, set and match.

Fourthly, we have heard for months about how the new soft-focus approach to Europe will pave the way for the lifting of the beef ban that our farmers so desperately need. We were told that the Government's new friends in Europe would support them. The Government say that they are winning for Britain in Europe, but no progress whatsoever has been made on the beef ban.

New Labour is learning the hard way that the European Union is not about soundbites or even warm personal handshakes; it is about 15 nations who have come together out of their own self-interest. Each nation is trying to get the best deal it can for its own people, and there is nothing wrong with that. The Government are so starry-eyed about Europe that they are convinced that other nations are queuing up to do them a favour, just because they roll out their touchy-feely language. The truth is that the new Labour Government will be rolled over by our partners again and again, just as they were at Amsterdam and just as they have been ever since.

Based on the record of failure of the past seven months, we can look ahead to the UK presidency only with trepidation. We want to the Minister to spell out tonight, not in soft soundbites, but in hard-nosed substantial policies, precisely what the Government's objectives are for the UK presidency. What do the Government intend to achieve during that six-month period in respect of enlargement, vote weighting reforms, the CAP, EU financing and jobs? How many jobs will be created under the UK presidency?

How will the Government sort out the mess they have got themselves into over frontier controls? I ask the Minister again, how did that happen? What went wrong at the Amsterdam summit? Why was the Spanish amendment not challenged? Was the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister or the Minister of State in the discussions when the Spanish amendment was tabled?

Mr. Doug Henderson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has already explained both to him and to his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) that the Spanish amendment was challenged?

Mr. Streeter: I am sorry to say this to the Minister, but frankly I do not believe him. I want the Minister to tell us tonight how we are going to get out of the difficult situation that he has got us into.

Mr. Henderson: If memory serves, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has responded—if he has not, I have—in a written answer and made it absolutely clear that the Spanish amendment was challenged. Is the hon. Gentleman aware of that?

Mr. Streeter: The Minister is sticking to his line. The Foreign Secretary has told us on two occasions that the agreement on the voting arrangements for the opt-in on border controls happened after the end of the summit. Would the Minister care to intervene yet again to confirm that? Is that right or not?

Well, we can assume that, as the Foreign Secretary told us today, after the summit had been concluded an agreement was entered into between the Spanish and the Dutch presidency to change the arrangements that had been agreed at the Amsterdam summit. What does that say about new Labour's relationship with Europe? What does that say about making friends in Europe?

What is the Minister going to do now? How will he solve this problem? Is he going to hold a bilateral meeting with Spain during the Luxembourg summit? Is he going to call the Spanish and the Dutch together? Is he going to raise this matter in full session at the Luxembourg summit? Is he going to use the UK presidency to undo the damaging agreement that has been entered into?

It is an important issue and it requires specific answers. The Minister must understand that we will not let him off the hook. We will press until we ascertain precisely what

went wrong and what the Minister will do about it. Will he put the record straight? Will he put on one side the new Labour handbook of soft-focus phrases, and deal with policy and substance?

Will he set out the Government programme for the United Kingdom presidency? Will he be able to muster from somewhere an intellectually coherent agenda to set out the Government's approach to Europe? Will he tell us where he is winning in Europe? Will he tell us what he is leading in Europe? We know that we have a Government without values or principles, but can we for once have some substance?

8.30 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): We have had a good debate, although the House has not been as well attended as it has been for some of the debates on European matters over four of the past six sitting days. There has been considerable passion in some of the contributions to the debate. Many have been wide-ranging, and some have concentrated more on the Luxembourg summit than others.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) on his second maiden speech. It is sometimes thought outside the House that we do not on one side of the Chamber have colleagues on the other. Even when I sat on the Opposition Benches and the hon. Gentleman took his place on the Government Benches, I always thought that he was a good colleague with whom to talk about political issues. He would view them objectively and would agree or disagree with parliamentary colleagues, depending on their attitude. That approach was reflected in his contribution this evening, which was measured and dignified.

The hon. Gentleman did not attack the Conservative party, although there was plenty of scope for him to do so, had he wished. He made a thoughtful speech, and we look forward to many more from him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) talked about the financing of the European Union. I can reassure him that the British rebate is a central part of our negotiating position. We have no intention of giving ground on that.

I know that there are many worries about structural funds. I know also that my right hon. Friend will recognise that, regardless of any enlargement process, there is a need to look again at structural funds because of the changes in the European economy that have taken place over the past eight years. Achieving a fair and proper structure is a principal aim that arises from the Luxembourg conclusions.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) referred to the Lomé convention, as did the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells). It is an important issue and we have already begun to consider the review that is taking place. The Government will be pursuing the matter initially over the next six months. The focus of our direction will be to try to do the best that we can for the poorest countries. I hope that that will meet many of the points raised by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford.

The hon. Member for Woodspring said that he saw Europe doing nothing but contemplating its navel. Surely the last thing to which Conservative Members would want to draw attention is contemplating political navels after the events of the past seven months. If the hon. Gentleman wishes further to pursue that argument, I am sure that the House will enjoy it.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) gave general support to many of the issues that are on the agenda which the Government will pursue at the Luxembourg summit. The code of conduct on arms is important and we shall be raising the issue during our presidency. There is a huge amount of common ground on open and accountable institutions in Europe. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has welcomed the announcements that have already been given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and myself in Select Committees, on opening up and extending scrutiny. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be making an announcement shortly.

The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) made a good and rounded speech and tackled many issues that many right hon. and hon. Members did not wish to take up. When they read the report of the hon. Gentleman's speech in *Hansard* tomorrow, they will be able to assess the quality of his speech.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) makes predictable contributions in these debates. He makes them with conviction, however, and speaks well. I do not agree with much of what he said, but it is important in a debate of this sort that all views are advanced.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) argued that the Foreign Office now acts only for foreigners—I paraphrase his remarks. His assertion was in contradiction to the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Ludlow, who accused the Government of being too patriotic. Conservative Members cannot have it both ways.

The hon. Member for West Dorset talked also about the powers of the European Court. I have explained the Government's position, including the modest extension of powers. I did so in Committee against the background of the Amsterdam treaty, and I am prepared to return to the issue in Committee. It would be inappropriate to go into the details now, when there are so many other issues on which I must respond.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) ended his contribution by wishing the Government well in their presidency of the EU. I began to look for the catch, but I did not find one in relation to the agenda for Luxembourg. I gained the impression that the right hon. and learned Gentleman agreed with the broad thrust of the Government's position on the importance of enlargement and reform of the CAP.

Unfortunately for the House, the right hon. and learned Gentleman, in endeavouring to find areas of controversy, indulged in scaremongering about the social chapter. The arguments have been exhausted during our debates on the Amsterdam treaty. We believe that the social chapter is essential if British workers are to have the same rights as workers in other European countries. It is important that Britain is involved in the debates and discussions about the social chapter, so that we achieve the right balance between things that can be best arranged at European level and those that can be settled at nation state level.

The argument has been exhausted also on whether the social chapter runs in contradiction to competitiveness. Competitiveness is a different issue, about securing new

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

products, new designs, new production systems and breaking into new markets. In many instances, the social chapter reinforces that approach.

Dr. Fox: If the Minister is correct in saying that the Government want the same conditions to apply, why did they not turn to domestic legislation rather than signing the social chapter?

Mr. Henderson: That is old hat, because we have been through the argument before.

Mr. Howard: There have been no answers.

Mr. Henderson: Answers have been given.

The United Kingdom is a member of the European Union. We must consider what can best be decided by the EU at Community level and what can best be decided at nation state level. When we are talking about consultation, procedures and broad initiatives that turn on more than one country and involve companies that employ more than 1,500 people, it clearly makes sense to have common standards across Europe. I refer to companies that operate across Europe.

The importance of the social chapter is that signing up to it enables a member state to have influence. That having been done, the member state can contribute, initiate and agree to what is best decided at European level. In addition, there is the right to advance arguments, as sometimes the Government will. It is better to decide some things, however, at a local or national level.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe has had a specific reply on information about the euro currency. The Government may seek support from the Commission, to provide information. Money is available. *[Interruption.]* An approach has been made, but no final decision has been reached. The previous Government had the opportunity to tap into those resources to provide information. There is no question of the money being used for any propaganda. Indeed, it would be an ultra vires use of the funds were that to happen.

Mr. Robert Jackson: In relation to the Schengen opt-in, serious allegations have been made about the propriety of the conduct of the Dutch presidency. Does the Minister have anything to say in its defence?

Mr. Henderson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made the position clear when he was before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs: that Britain opposed the Spanish amendment, that there was a mix-up, that, when an attempt was made to clarify the matter, the Dutch presidency would not accept that there had been a challenge. There was no provision in the proceedings—the previous Government were involved in the same proceedings—for minutes to be taken or for a record. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to challenge what happened. Subsequently, there was a bilateral understanding between the Dutch presidency and the Spanish Government. We then secured a declaration that makes it clear that, if we wish to join any of the existing Schengen acquis, we can do so if the other countries accept that.

Speaking theoretically, if we wanted to join any Schengen acquis, we would ensure that the Commission was consulted beforehand, and if any country wished to object to our application for involvement, it would have to state that in specific terms. It is our belief that, if a strong case is made for Britain to sign up to part of the Schengen acquis, it will be extremely difficult for any country to block the application.

It is a little rich that some Opposition Members—not the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe—raise this issue when, in government, they could not make progress in negotiation and could not protect Britain's position in the treaty on border controls. That is why I find it extremely strange that the Conservative party, which is totally opposed to any involvement in the Schengen acquis, is trying to make something of the negotiations.

Mr. Howard: It is important that my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) and the House should appreciate that these serious allegations, as my hon. Friend rightly said, against the Dutch presidency are made by the Government, not the Opposition. The Minister has told us something this evening that reverts to what the Foreign Secretary told us in oral answers to questions on 25 November, and differs from what the Minister told us in a written answer, published in the *Official Report*.

On 25 November, the Foreign Secretary alleged that this hole-in-the-corner agreement between Spain and the Dutch presidency was made subsequent to the hearings at Amsterdam. The Minister of State says, in the answer available in *Hansard*, that that agreement was reached on the night of 16 to 17 June, during the summit at Amsterdam. Can the Minister of State tell us which it was?

Mr. Henderson: Initially there were discussions in the margins of Amsterdam. Subsequently, when it was discovered that there was a difference of historic interpretation, an attempt was made to clarify, and a number of exchanges took place in private between the various parties contesting the text of the agreement.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: I shall give way once more, then I shall move on.

Mr. Howard: I refer the Minister to the question that I asked him, which is in *Hansard*:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs . . . when the bilateral agreement between Spain and the Dutch presidency of the EU was concluded."

The Minister replied:

"We believe that the text reflected discussions in the margins of the Amsterdam European Council on 16-17 June."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. *123*.]

This is important, and we are entitled to a clear answer from the Minister.

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is thrashing this to death. It is clear from the answer that, initially, during the discussions before the completion of the Amsterdam talks, there were discussions in the margins between the Dutch presidency and the Spanish

Government. Once it was discovered that there was a difference of view—in other words, when the Dutch presidency was saying that the Spanish amendment had not been changed—there were further exchanges between the various parties before final clarification. Subsequent to all that, there was a declaration, which I believe protects our interests in these matters.

I shall now move on.

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Henderson: No, I am not giving way. I shall continue, as I know that hon. Members are keen to conclude relatively early this evening.

The Opposition Front-Bench speeches had nothing positive to offer. There was no vision on Europe, no vision about the direction in which the Opposition want to travel. Opposition Members were split on monetary union, split on the Amsterdam treaty, and, indeed, split on the referendum. We have not yet had a reply from the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, about what happened to the commitment that there would be a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty. The shadow Foreign Secretary first stated that there would be a referendum, then appeared to be overruled by the Leader of the Opposition.

The hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) said that the Secretary of State, in his opening remarks, only attacked. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was listening to what the Secretary of State said, because my recollection is that he covered very thoroughly all the issues that will be before the Luxembourg Council and, indeed, other issues that are central to our relationship with Europe.

My right hon. Friend made it absolutely clear that he believes that people see the advantage of the European Union, as a modern relationship among states, dealing with the movement of people, goods and ideas. He said that enlargement was about strength, about seeking a practical timetable to bring about enlargement at the earliest possible time, and about looking at the reform procedures for the common agricultural policy, structural funds and budgets. He gave the commitment, in answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe, that the British presidency would forge ahead with those issues and others.

During our presidency, we shall be able to demonstrate what can be achieved on employment, the environment and the fight against drugs. I know that those policies are welcome in this country, and they will be welcome in Europe. We shall be very happy to pursue them in Luxembourg.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Anti-missile Defence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

8.48 pm

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): John Maynard Keynes was once quoted as saying:

"Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist."

In a similar way, whole generations of politicians can be captivated by a beguiling phrase. Today's Governments—not just the British Government—are captivated by the beguiling phrase "peace dividend". It is a phrase that carries within it the idea that we have somehow finished our investment in peace, and that all we have to do is to sit back and enjoy and spend the rewards. That is a fallacious idea. The only proper dividend of peace is peace itself. By seeking to "spend" this dividend by cutting defence spending, the Government run the risk of bankrupting their own defence strategy.

I secured this debate to seek clarification from the Government about their policy on ballistic missile defence systems. Stories have recently been circulating in the press that the Government plan to abandon research on the development of ballistic missile defences. *The Sunday Telegraph* of 23 November quotes senior defence sources as saying:

"Even if this has not been abandoned completely, it has been kicked into the long grass."

My fears were reinforced by the Institute of International Strategic Studies, whose journal *Strategic Comments* said last month:

"The MoD and Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials agree that the Review will not recommend any significant new expenditure on . . . ballistic missile defence systems."

As a former security command Minister in the Foreign Office, I do not always believe everything I read in the newspapers. I have a great deal of respect for the Minister for the Armed Forces, and I want clear guidance from him on the Government's policy. If those stories are true, it could have disastrous consequences for the United Kingdom and our NATO allies.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the relaxation of its global grip set loose the ambitions of a number of states in a world in which borders are no longer defined by the spheres of influence of east and west. The result has paradoxically been a rush to arms, and most particularly a rush to acquire weapons of mass destruction—a rush which, if we are not careful, may render NATO's whole new policy obsolete.

Many nations—most obviously Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iran and North Korea—are developing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological weapons and their delivery systems. At least 38 states possess ballistic missiles, and more than 70 have cruise missiles. For the moment, the range of systems is limited, but it will not be long before Iranian systems can hit Israel, and not much longer before the whole of Europe is within the missile range of a number of middle eastern countries.

[Mr. David Davis]

As is well known, the North Koreans are currently developing the Taepo Dong 2 missile. As it stands, we can only guess at the maximum range, but the third report of the Select Committee on Defence published in 1995–96 says that it is

"planned to have a range of around 5,000 km."

Libya and Iran already have an interest in buying that system. If they manage to get their hands on missiles with that range, it could put Britain at risk. Even if they do not, the Russians and Chinese might be alternative sources.

So much we know, because it is in the public record; but we should not overestimate our knowledge. The single biggest lesson to be learnt from the United Nations special commission's investigations in Iraq, and from the various issues that have been in the public domain in the past couple of months, is that our ignorance is massive.

Iraq has been a problem state for some time; yet we knew next to nothing about its programmes. In the Gulf conflict, we targeted eight out of 56 nuclear facilities. We were unable to find or destroy some 28,000 chemical munitions, and we knew little of the biological weaponry: 30,000 litres of botulin, anthrax and aflatoxin.

It is not as though we were not warned. In 1980, the Israeli air force bombed and destroyed Saddam Hussein's Osirak nuclear reactor outside Baghdad. The Israeli Government were widely condemned by the international community for that action. The Gulf war showed that we were wrong and they were right. Had they not taken that action, there is no telling whether Iraq would have had a nuclear weapon by the start of the war over Kuwait.

That ignorance is repeated elsewhere. We now know that the Soviet Union's stocks of chemical and biological warfare weaponry were 10 times that estimated by American analysts at the time of the cold war. That ignorance is endemic. Soviet nuclear accounting was primitive in the extreme—the Government have recently given assistance with that. General Lebed has said that nuclear warheads have gone missing, but no one can tell whether he is right or wrong. We know that a number of rogue states are seeking to acquire such weapons, and many experts believe that they are likely to succeed some time in the next 10 years.

Those rogue states want weapons of mass destruction and the associated missile delivery systems for two reasons. The most important reason is regional dominance. They have learnt that lesson from recent experience. The carnage of the Iran-Iraq war ended with the missile exchanges called the "war of the cities". The population fled the cities, terrified that Iraqi Scuds would be armed with chemical or biological weapons. As a result, Iran sued for peace. Both Iran and Iraq learned lessons from that.

The second reason for acquiring weapons of mass destruction is as an equaliser against western technological military dominance. If anything, the Gulf war will have sharpened that desire. Shortly after the Gulf war, a former Indian chief of staff said that

"the next conflict with the United States would involve weapons of mass destruction."

We can deduce from that that lessons will also be learned by so-called third world countries.

Europe's position is acute, because so many of the proliferators of weapons of mass destruction are around the Mediterranean and on Europe's southern border. Within 10 years at most—probably much less—every European capital could be within missile range of north Africa and the middle east, and will certainly be within the range of Libya and Algeria. If the Taepo Dong 2 achieves only the 3,500 km range, its limit from Iran or Iraq is probably Paris. If it achieves much more, let alone its intended 5,000 km range, the whole of Britain is within range of all the countries in the middle east. We should not forget that fuel technology is advancing all the time and can change the range of an extant missile system.

European exposure to that threat is likely to change the attitude of at least some countries to military operations beyond the borders of Europe. The fashionable interest in NATO out-of-area operations is likely to fade rather quickly under that threat. If we do not deal with this problem, they could become an obsolete concept in less than a decade. History shows that only too well. When the Americans staged their raid on Tripoli, other European countries refused to allow American warplanes overflight rights. That may have cost the lives of American service men. It showed that European countries will not always rush to support another NATO partner state, even when dealing with some of the dubious regimes of the middle east.

Many interests may motivate such reluctance: political and commercial interests, fear of the consequences, or national amour propre. As we saw with Belgium, which was an ammunition supplier during the Gulf war, international solidarity can be very delicate. The Gulf coalition was always a fragile entity.

Let us imagine the Gulf war occurring in 10 years' time against an opponent with missile systems able to hit any European capital. That opponent would almost certainly have chemical or biological weapons capable of killing hundreds of thousands. They might have 10 or 20 nuclear warheads capable of destroying cities. In such circumstances, how easy would it have been to hold together the alliance that won the Gulf war?

This is no fantasy. Recent history shows all too clearly that missiles are now being used to intimidate and break up coalitions. I have spoken about the war of the cities, and we know that Saddam used his Scud missiles to rain terror on Israel in the hope of provoking retaliation that would break up the alliance. More recently, China used missiles to intimidate the Taiwanese during their elections. That is the tactic of the future.

The effect of such proliferation will be to shut down the ability of the major powers to intervene. The new missile empires will be free to crush democratic states, indulge in genocide or hold the west to ransom over the control of critical resources or trade routes. That means that we have a 10-year or less window for action. If we do not act now, we shall face a geopolitical, tectonic shift, an irreversible fragmentation of the world into regional hegemonies, some of which could easily become no-go areas for western states.

There are four stages in any process that western Governments could use to deal with the danger. First, we could attempt to deny the rogue states the technology and, of course, we try to do that. For example, we can try to ensure that the missile technology control regime is adhered to. We became chairman of that regime while

I was at the Foreign Office. It is an agreement between 28 states to curb exports of vital components. China is not a signatory, nor are any of the rogue states. However, the regime has no means of enforcement, so it has not been able to prevent advances in missile technology. All the associated regimes relating to dual technology, weapons of mass destruction and the components thereof are equally porous.

Secondly, we can attempt to deter missile attacks by retaliation. That is a necessary aspect of the policy, but it is not certain. Deterring such attacks will work only if the offending states make a rational calculation of their self-interest. The rationality of leaders such as Saddam Hussein is a dangerous plank on which to base a policy.

Thirdly, western states can attack missile launch sites and other facilities. However, the Gulf war showed how difficult that can be. The United States air force failed to destroy the Iraqi mobile missile launchers.

The fourth and final way to deal with hostile missiles and the one about which I am concerned in this debate is to develop missile defence systems. Such systems cannot be created or completed overnight. They take time to develop, and if we delay now it may be too late 10 years down the line if we discover that Iran, to take one example, has nuclear missiles.

Some of the information that has come out of Russia in the past week or two shows that if we start to develop anti-missile system when we discover that a prospective opponent has nuclear missiles, that could cause destabilisation and provoke an attack. If we develop a defence system now, it could cause rogue states to re-evaluate their priorities. I am speaking not just about Britain but about all the European NATO states, any one of which could face any of these problems. Nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles are expensive. If the west is adequately defended, the calculations may show that the costs outweigh the gains.

It is vital for all of NATO to be defended against the missile threat, but if anything it is even more important that Britain be defended. Throughout the world we are rightly seen as particularly good allies of the Americans. I hope that that is as true today as it was under the Government of which I was a member. It attracts plaudits such as "special relationship", but it also attracts words such as "running dogs". However it is described, we are seen as close allies. The strength of that alliance means that any conflict involving the United States would make us a prime target. We may currently be at the edge of the missile range, but the political situation means that we are a prime target, and that distance edge may not last long.

Britain has a proud tradition of standing by her allies and upholding world freedom. One of my reasons for respecting the Minister of State is that I believe that he shares my belief in that. It is a source of strength, but it also makes us a target for despotic regimes. If we were unable to defend ourselves, it could have grave consequences elsewhere. The proliferation of missiles threatens to snuff out the resurgence of democracy, free trade and individual freedom that is serving the world so well today. Under any Government, this country has always been at the forefront of defending those civilised values in the past. An apparently small decision now, which may save a small amount of money, may eliminate our ability to defend those civilised values in the future.

9.3 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) illustrated in a number of ways the wisdom that he brings to the matter—first, in his choice of subject; secondly, by his recognition at the outset that peace is the real dividend; and thirdly, by his caution to Members, including myself, not to believe what we read in the papers. That was a somewhat superfluous caution, but I agree with him.

The right hon. Gentleman is wise enough to know that, if the premise of an argument is wrong, the conclusion will probably also be wrong. Part of his argument was based on the premise that a newspaper report was accurate. Let me make it plain that the report was not accurate.

Like every other aspect of defence, ballistic missile defence is being examined in the context of the strategic defence review, but no decisions have yet been taken. Far from sudden or dramatic decisions or significant shifts having been made, no decisions have been taken. Press speculation suggesting that the issue has been decided is premature and misleading.

Despite the flaw in the premise of the right hon. Gentleman's argument, I congratulate him on securing the debate on such an important subject. Anyone who listens to or reads the debate will recognise that the timing is apposite. We have recently seen renewed Iraqi efforts to obstruct the investigations of United Nations officials into its weapons programmes. It is as well to remind ourselves of the risks to not only regional but global security posed by the proliferation of missiles and the development of weapons of mass destruction.

The right hon. Gentleman's article in *The Daily Telegraph* of 20 November set out many of the issues facing us in the complex and difficult area to which he has devoted his debate. Some 14 third-world nations now possess operational ballistic missiles, and many other countries have cruise missiles of some sort.

Of course, some nations give greater cause for concern than others. Iraq is the obvious and topical example, but it is not by any means the only one. Several nations have not only missile programmes, but programmes for nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. When those capabilities, or attempts to develop those capabilities, are linked with a track record of aggressive and irresponsible behaviour, the cause for concern is manifest.

Attempts to develop nuclear, biological or chemical weapons—weapons of mass destruction—not only multiply concerns about missile proliferation, but present a more complex security challenge. That is partly because such weapons can be delivered by means other than missiles, and also because programmes to develop them are much harder to detect. Chemical and biological weapons activity can often be concealed within programmes with legitimate civil applications.

Biological agents are particularly problematical: a small quantity can have a widespread and potentially catastrophic effect. The production of such small quantities may require facilities that are extremely basic and easy to disguise or hide. We cannot assume that the activities that we know about represent the full extent of the problem. That very uncertainty, which is greater in this area than in many others, is itself a weapon in the hands of regimes that cause concern to the right hon. Gentleman and me.

[Dr. John Reid]

In considering the missile threats faced by the United Kingdom, it is probably helpful to distinguish between three areas: the United Kingdom itself, the territory of our NATO allies, and the territory outside the NATO area, to which the right hon. Gentleman alluded.

At present, the missile capabilities of states such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya and North Korea do not have the range to pose a direct threat to the United Kingdom or to the bulk of NATO territory, except for the south-eastern fringes. In saying that, I do not mean to diminish that threat, but merely to explain that the United Kingdom and its close geographical allies and colleagues are not in imminent danger from that threat. In the immediate future, the risks lie mainly in regions outside the NATO area, particularly the middle east, the near east and north Africa.

However, the picture is not static, and concerns remain about attempts by some of those countries to develop ballistic missiles with greater range—the right hon. Gentleman referred to that. How long it might take to develop the range to threaten western Europe and the United Kingdom itself is difficult to assess, but it can certainly be measured in years. However, that is a relatively short time in security estimates and in the development of security operations. Although it can be measured in years, that is of limited comfort because that is a relatively short period in military planning and because British forces may be deployed on operations where they face missile threats outside the United Kingdom, even with the limited ranges currently available to potential aggressors. In terms of time scales, the protection of deployed forces is a more immediate concern than the protection of the United Kingdom itself.

We could spend a great deal of time talking about the threat and speculating about how it might evolve in the years ahead. The very uncertainty should alert us to the imminence of the danger. In the short time available, I shall refer to responses to that threat, some of which were covered by the right hon. Gentleman. I must make it plain that, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman agrees, there is no single, all-encompassing answer to these issues, but there are several mutually reinforcing approaches available to us.

First, there are preventive measures of various kinds. Diplomacy has a role to play in discouraging the development and proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction. There may be some regimes that are impervious to the moral condemnation of the international community, even given the most stringent methods of implementation. However, just because some regimes are impervious to that, we should not underestimate the importance of such diplomatic factors in dissuading others from following their example.

Of course, diplomatic efforts will not always be able to solve the problem, but they may play a role in containing it, as long as the international community has the determination to sustain the pressure. There are mixed views about the effectiveness of diplomatic and economic sanctions, but there is no doubt that they can constrain a pariah regime's freedom of action and constitute a constant reminder that its behaviour is under scrutiny. It is crucial that such regimes are not given any encouragement to believe that responsible nations have lost interest or lack the political will to respond to their transgressions.

On a more specific level, arms control agreements clearly have an important contribution in making proliferation both harder to achieve and harder to conceal. We welcome the agreement this year of increased powers for the International Atomic Energy Agency—the so-called "93 plus 2" programme. That will effectively fill the holes in which Saddam Hussein was able to hide his nuclear programme and make it more difficult for him or any successor to do so again. We are working for early implementation of that agreement.

The missile technology control regime—to which the right hon. Member referred—the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the chemical weapons convention and the biological weapons convention all have a part to play. It is in our interests to encourage the widest possible support for those agreements, and to do what we can to strengthen the means available for monitoring, verifying and enforcing compliance.

Next year, we will be using our presidency of the European Union to press for early progress, particularly on verification arrangements for the biological weapons convention. It would be optimistic to imagine that arms control will completely eradicate the problem, but it will add to the obstacles faced by the would-be proliferator.

The right hon. Member will know that intelligence on such weapons has a critical part to play. The House will not expect me to go into details on the matter, but—on the basis that forewarned is forearmed—it is vital that we gather as much information as possible on proliferation activities, and particularly on the intentions and capabilities of potential adversaries. If there is the slightest chance that British armed forces might have to deploy to a particular region in future, in defence of British national interests or maintenance of international peace and security, we want and need to know as much as possible about the threats that they may have to face.

We must, however, accept that we will never be able to be sure that we know all that there is to know. Our approach to the issue must take account of that inevitable uncertainty.

When we do have good intelligence of capabilities and intentions, an additional element in our response may be the use of counter-force measures, to strike at the aggressor's capabilities before he can use them. Developments in precision guided and stand-off weapons may make that an increasingly viable option. We also have an exceptional asset in our special forces. However, the applicability of counter-force measures obviously depends on warning of the aggressor's intentions and the availability of good information for targeting purposes.

The role of deterrence, to which the right hon. Member referred, must not be overlooked. Even if a potential aggressor has developed missiles with the range to strike at the United Kingdom, and nuclear, biological or chemical warheads to be delivered by those means, he would have to consider—he would do well to consider—the possible consequences of such an attack.

There is sometimes a tendency to suppose that the concept of deterrence is relevant only in a transatlantic context, and that dictatorial regimes outside Europe are somehow incapable of thinking in such terms. We would be wise not to make such suppositions. Although such

despots often appear indifferent to the suffering of their own peoples, I see no sign that they are indifferent to the survival of their regimes and the preservation of their personal positions. Deterrence has a bearing on both those matters.

It seems unlikely that a dictator who was willing to strike another country with weapons of mass destruction would be so trusting as to feel entirely sure that that country would not respond with the power at its disposal. Any state contemplating such an assault on a NATO member would have to consider the implications very carefully.

We must realise, however, that deterrence in that sense might not carry the same weight in all circumstances. Therefore, we need to be able to provide our forces with adequate protection for deployed operations, in case neither deterrence nor counter-force measures could be relied on to nullify the threat. Such protection could include both active and passive defensive measures. Active defence, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, is generally used to refer to anti-missile defence systems, such as the Patriot system and various other systems being developed by the United States, together with the necessary early warning and command, control and communications capabilities.

We maintain close links with our American allies on this subject—very close, in fact. The right hon. Gentleman perhaps has no idea quite how close. Were I not addressing the Chamber on this important subject, I would be at a dinner with our Secretary of State and the United States Defence Secretary. The British Government will continue close links with our American allies; we have also played a full part in discussions in NATO, and will keep doing so.

At the national level, a consortium led by British Aerospace has conducted a pre-feasibility study investigating the various technical options that may become available in the years ahead. While the study remains classified, I am glad to tell the right hon. Gentleman that my officials are working to produce a declassified version of a report on the methodology and findings of the wider pre-feasibility programme, of which the study formed the larger part. That work has been part of the background to consideration of the issue under the strategic defence review.

There is a continuity of contemplation and purpose on this issue which does not square with the inaccurate reporting that formed part of the basis of the right hon. Gentleman's speech. I cannot yet tell the House what the outcome of that consideration may be, or whether we shall identify a requirement at this stage for the UK to take steps, on a national or multinational basis, towards procurement of ballistic missile defence systems, but a range of options will be examined by Ministers in due course, as with every other issue in the review.

Whatever the conclusion of that work, it is certain that we will continue to require passive defence measures, including capabilities to detect chemical and biological agents, protective equipment, decontamination facilities and medical counter-measures. Such capabilities will always be necessary because no system of active defence, however sophisticated, could counter every possible means of delivering weapons of mass destruction—which may include artillery shells or aerosol sprays, as well as missiles.

No single issue that I have discussed should be taken in isolation; nor does any one of them supply us with exclusive protection against the threat of ballistic missiles. They must all be considered together, as an interlocking network of means by which we can begin to consider how to defend ourselves against a grave potential threat.

Even sophisticated missile defence systems may face considerable technical challenges in dealing comprehensively with missiles armed with nuclear, biological or chemical warheads.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising the issue and putting his concerns on the record, to alert us all to the dangers of ballistic missiles and the development of weapons of mass destruction. Such matters can remain quiescent for long periods, thereby encouraging complacency in some quarters. Then we can suddenly find ourselves facing the grave and disastrous consequences of the development of weapons of mass destruction. Over the past few weeks, we have faced up to a grave problem of that nature.

The Government have continually reiterated that our stance has been based on the international community's determination that such weapons shall not be available to those who might use them against the rest of the world.

I hope that this brief overview has illustrated the nature of the problem, the seriousness with which the Government view it and the diverse combination of responses that may be available to us. I thank the right hon. Gentleman again for bringing this complex and important subject to the attention of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 5 December 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

POLICE (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Cook, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Dewar and Mr. Adam Ingram, presented a Bill to make provision about policing in Northern Ireland; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next, and to be printed [Bill 96].

Special Educational Needs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

9.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): The House will know that, yesterday, the Government's Bill to raise standards for children in schools was given its First Reading. We view the discussion document, the Green Paper, that we have published on special educational needs as a sister document to the Bill. We are determined that, when we say that we want to raise standards for all children, we mean all children. It is important to us that the consideration of our schools' future incorporates the future of children who are thought to have SEN. I therefore welcome the opportunity to have a debate that perhaps matches the many discussions throughout the country since the Green Paper's publication.

I expect that different views will be expressed in the House today, and that is right, but—this is an important starting point—members of all parties in the House share the concern that we should do as much as we can for children with special educational needs and for their families. I acknowledge the Conservative party's contribution over the years to that group of young people. Almost a quarter of a century ago, while in government, it commissioned the Warnock report and gave effect to some of its key recommendations in the Education Act 1981.

The code of practice on SEN, on which the previous Government consulted widely, has been an important achievement. We want to re-examine it, but we acknowledge that it was brought about through consultation and discussion with everyone who had an interest in the sector. The Liberal Democrats and the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) were part of the pressure that brought about the code of practice during consideration of, I think, the first Bill on which we sat together in Committee.

There are individuals who, whatever their party affiliations, have worked hard during their time in the House to ensure that children's special educational needs are not taken off anyone's agenda. It is in that spirit of a shared wish to do better—perhaps presenting different ideas of how we get there—that I wish to approach the debate.

The Labour party has not always believed that the measures have gone far enough or have been acted on as quickly as they might have been, but there has not been a major ideological divide in this sector, as there has in other education sectors. That is as it should be, because, in the education of children with SEN, whether we are talking about the 3 per cent. of children with statements or the 18 per cent. whom schools say have special needs of some sort, we are forced to confront some of the most difficult issues on the education agenda. Whatever we do, when we talk about children with SEN, we must never forget that we are dealing with some of the most vulnerable children in society.

I am delighted that, within six months of taking office, we have published a major Green Paper on the subject—and delighted that we have done so with the assistance of the national advisory group on SEN. I pay tribute to its

[Ms Estelle Morris]

work with the Government, especially in the past two months, when we have travelled throughout the country, been involved in consultations, and ensured that any decisions that we eventually arrive at will take account of the views of the people who will be affected.

Through both the Green Paper and the national advisory group, we have tackled the matter in an open consultative manner. That reflects our recognition that, if we are to improve provision for children with SEN, we must listen carefully to all those with an interest. That means listening to the professionals—to the teachers, workers in voluntary bodies, educational psychologists, education officers and medical professionals. However, it also means listening carefully to the views of parents and, as far as possible, of the young people who will be affected.

The consultation on the Green Paper continues until the start of January. I am delighted that so many organisations and groups throughout the country have been ready to hold conferences and meetings to discuss the Green Paper. I and officials from my Department have already attended many of them, and we are already receiving responses from organisations, individuals, voluntary groups, schools, parents and teachers and, of course, those will inform our future agenda for this group of children and their families.

It is already clear from the great majority of those who have so far expressed a view that they welcome the Green Paper. There is an air of excitement, optimism and eagerness that for the first time in many years they have the opportunity not just to look at an aspect of special educational needs, but to consider the whole package, to examine all the issues relating to SEN. It is clear that there will be many important suggestions on improving provision, but also some concerns about safeguards that will need to be retained or put in place.

In his foreword to the Green Paper, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sets out six key principles that underlie our approach. I should like to speak briefly about them, because they are at the heart of everything that follows in the Green Paper. The first point is central to all that we want to do: the Government want to raise standards for all children and have the highest expectations for all children. By that, we mean exactly what we say, and we include children with special educational needs.

To make that happen, there must be a changing culture and the SEN dimension must be built into all our programmes for raising standards. The whole range of our education policies has a part to play in that. Those policies include announcements that we have already made on our early years development plans, our plans on baseline assessment and, most important, our emphasis on early literacy and numeracy and the resources that we are committing to make sure that our children master the basic skills at an early age.

As the Green Paper states, with the right approach in the early years we might be able to forestall the development of some special educational needs, although by no means all—I would not pretend that. If we are right, the inevitable consequence will be that, over time, the proportion of children who require special education on reaching secondary level should reduce.

Our second key principle is our commitment on educational, social and moral grounds to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools where possible. Of course, we must remember that 19 out of 20 children with such needs are already in mainstream schools. By comparison with some European countries, our record on inclusiveness is good. However, the experience of other countries, for example in Scandinavia, suggests that there might be scope for further progress.

The opportunities for children with disabilities to be educated in mainstream schools vary widely across the country. As the Green Paper states, in some local authorities less than 0.5 per cent. of children are educated in special schools. In other LEAs, it is more than 2 per cent. The variation might be acceptable, but it is clear that in some local authorities a parent's right to obtain an inclusive mainstream education might depend more on where the parent lives than on the needs of the child. The Green Paper seeks to address those differing statistics and to examine what is behind them, to see whether we can learn from some areas.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I am pleased to hear that the Minister's commitment to special educational needs is being developed through the Green Paper. I am also pleased at the tone of her speech. Is she as surprised as I am by the fact that Hazel Glen, a special educational needs centre for under-fives in my constituency, was unexpectedly closed at the beginning of the year, despite assurances that special education would be expanded in Croydon? Will she undertake to look at that?

Ms Morris: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that I shall look at that. It is difficult to comment on decisions in areas with which I am not familiar and when I do not know the background. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to spot special educational needs and learning difficulties at an early age. For some children, the age of five is too late. We must do what we can to identify special learning difficulties at an early age and take immediate action to assist the children and their parents. That is important. I shall look at the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises and, if it is acceptable to him, I shall speak to the authorities in Croydon and come back to him.

Nothing in the Green Paper suggests that we want to close all special schools. We shall listen carefully to responses to the Green Paper, but our starting point is that for some children during at least part of their school career, education in a specialist environment may be appropriate. There is certainly a need for development of the role of special schools so that, increasingly, they become specialist resources for educating children who are there full time for the whole of for part of their education, and for supporting children who are educated in mainstream schools. I understand the difference that that would make to teachers in special schools and to the parents of children at those schools.

The change cannot be made overnight. It will require extra training for staff in special schools who want to work more in mainstream education, and for mainstream teachers with some special needs children. It will require resources and prioritising, but we want to start by building on existing good practice.

The principle of inclusive education does not mean removing choice from parents. We want parents to choose mainstream education when they feel that that is right for their children. We want to help to develop the quality of education in mainstream schools and the necessary support services that will give parents confidence. It would be wrong to do away with the present arrangements, which require LEAs to pay serious attention to parents' wishes. It is clear that, if there is no effective inclusive education in the area in which parents live, they will not have the choice so that they can request either a special school place or a mainstream place.

We want to give body to the notion of parental choice, so that parents can choose with the interests of their children at heart, knowing that, whatever their choice, there will be support that is appropriate to the stage of a child's development. I regret having to say that the policy of promoting inclusion where possible was never about dumping difficult children on unwilling mainstream schools. The early headlines that greeted the Green Paper did a great injustice to families that genuinely want to see children take their place in mainstream schools. Those families try their best to include their children in the activities of their peers and communities. The headlines also did an injustice to the many schools that tried hard to keep children with severe behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools.

Schools currently face many challenges and they make great efforts to retain in mainstream education children with behavioural problems. Sometimes, with the best will in the world and after much work and effort, that simply does not work. Schools must take account of the needs of all children. That includes not only the needs of the individual child, but the needs of those whose work could be disrupted by the activity and behaviour of others. We are not being dogmatic about inclusion or taking away the right of mainstream schools to decide that it is better for a child and for other children to exclude that child and request that he or she be educated in different circumstances. We acknowledge the good work of many mainstream schools in dealing with children who have behavioural problems. We want to praise them and spread their good practice.

The changes that we want to implement have spending implications—there is no doubt about that, and we have not pretended otherwise. I shall say more about the implications later in my speech.

Now, however, I am pleased to be able to announce to the House our plans for the schools access initiative, which supports projects to make mainstream schools accessible to children with—often physical—disabilities. In the previous financial year, the previous Government budgeted only £4 million for the initiative for this year, and for following years. I am delighted that, against a tight financial background, we are raising the funding almost threefold, so that, from next year, the initiative will provide £11 million of support, which is more than at any stage under the Conservatives.

I should like to pay tribute to the work done, way back in the early 1990s, by Coopers and Lybrand. The hon. Member for Bath and I, as Back Benchers, were associated with that work. I pay tribute also to Scope and to the National Union of Teachers, which had the foresight to implement it. The work set in motion the concept of Government making money available for schools to adapt themselves to the needs of children with physical disabilities. I pay tribute to the work done by those organisations.

I have already touched on the Green Paper's third principle, which is the importance of empowering parents of children with special educational needs, so that they have a real say in decisions about their child's education and can themselves contribute to their child's development. Partnership between home and school is crucial for all children. Time and again, hon. Members on both sides of the House express that belief. Perhaps, however, such partnership is even more crucial for families whose children have special educational needs than it is for other families.

Parents of children with special educational needs are sometimes under the greatest pressure and stress. They face a series of important and difficult decisions that do not always confront parents without children in that group, and it is important that they receive accurate information—when they need it—and support in making their crucial decisions. Too often, the support that they receive in that important decision-making process is too little and too late.

In the Green Paper, the Government have suggested that we make use of the named person—a good part of the code of practice—at an earlier stage, and that we develop parent partnerships across the country. We aim to achieve that goal by 2002. From next year, local areas will be able to submit bids, under the standards fund, to implement partnerships, so that parents receive support at the right time—when they are making decisions.

Parents often feel overwhelmed by bureaucracy and by the many avenues along which they have to travel to find the help that they need. It is difficult enough to be a parent. Perhaps it is even more difficult to be the parent of a child with SEN. It must be very dispiriting for those parents to have feelings of loneliness and isolation when working with those who are trying to work with them. We will have done a good job if we can inject extra support for parents at that point, so that they are helped in their important decision making.

Our fourth principle is about getting good value for money in expenditure on SEN. Currently, local education authorities in England spend about one seventh of their schools budget—totalling £2.5 billion—on special educational needs. We do not want to reduce that sum. I have already demonstrated by today's announcement that we are not about cost cutting in our approach to children with SEN and their families. We acknowledge that there will be transitional costs in making the improvements that we want. We want to shift resources, however, from expensive remediation to cost-effective prevention and early intervention. We want to shift the emphasis from procedures to practical support.

It is right for us to ensure that the one seventh of schools expenditure on SEN is spent so that it most benefits children. We must reach a stage at which we can deal with the problems without people assuming that we are engaged in a cost-cutting process. We are not. The Government have already shown by our actions that we are securing more money for education, not less. Children with SEN will benefit from the increased resources, as will every other child in the United Kingdom.

We have to examine how effectively the process of statutory assessment and statements is working. There is much evidence—despite the introduction of the SEN code

[Ms Morris]

of practice—that there are still matters to be re-examined, and that perhaps the code is not working as well as everyone had hoped. Perhaps that is inevitable in introducing such a complex procedure. After a few years, we should re-examine it.

Undoubtedly, for some children with complex special needs, it is crucial that the statementing process—which brings together responsible agencies in helping and supporting those children—continues, so that the multi-agency approach can also continue. We have no intention of weakening the process or of removing parents' right to ask for an assessment and a statement. As statutory assessment is so expensive, and as there has been such a sharp increase in the number of children with statements in recent years—so that there are now more than 50 per cent. more such children than were envisaged in the Warnock report—it is right to ask how effective the process is for all the children to whom it applies.

I look forward to receiving comments on the Green Paper. I want also to help schools to make effective provision under the code of practice for all pupils, including those with SEN, at an earlier stage.

Let us consider the striking example of two children, one of whom is judged narrowly to miss qualifying for a statement—it is a fine judgment, but he or she has fallen below the line—whereas the other child is judged to be just above the line. The amount of money available to the first child will be much less than that available to the second child. Is a system that discriminates against one of two children with very similar needs fair to all children? Such anomalies make a re-examination of the statementing process necessary—not because we want to remove the protection that statements offer or the multidisciplinary approach that they engender, but because the process may not be operating in a manner that is fair to all children.

I shall deal only briefly with the Green Paper's last two principles, although they are both essential to achieving our aims. We have to improve the training of all those involved with children with SEN. The Green Paper contains our proposals for the training of all teachers, particularly for SEN co-ordinators and specialists. In the new remit letter from the Secretary of State, we have asked the Teacher Training Agency to pay particular attention to the SEN dimension in all its work.

The remit letter mentions also, at last, the growing band of learning support assistants who are becoming increasingly important to our schools and our children. They have had too little recognition and been offered too few training opportunities, either to progress to other activities or to enhance their ability to support children. It is right that we acknowledge the role that they play and do something to improve their training and qualifications. They contribute a great deal to educating children with SEN. We have asked the TTA to examine specifically what we must do to enhance their ability to work well.

The Green Paper emphasises the importance of co-operative working between the various agencies concerned with children's special needs. It proposes that LEAs should work together to co-operate on a regional basis to plan provision, especially for low-incidence disabilities. The planning would cover not only available specialist places, but specialist training and support services. We need to ensure that all local agencies—education, social services and health, with the voluntary sector—work together in the interests of children with special needs.

We shall never reach the position with SEN where we do not have to use the skills of many professionals who are located in different areas of the system, who have different training backgrounds and who are resourced by different finances. Think what it is like for parents who must deal with that structure. We must try to establish a cohesive pattern of provision that meets parents' needs. For too long, parents have had to adjust their needs to the system: we want to build a system that adjusts to parents' needs.

This is an important moment in the nation's consideration of children with SEN. Children who last year received recognition for their achievement in examinations would not have been thought educable—that is the word we use—20 years ago. The progress that has been made in the past 20 years has highlighted the potential of so many young people who were previously classed as ineducable. The potential of many children went unrealised—depriving them of their right to flourish and depriving the nation of the benefit of their contribution.

There is more potential to be tapped. We have not yet constructed a system that allows every child with SEN to grow, to flourish and to realise his or her true potential. It is time to look at overall provision for those children and to consider whether we can take the next step. I believe that we can. That goal can be achieved through consultation and through working on a shared agenda. We must send a message that those children matter and that we believe that we can do better.

I am grateful to have the opportunity today to listen to the contribution that hon. Members will make to our Green Paper consultation. When that consultation is concluded, the Government will consider the responses received and announce our plans to take forward the agenda in due course.

10.1 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I, too, welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate. It comes in the middle of the consultation process on special educational needs, which will conclude on 9 January. The Minister will not be surprised to learn that I have quite a few questions. If she cannot respond to them in her winding-up speech, I hope that she will be kind enough to take note of them. When the consultation concludes on 9 January, I should be grateful if she would reply specifically to the questions raised in today's debate.

I am also grateful to the Minister for her recognition of the previous Government's work in this area. As she said, the Eduction Act 1981, which followed the Warnock report, set the framework of recognition for special educational needs and, in 1993, a code of practice gave statutory guidance to local education authorities, health authorities, social services and, most important, parents. I agree also with the multidisciplinary approach established by the previous Government, on which the Minister said that she would build. We welcome that as an extremely important move.

We can support much else in the consultation document. It is critical to identify problems at the earliest opportunity. Improved training of SEN teachers and other

support staff is very important also. We need better co-operation between local agencies in order to support children with special educational needs. As to early intervention, the Minister will know that health authorities in particular often hold a lot of information that should be transferred to LEAs and the education establishment at a much earlier stage. Despite much effort in that area, such information is often withheld until a child approaches full-time school age. If there is to be early intervention, that information must be exchanged and shared on a multidisciplinary basis at the earliest opportunity.

There are many questions arising from the consultation document, and I shall outline several issues that concern the Opposition. At the last Education questions, I asked the Minister about legal protection for children who receive statements and how that is enshrined in law at present. I remind her of the words in the press release issued by her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when the Green Paper was announced on 22 October. The Secretary of State said:

"The present law, including statements for some children, is there to protect the interests of the vulnerable. We shall not change that."

LEAs must, by law, deliver what is written into statements. Changes to the statementing process that recognise need must have legal backing. For example, an LEA would be legally obliged to deliver speech therapy if that were written into a statement. If speech therapy were suddenly to become the responsibility of the health service, although it remained a recognised need, there would be no statutory obligation on the health service to deliver it. I do not wish to see a diminution in the legal protection afforded to individual children through changes in the statementing process.

The Green Paper states that about 3 per cent. of children have special educational needs and are involved in statementing. There are now about 233,000 statements, compared with 153,000 in 1991. Hon. Members who have been here for some time will know that the practice of adhering closely to the figures cited by Baroness Warnock in her excellent report—which was produced in the 1970s and became the basis of the 1981 Act—is a personal bone of contention. If the purpose of the Green Paper is to examine the overall situation—the Minister said today that that is its purpose—I hope that she will also consider the changes that have taken place in certain areas of special educational need since Baroness Warnock produced her report.

For example, the Warnock report mentions dyslexia, which was formally recognised in the 1993 code of practice. However, the report does not identify the condition as necessarily requiring a statementing process, which is what happens now. I shall give several other examples later. I ask the Minister to do some number crunching. If this process is to be meaningful, we must address the real needs of children, rather than apportioning need according to a set of statistics which may be out of date for all sorts of reasons.

I turn now to the number of statements that the Minister is considering. Will the proposal involving quotas be at odds with local education authorities' basic duty to consider individual need? The inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream education and in special schools—I listened carefully to the hon. Lady's remarks about the dividing line and children who fall either side of it—requires resources. It is not just in mainstream education that we are concerned about the resources that support statements; if statements are based on a quota system, that may affect children in both mainstream education and special schools.

Children in specialised environments, such as special schools, are as much at risk from changes in provision resulting from cuts in resources as children in mainstream education. Therefore, their need for statement protection is every bit as great. Does the Minister accept that the proposal poses a real threat to the right of children in special schools to receive the provision that they need?

The proposals in the Green Paper also seek to ensure that, where possible, children with special educational needs are educated in mainstream schools. I know that many parents will welcome that approach. However, attempting to increase inclusion while removing children's rights to the provision that they require may be self-defeating. Should the Government not aim to strengthen the existing entitlement to ensure that the inclusive placements are successful?

The legal contract with schools mentioned in chapter 3, paragraph 9 of the Green Paper also raises some questions. There is a possibility of a new contract, different from what is currently in place. The Green Paper talks about strengthening

"the assurance to parents that schools will offer effective and consistent support of stages 1-3"

of the statementing process. Are the Government thinking of legally binding contracts? If so, will there be an appeals system? There must be a right of appeal in those circumstances. The Minister has identified the bureaucratic nature of the statementing process, but there must be checks and balances associated with rights. Will the Minister say whether the Government intend that parents will have a right of appeal on the school contract?

What advice has the Minister had on the implications of the Green Paper on what a school should provide before a statement is agreed, bearing in mind the High Court ruling on Phelps *v.* London borough of Hillingdon? The case was brought by a mother whose daughter had dyslexia, arguing that the psychologist should have diagnosed the dyslexia in October 1985, when she was nearly 12. Failing that, it should have been diagnosed subsequently as the girl experienced increasing difficulties.

As a result of the failure to diagnose the condition, the girl failed to receive the necessary provision, and her standard of literacy was lower than she would have achieved had she received that provision. The defendant argued that the psychologist had no duty of care to the plaintiff and that his role was only to advise the local education authority and the school. The judge's ruling that the psychologist owed a duty of care to the plaintiff has implications if there is to be a legal contract between the school and the parent before statementing.

Statementing must focus on identifying need so that the services and provisions that will help to meet that need during a child's education can be delivered. However, it is obvious that the possession of a statement in education has a more far-reaching benefit to the child. It is a passport for life. The Minister did not mention that and I should like her to reflect on it. Children with lifelong special educational needs who do not receive statements often hit the buffers when they come out of full-time education at 16 or 18. Because they have no formal statement about their needs as a child, they have enormous difficulty in accessing appropriate training, benefits and appropriate employment.

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

The Government have already said that they want to get more people with disabilities into employment. I am not suggesting that there should be lots of pieces of paper flying around with lots of bureaucracy for no purpose, but the statementing process goes beyond the age at which the child leaves school.

I mentioned earlier that I should like to draw the Minister's attention to certain conditions that particularly affect children and their parents. Those conditions, many of which are lifelong, often make it difficult for parents to get recognition from the medical profession. I have been in that extraordinary position. If certain conditions are not diagnosed early and do not receive early intervention, the education of the child is adversely affected.

There has always been a big debate about labelling. I am familiar with the arguments. I understand the reservations of some in the medical profession about labelling children too early, because they do not know how a learning difficulty will develop from an early age or how severe the disability will be. However, labelling is not a stigma. Statementing was once a stigma. I hope that the 1993 code of practice has put that to rest. I hope that the Minister will not be gulled by siren voices that say that labelling and statementing are a stigma. They are a passport, particularly for children with certain problems.

I was delighted to hear the Minister recognise the difficulties of having children with emotional and behavioural problems in classrooms. We all recognise the difficulties caused to the individual child and to the others being taught in the classroom with them. My sympathies lie particularly with any teacher trying to teach a class including one severely emotionally disturbed child or a child with challenging behaviour. Certain conditions give us special cause for concern.

The Green Paper notes on page 77:

"The number of children perceived to be falling within this group is increasing."

That is an ambiguous statement about children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Will the Minister say before the results of the consultation are printed whether that is only a perception or whether the numbers are genuinely increasing?

In the past few years, there has been an explosion in the number of parent support groups for children with attention deficit disorder, otherwise known as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Those parents are desperately concerned that the condition should be better understood and that appropriate treatments and management should be developed. It is unfortunate that the condition is sometimes dismissed out of hand, and parents are criticised for their children's behaviour.

Will the Minister also consider another aspect of emotional disturbance in children? There have been changes in society and in the way in which people live in the past 15 years. Divorce is on the increase. For one reason or another, there are a lot of children in school who are emotionally disturbed because of a specific trauma in their life. I do not want to undervalue such needs or the necessity of providing appropriate support when the problem is identified. I should be interested to see the statistics that relate to the statement on page 77 of the Green Paper.

Baroness Warnock's report made suggestions about the number of children involved. There are clearly many children who would be classified as emotionally disturbed, albeit for a temporary period, who have to be catered for in the net of special educational needs. That must mean that the cake is being cut ever more thinly. I hope that the Minister will consider specifically how to address the problems of those children.

The concerns of parents about the appropriate education to be provided must be listened to by professionals. They need people to stand alongside them. As the Minister knows, one of the great difficulties is that some parents are not able to articulate their own and their children's needs. That gives cause for concern. Some parents cannot articulate their children's needs, but others do not want to kick up a fuss in case teachers, doctors or other professionals think they are making a fuss or take it out on them. Whatever changes the Minister makes, it is important that parents are listened to.

I refer the Minister to a paper that was sent to me by Contact A Family. It says:

"Most parents are at best wary and at worst downright hostile to the notion that their child's statement of special educational needs should be replaced or reduced by LEA discretion. As the Green Paper states . . . some LEAs have sought ways of restricting the rise in the number of statements and that has undoubtedly created some 'mistrust and conflict in an area where trust and co-operation are essential.'"

One of the groups of parents who have particular difficulty are those with children who have a medical condition that the LEA tends not to recognise for all sorts of reasons. It is unacceptable that LEAs should pick and choose among conditions that they think they should recognise and those that they think they should not.

The House will not be surprised to know that I shall conclude by talking about a particular group of children and their special educational needs—children with autism. I am a member of the national council of the National Autistic Society and this is Autism Awareness Week, so it is a timely opportunity for me to give yet another plug for their needs.

A recent survey found that one in three parents were being turned away by professionals when they expressed concerns about their children, yet those children were subsequently diagnosed as having autism. The survey also found that there was an average delay of almost four years from when parents first sought professional help to when they got a diagnosis. Ignoring and dismissing parents' concerns in that way leads to much greater problems for children and their families than is necessary.

Children with autism can be helped to learn and to reach their full potential if they are diagnosed early. More than 500,000 people in the United Kingdom have autistic spectrum disorder, which is a disability with a wide range of effects. Some children with autism have learning disabilities, whereas others do not. Some children have no language and some exhibit challenging behaviour. All of them, whatever the degree of their autism, find the world a confusing and frightening place. With the right support, however, the impact of autism on children and their families can be minimised.

I ask the Minister to look particularly at the physical adaptation of the mainstream environment for children with autism. She will know that there are specialist schools for autism where the teaching methods are quite different from those in mainstream schools. I have in my

constituency an excellent SEN school, Millwater school in Honiton, where in recent years the staff have adopted methods of teaching children with autism. I went there recently and the staff showed me what they were doing with the children. It is admirable work.

That type of teaching requires a more enclosed environment for the individual and much more structured programming in terms of what the child will do from one session to the next. Millwater school can offer that teaching in the earlier years, but it cannot follow it through until the child leaves school at 18. The school has established best practice. Indeed, teachers from other parts of Devon are trained by the teachers at Millwater school.

We are not opposed to integration in principle. I hope, however, that the Minister is aware that meeting the needs of some children means more than one-to-one attention. The idea of a bit more one-to-one attention has become a panacea in SEN. Of course one-to-one attention is important, but it has to be appropriate. The teaching methods have to be appropriate and the child's individual needs have to be identified.

I welcome the opportunity for us to explore in the debate today what the Government have in mind in their Green Paper. I hope that the Minister has taken note of some of my concerns and that she will respond to me in writing if she does not do so in her winding-up speech. I hope too that the Government's response to the consultation document in January will meet my concerns.

10.24 am

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Like the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), I pay tribute to the Minister for arranging this debate today and, perhaps more important, for producing a Green Paper on this important issue when her Department is busy with other matters. It has introduced in a short space of time two major education Bills. That shows that the Minister, her Department and the Government generally are extremely concerned about special educational needs.

It was also right for the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton to refer to the important timing of this debate, which is taking place during national autism awareness week. As the hon. Lady rightly said, there are about 120,000 children with autism in this country. Their needs are covered by the aspirations behind the Green Paper.

I was interested to receive only yesterday a letter from the National Autistic Society, in which it says:

"The Green Paper on SEN could be of tremendous benefit to children with autism—but only if the key elements of early intervention, teacher training and development and resources in schools are in place."

Those comments sum up many of our concerns about the Green Paper. We share many of the Government's aspirations, but we want to know that those aspirations can be delivered.

The Minister rightly paid tribute to the many teachers and professionals who, in recent years, have done a tremendous job of providing support in many different ways for children with special educational needs. She also, rightly, paid a tribute to the previous Government. There is no doubt that the previous Administration cared greatly about the issue. I pay particular tribute to one member of that Administration: those concerned with special educational needs recognise the committed work of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). During his time as Minister, he made SEN an important issue and did a great deal about it.

Unfortunately, as with much else in education, many of the promises were affected by the education cuts. One example is the introduction of special educational needs co-ordinators. That was a good idea, but those concerned have experienced difficulty fulfilling their potential because they are not provided with the resources they need or the non-contact time in which to do the job that is required.

We must all acknowledge that the Green Paper is a consultation paper and as such, is inevitably thin on details. As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton observe, that means that there are a number of questions to which we would like the Minister to respond. I warmly welcome, however, the broad thrust of the Green Paper and I especially welcome the proposals to develop parental partnerships that will increase parental confidence in the system. I welcome the plans to strengthen still further the code of practice and the fundamental principle—this may be the key to the whole debate—that, wherever possible, children with special educational needs will be educated in mainstream schools.

The Minister rightly said that 19 out of 20 children with special educational needs are already educated in mainstream schools, but I share her view that we could do better.

Provision for special educational needs is a bit of a lottery. The Minister touched on that point, but it is worth stressing. Whether parents can get the mainstream provision that they want for their child depends on where they live. It is different in different parts of the country. There should not be a lottery in provision that children need.

I welcome the reference in the Green Paper and in the School Standards and Framework Bill to the procedures for early identification of special educational needs. Of all the proposals in the Green Paper and the Bill, that is the most crucial. Early identification of need, followed by early support, will reduce need and give young people greater opportunities to fulfil their potential.

I welcome the intention to drive down the number of statements. That will be acceptable only if we reduce the need for them; it will not if we merely cut the number arbitrarily. Early identification and support will be one of the key ways in which to reduce need.

There is just one thing wrong with the whole thrust of the Green Paper. I suspect that we cannot do anything about it yet, but it is an aspiration for us all. We should find a way of turning the whole debate on its head. We would achieve the most wonderful success if we were able to drop the phrase "special educational needs". Every child has special educational needs of one sort or another. We should have an education system that identifies and provides for the needs of every child. Only when we achieve that will we have a truly comprehensive education system.

Were we to move in that direction, as the Green Paper suggests, many more issues would have to be debated and addressed. That style of comprehensive education would require an absolute guarantee that all pupils have a right to the same range of educational choices, and that all schools value all pupils equally but celebrate diversity.

[Mr. Don Foster]

Schools should be developed to facilitate the learning of all pupils. We must recognise that effective development requires the involvement of all members of the school community, not just a few specialist teachers and ancillaries who are specially trained and selected for special educational needs work.

I think that my vision is shared by the Minister and the Government and is covered in the Green Paper. It is not an impossibility: it can be realised. The Green Paper highlighted a number of examples. One such is the John Smeaton community high school in Leeds. I had a particular reason for looking in more detail at this example of a school that is trying to develop an inclusive policy. The recent report of the Office for Standards in Education said:

"The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Staff cater extremely well for such pupils, ensure that they are integrated into school life and lessons, and help them to make satisfactory progress. Teachers generally use a range of styles and a variety of teaching methods depending on the needs and abilities of the pupils. Lively presentation and delivery was seen in English and geography lessons; in mathematics, stimulating activities are planned using devices such as pinball machines and the Morse Code."

I should declare a special interest, because the head of that school until very recently was my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). He is even more passionate about these issues than I am, and rightly so. He apologises to the House for not being present, but he has an important constituency engagement.

Passionate support for an inclusive approach should not be interpreted by anyone as a belief that there will never be a need in the future for either statements or special schools: both will continue to play an important role. The Minister and the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton were right to say that we must not be dogmatic about inclusion. There will always be some children for whose needs education in mainstream schools is inappropriate. Sometimes, mainstream schools may also be inappropriate for other children, but I echo the Minister's point that that should always be the exception rather than the rule.

If we start from the premise of inclusivity, we must ask ourselves a series of questions. We must think about how we will train teachers: that is not covered in the Green Paper. We shall have to train all our teachers for work with special educational needs. Sadly, some trainee teachers receive as little as two hours' special needs training during their teacher training course. We shall have to find ways for teachers to teach a class with a wide range of individual needs. It is no good the Secretary of State promoting whole class teaching in the more formal style that he has suddenly become very keen on, because that will not be appropriate for children with a wide range of needs. He will have to give that more thought.

We must also think again about the way in which we relate to parents. We must ensure that parents are confident that their child's needs are being met and that they are wholly involved in the process. As the Minister acknowledges, we must also think again about how we reallocate resources. There are answers to many of those questions and there are many examples of how that approach can work in practice, but we must put in place adequate resources and training.

The Green Paper—understandably—does not provide all the details, so some clarification is required. It would be helpful if the Minister could deal with some of the issues that have been raised, because that would help to inform other people who may want to submit comments before the close of the consultation period.

The Green Paper omits reference to the crucial distinction in law between special educational provision that can be arranged by a mainstream school and that which cannot. When it is shown that the school is unable to provide for special educational needs, it is the duty of the local education authority to undertake a formal assessment to determine the provision required and to arrange that provision. Do the Government intend to change that basic duty to children with special educational needs?

Paragraph 13 of chapter 3 seems to imply that the issuing of statements is now outside the LEA's control. There is no evidence to support that contention. In 1995–96, 99.5 per cent. of all statements were issued by LEAs of their own volition and only 0.5 per cent., which is the grand total of 75 in the whole year, were forced on the LEA as a result of tribunal decisions. I hope that the Minister accepts that the issuing of statements is still within the control and discretion of LEAs.

We must recognise—perhaps this is not recognised enough in the Green Paper—that we need a clearer understanding of why there has been a growth in the number of children with special educational needs. One of the reasons—about which more could have been said in the Green Paper—is that we have a greater professional understanding of special educational needs. More people have an understanding of dyslexia, autism, Asperger's syndrome and many other issues. Perhaps we should not be too surprised by the increase.

Many people are concerned about the proposal in chapter 3, paragraph 19 of the Green Paper, which suggests that the Government might introduce quotas in the number of statements. I believe that that goes against the spirit of the vast majority of the Green Paper.

Ms Estelle Morris: Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) have referred to that paragraph. I do not wish to repeat this too many times, but their interpretation is not correct. I am grateful for the opportunity to state this now, rather than leave it for another couple of hours. We have no intention of introducing quotas. Paragraph 19 says:

"They would therefore not operate as strict quotas".

We want to look at the disparity in the number of statements and try to get behind the figures. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that this was not put in out of a desire to have quotas. We went as far as saying that we do not want to use the word "quotas". I hope that he will accept my assurance.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the Minister for taking the opportunity to make that clear. She said, rightly, that there are real concerns about the differences in the number and timing of statements in different local education authorities. If what we have heard is a clear assurance that the intention of that section of the Green Paper is to "get behind the figures"—as she put it—and to gain a better understanding of what is going on so we learn from best practice, many people will be heartened.

Is the Minister aware that many people still have some suspicion that the Government intend to remove many of the legal rights and entitlements to special educational needs provision? She may be aware of a letter received in the past couple of days by the Secretary of State from a child of nearly 15 years who is a pupil at a Plymouth school. In his letter, Ryan Gross says:

"Dear Mr. Blunkett,

I am nearly 15 years old and I have cerebral palsy. I go to Lipson Community College in Plymouth, a mainstream school. In September my mum spoke to you about the Green Paper and you gave her your guarantee that your government would not diminish or remove the rights of disabled children to their legal entitlement to help that their needs call for. Now, my mum and I have read your Green Paper and we are very worried that you will break your promise . . .

Mr. Blunkett, I am asking you to keep your promise to my mum and not take away my right or the right of any other child to be protected by having a Statement of Need and the guaranteed provision that the statement gives us."

I believe from my understanding of the Green Paper that the Minister will be able to give an absolute guarantee that those rights will not be taken away. I hope very much that she will.

Finally, I wish to comment on spin-doctoring. I am grateful that the Minister has announced today a near trebling of the budget, but let us not be too carried away by her announcement. She has said that £11 million will be made available per annum. I have done a quick back-of-the-cigarette-packet calculation. I know, for example, that if a mainstream school introduces a lift to provide access for disabled children, it must be separately powered due to fire regulations. The cost, therefore, will be at least £50,000—and that may be an underestimate. On that basis, the entire sum announced today will provide 200 lifts for 24,000 schools. It will not go very far in helping to ensure that all disabled children's needs are met.

Ms Morris: It is better than nothing.

Mr. Foster: The Minister says from a sedentary position that it is better than nothing, and she is right. As she said, the move towards inclusion—with all the back-up, teacher training and resource support that will be needed—will cost a considerable amount. I am glad that the Government recognise that, but I hope to hear from them a real commitment to making those resources available. The children of this country deserve to have their needs met—those with special educational needs particularly deserve to have them met—but we also need resources.

10.45 am

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): I warmly welcome the Green Paper on special educational needs, which is the first comprehensive review of special needs for 20 years. With special needs education now costing £2.5 billion a year—12.5 per cent. of schools' budgets—it seems sensible to look closely at how this large sum can be spent and whether it is being spent in a way that will bring greater benefits to children in need.

In particular, it seems appropriate to consider in detail the operation of the statementing system. The number of statements nationwide has risen by 40 per cent. in the past five years. Nearly 3 per cent. of children now have statements, compared with the 2 per cent. envisaged in the Warnock report which led to the introduction of statements in 1981.

Although improved in recent years, there are still problems with the statementing system. As hon. Members will know from their constituency casework, the process is complex, bureaucratic and prone to lengthy delays which are harmful to children. As schools and parents demand ever more statements, the cost of statementing—together with the legal costs of dealing with tribunal cases—is putting a major strain on local education authority budgets, not least in London, part of which I represent.

Nobody—certainly not the Government in the Green Paper—is challenging the principle of statementing. Nobody—certainly not the Government, as the publication of the Green Paper proves—is disputing the need for special education provision. In 1981, Warnock estimated that one in five children would require some such form of provision at some stage in their school careers. That figure is borne out by the current estimate that 18 per cent. of the school population has special educational needs.

The question is whether the current levels of statementing represent the most appropriate and cost-effective form of intervention. That reasonable question is addressed in the Green Paper, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for School Standards has made it clear today that if savings can be made by reducing the number of statements the money saved will continue to be earmarked for special educational needs teaching. I welcome that vital assurance.

I also welcome the Green Paper's emphasis on early intervention in special needs. The Government are surely right to place the emphasis on preventative, rather than remedial action. Indeed, such intervention cannot come too early. That is why it is good to see in the Green Paper—and in more detail in the Department's draft guidance on behaviour support plans—the proposal that from April next year all LEAs should have in place early years development plans, focusing initially on four-year-olds and ultimately extending to all children from birth to eight years.

Language is vital for the development of literacy and other skills. Chapter 7 of the Green Paper rightly emphasises the need for improvements in speech therapy. I am pleased that the Government recognise the need to resolve the lack of clarity over funding for speech therapy between local education authorities and health authorities, and their willingness to consider changes in the law to ensure that children receive the services that they require.

Currently, the relatively small number of speech therapists face exceptionally heavy case loads, with children sometimes experiencing long waits—even for initial assessment. I hope that my hon. Friend can offer the assurance that an increase in the number of speech therapists, with appropriate salary levels and conditions of work to attract them, will be an early call on resources.

Above all, I welcome the Government's fundamental thrust in the Green Paper towards inclusion in their approach to special education. I welcome that approach because, as the representative of an inner-city constituency, I recognise all too clearly the penalties for individual children and young people—and to the wider society—of exclusion from the school system.

[Mr. Keith Hill]

Between 1991–95, school exclusions in the United Kingdom rose by 400 per cent. Exclusions are rising most dramatically in the primary sector. Dr. Carl Parsons, author of the Canterbury Christ Church college report on exclusion, estimates that education authorities are now dealing with up to 20,000 permanently excluded children a year, at a direct cost to the country of £60 million.

Last week's White Paper on youth crime identified truancy and exclusion as a key factor relating to youth criminality. In its report on young people and crime, published just over a year ago, the Audit Commission found that 65 per cent. of school-age offenders were not attending lessons regularly. The majority—42 per cent.—had been excluded, while the other 23 per cent. were playing truant a significant amount of the time. It also estimated that around £1 billion is spent every year in dealing with the effects of juvenile delinquency. These are among the social costs to which exclusion contributes in significant measure.

The personal costs are to be found in the tremendous strain on the families caring for these children and young people, and the under-achievement, alienation and loss of worthwhile prospects for the individuals themselves.

Representing as I do the Lambeth area, I have a special cause for concern in the disproportionate level of exclusions among black pupils. Higher rates of exclusion among, in particular, Caribbean boys and youths is a well attested phenomenon, even if the estimates of over-representation vary somewhat. The Commission for Racial Equality's analysis of the DfEE's latest figures suggest that Caribbean pupils are about seven times more likely than white pupils to be excluded.

It is perfectly clear that the increasing number of black exclusions follows the general pattern of rising exclusions. There are many and varied explanations and possible solutions for this, some of which I shall touch on later. However, even where schools have successfully cut their exclusion rates, they have still not been able to address the over-representation of certain ethnic groups. In other words, we need to put in place strategies to tackle the specific needs of such groups. These should include developing partnerships with ethnic minority and other community organisations, developing mentoring programmes, teaching pupils how to respond to racial harassment, and discussing racism and inequality within the curriculum.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for school standards has personally endorsed the CRE's good practice guide. The guide contains a number of proposals to reduce exclusions in general, but I draw her attention again to three specific recommendations aimed at dealing with potential racism and racial stereotyping in schools: first, the inclusion of racial equality as a management issue in head teacher training; secondly, addressing racial equality issues within training programmes for existing teachers, particularly those concerning behaviour management and curriculum leadership; thirdly, ensuring that equal opportunities issues are central concerns within initial teacher training, alongside literacy and numeracy.

I come next to the issue of emotional and behavioural difficulties as a source of exclusion from schools, although I do not wish to link this directly with the issue of black exclusions. I say that because, interestingly, the 1996 Office for Standards in Education report on exclusion from secondary schools found that excluded Caribbean children tended to be relatively successful at school and that

"their disruptive behaviour did not usually date from early in their school career, nor was it obviously associated with deep-seated trauma as with many of the white children."

Nevertheless, the Green Paper recognises that the number of children perceived to fall into the grouping of those with emotional and behavioural difficulties is growing, that exclusion is sometimes the only recourse for such pupils, and that even when they are not formally excluded many of these children effectively remove themselves from the education process.

In their 1995 study of primary school exclusions, Hayden and Lawrence found that, among the LEAs that they examined, nearly half of excluded children had statements of special needs or were in the process of being assessed, mainly for EBD.

There is certainly evidence that exclusion is often linked with poor acquisition of basic skills, particularly literacy. Poor language skills can result in frustration, which is reflected in behavioural difficulties, and prevent the development of literacy skills. That is why I drew attention earlier to the importance of speech therapy as a means of diagnosing such problems at an early stage.

Equally, EBD can also prevent learning. That is why the Government are right to acknowledge in the Green Paper that early identification and intervention can be particularly successful in tackling EBD.

I welcome the support for nurture groups and for school behaviour policies designed to create the calm atmosphere for learning that children with EBD problems especially require. However, we should not overlook the fact that getting children to behave in the classroom may not deal with the underlying causes of bad behaviour. Conformity in the classroom does not solve the problem if children still take their anger away with them out of school. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend the Minister will look at methods such as those employed by educational therapists, some of which can be acquired by classroom teachers through initial or in-service training.

For some children, of course, only therapy will meet their needs, and they will not make progress without it. Nor, might I add, are all EBD children disruptive. There are quiet and withdrawn children who may well, for whatever reason—perhaps abuse—suffer from an emotional problem that prevents learning and for whom extra literacy support will not work unless the emotional issue is dealt with. However, where a child is disruptive, exclusion may be unavoidable, but it really must be as a last resort.

It is not just that exclusion is so expensive. Home tuition or placement in a pupil referral unit costs more than twice as much as teaching a child at school. More important, permanent exclusion can have a devastating effect on the educational chances of the individuals concerned. Only one in three pupils excluded from

primary schools ever returs to mainstream education, and for secondary pupils it is less than one in five. For most excluded children, exclusion is a sentence for life.

From next April, all local education authorities will be required to prepare behaviour support plans, setting out their arrangements for the education of children with behavioural difficulties, including those with special educational needs. Under the SEN code of practice, of course, schools are required to tackle behaviour problems, but as I understand it local education authorities will only be required to set out their expectations of schools in identifying the cause of behaviour problems and the procedures to be adopted before calling on support services.

It has been suggested to me and I now suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is a problem with the linkage between the LEA and schools under the local management of schools and grant-maintained arrangements. In my borough of Lambeth, only half the primary schools buy in specialist support from the learning support service's primary pupil referral unit and only one of the seven secondary schools, five of which are grant-maintained, buy into the secondary referral unit. The remainder of the schools make their own arrangements for the non-statutory SEN stages. In other words, we are relying on schools to act wisely in this matter, but we have no guarantees.

If the Green Paper's object of reducing the number of statements is achieved, we shall be putting extra resources back into schools, but we shall not know or have any guarantees about how the resources are being used or even if they are being used for SEN purposes. That in turn relates to the general question of the future role of learning support services. Although the Green Paper discusses the changed role of educational psychologists and the use of special school staff to support mainstream schools, I imagine that my hon. Friend the Minister would agree that the preventive work carried out traditionally by learning support services is a cornerstone of SEN policy.

However, the consequence of the greater delegation of school budgets has been a move away from an LEA core-funded service towards systems such as service level agreements. In effect, learning support services have had to turn themselves into marketing agencies under pressure to sell their services to schools and to comply with schools' work specifications—not necessarily the most effective way to use the specialist skills of the support services.

In addition, those new market forces have created a trend towards short-term contracts for learning support staff. That raises the question how services can retain highly trained staff and expect them to undergo further training when there is no certainty of a job from one year to the next. Those are both serious problems, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reflect on them.

I began by welcoming the Green Paper's emphasis on inclusion in its approach towards special educational needs. I have focused on the need to minimise the damaging consequences of pupil exclusion. I have no doubts about the immense demands that we are making on schools and teachers in asking them to embrace that inclusive approach. Faced with a violent and abusive year nine or 10 pupil, a teacher will certainly want rather more than warm words to be persuaded that such a pupil should not be kicked out on his ear. The teacher must be able to rely on a practical mechanism to deal with such a pupil.

The answer has to be a clear behaviour plan with teeth. In other words, behaviour support teams must be available to take the pupil out of the classroom, work with him and turn him around so that he can be reintegrated into the classroom. That is the support mechanism that teachers have the right to expect, and it needs to be available in the form of a specialist behaviour support unit in the school. If the school will not fund it, LEAs must have the resources to supply it.

If schools are to accept the inclusive approach, they will also need various forms of assurance. Like teachers, schools will have to be confident that there will be practical support mechanisms on hand to deal with disruptive pupils. If they cannot, or will not, provide those support services, there is a strong case for every LEA to have a support unit.

We all know of the pressures on schools to perform well, both from parents and the Government, and both are right to require the highest standards of excellence. We also know that it only needs one disruptive pupil to create an atmosphere of chaos in a classroom and in the school at large, with disastrous consequences for the performance of other pupils. The temptation to solve the problem by exclusion is obvious. It is surely no coincidence that the recent surge in exclusions seems to date from the publication of the league tables.

If we are saying that we want as many children as possible to be in school and that we want schools to be open and to serve the whole community, schools will have to be rewarded for opening their doors to everyone. That means extra resources and support for the so-called sink schools, which will still take on a disproportionate responsibility for such pupils. Obviously, that is envisaged in the education action zone approach, which I welcome. I hope that we shall get one in Lambeth. I am sure that further resources will become available as and when it is prudent.

Also, it means a change in the way in which we judge the achievements of schools. A good school is not only a school that scores highly on the raw results in the league tables, but one that serves its community, not one that takes on children reluctantly. That is the importance of the Government's commitment to ending selection in schools and to introducing baseline assessment and measures of the value added by schools to their pupils. A good school is a school that provides excellence for all children, whatever their background or needs. I commend the Green Paper to the House.

11.6 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Special educational needs is a subject of great importance in education. I welcome much in the Green Paper. Opposition Members have made it clear that when we are in agreement with the Government we will give them our support and there is much here that we can support.

Considerable numbers of pupils are directly involved in this area and some of the issues involved have a bearing on the entire education system. The subject is also complicated, encompassing many different issues and problems, which can make clear analysis difficult. On a more trivial note, however, I found—as did many other people in my constituency who were sent the document—that after one reading it started to fall to pieces. Let us hope that future Government policies do not do the same quite so easily.

[Mr. John Randall]

In the past 18 years, much has been done to promote standards in our schools, but as it used to say on my old school reports, "Could do better." That will always be the case in education. Many of the aspirations contained in the Green Paper are desirable, but I have some worries about some of the recommendations. Of course we want to raise standards for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The Green Paper's emphasis on early intervention, raising expectations, target setting, teacher training, the role of parents and improving the efficiency of the present arrangements are all to be welcomed.

My main worries relate to the increasing inclusion that is central to the Green Paper's thinking. Obviously it is sensible in many cases to educate pupils with special educational needs within mainstream education. For many, it is the most appropriate environment for social as well as educational reasons. It can also be more cost-effective to deal with special educational needs within the mainstream.

At the moment, there are parents who prefer their children to be educated within the main system, but who face practical obstacles in doing so. If their child is disabled, they can face problems of access. The Green Paper's pledge in favour of significant expansion in the schools' access initiative will be widely welcomed. It will help mainstream schools to become more accessible to disabled children who would otherwise be denied access.

The emphasis on inclusion must be qualified. Inclusion is fine only if it is the best solution for both special needs pupils and their fellow pupils. When those two interests co-incide, inclusion makes sense, but the assumption that inclusion is, by definition, good is not universally shared. We must never forget the sensitivities involved in SEN, particularly in relation to parents. Many parents whose children have SEN have expressed concern about how their children's needs are being met. Many fear that inclusion will lead to their children's SEN requirements being neglected in a mainstream school and that the emphasis on inclusion will mean that their right to opt for a special school will be diminished.

The Green Paper states that the approach to SEN must be practical and not dogmatic, and that the right to opt for a special school will be retained. The fear is that, as inclusion becomes the benchmark by which SEN initiatives will be judged, it will become practically more difficult to opt for a special school. The Green Paper contains a number of commitments to work with a specific number of schools to identify ways in which special and mainstream schools can support each other. The practice of piloting changes in specific schools and LEAs is sensible as it helps to establish whether the proposals will work in practice.

The Green Paper also mentions the funding of research into the relative costs, benefits and practical implications of education within mainstream and special schools. To an extent, it seems to put the cart before the horse. Would it not be more sensible to await the conclusions of such research before placing unqualified emphasis on inclusion?

That brings me to one of the difficulties of discussing SEN—the fact that the sheer diversity of needs included within that category makes talking clearly about the subject complicated. I wish to deal with a specific group with special needs, which will pose the greatest difficulty to extending inclusion—children with emotional and behavioural difficulties—and the problems that that group experiences in the mainstream system. That group of children—mainly boys—has a range of problems, from short-term emotional difficulties to serious psychological problems. Their behaviour often results in exclusion and can be the result of many factors, including the breakdown of the family unit, poor parenting or experience of early learning difficulties.

The problem with those children is that they seem to spend more time outside the school environment than inside, which makes it difficult to counteract the negative impact of the external environment. They disrupt not only their own education but that of others. We must bear that factor in mind when discussing the problem. The needs of a small minority must be balanced with those of the vast majority of children.

How can we maximise the educational attainment of all children in the most appropriate environment? That must be done without compromising the interests of one group at the expense of another. I am particularly worried by the proposal to give schools financial incentives to encourage them to keep pupils at risk of exclusion and to admit pupils who have been excluded from other schools. That sends out the wrong signal by tempting schools to abdicate their objective judgment by making an exclusion decision based on budgetary considerations.

I hope that the Government will take those concerns into account when they prepare their White Paper.

11.13 am

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): Initially, I intended to thank both Front Benches for their broadly non-partisan approach; I am happy to extend my thanks to all three Front Benches. The subject of special educational needs is far too serious for us to get stuck in the mire of partisanship or dogma. I share the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister about the previous Government's action on special educational needs.

I was trying to come up with a crack about the attraction of foxes as opposed to children with special educational needs. However, I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have good reasons not to be in the Chamber today.

"Excellence in schools" was the title of the Government's White Paper published in July. It has now been followed up by the Green Paper bearing an extended version of that title, "Excellence for all children". The transition neatly mirrors the change of emphasis that has taken place under a Labour Government.

Schools identify almost one child in five as having some sort of special educational need. In the LEA that covers my constituency of Harrow, East, more than 900 children have individual statements showing the special educational needs provision that they require.

Although deprivation and special educational needs are clearly linked—much research shows that—SEN is not the exclusive preserve of inner-city, deprived areas. Areas of a far more mixed nature, such as Harrow, East, which is far from being the affluent suburbia that many people think it is, still have real concerns, albeit often of a different nature from the vast array and complexity of the difficulties alluded to by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall).

Whereas in the past doing one's best meant sympathetically tolerating low achievement, it now means tough adherence to the belief that all members of society have a positive contribution to make. The teaching profession in Harrow shares my high hopes for children in Harrow. The vast majority of children will, as adults, contribute economically to society, and all will contribute in other ways. That underpins our approach to special educational needs. Only this week, for example, Harrow held a Duke of Edinburgh award ceremony, when special school pupils with severe learning difficulties received bronze awards alongside A-level students from an independent school and young people from a range of secondary mainstream schools.

It is not, as others have said, merely a question of hoping; we have high expectations for children with special educational needs. The Labour Government's vision is excellence for all, not excellence for all except those with special educational needs. We have heard much today about how we can achieve that goal. However, no one claims that it will be easy and no one, least of all my hon. Friend the Minister, claims that the Green Paper contains all the answers. It is an extremely complex matter and much remains to be done on a cross-party basis to prevent children with SEN from being left behind and excluded, and from going on to join the one twelfth of 16-year-olds who currently leave school with no GCSEs, or the one sixth of adults with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills.

Early identification and intervention are therefore absolutely essential. Partnerships between professionals working with the under-fives and assessing pupils as they begin school will help to identify and address problems before they have a chance to get worse. There have been some successful Portage systems for working with parents of pre-school children. I cannot stress enough the importance of early intervention, not least to prevent subsequent SEN and emotional and behavioural difficulties at secondary school level. In many areas, although not all, that is preventable, because if children's problems are tackled early enough, they can go on to secondary school without significant SEN.

As pupils progress, it is vital that schools and parents have high expectations of the standards that pupils with SEN are capable of achieving. I do not seek to make a partisan point, but over the past 20, 30 or 40 years there has been, to an extent, an expectation of failure and of low performance and under-achievement by pupils with SEN. In this day and age, that is simply not acceptable. If that is a criticism, it is a criticism of the generic education profession, not a party political point.

Whereas only 2 per cent. of mainstream schools are deemed to be failing, the corresponding figure for special schools is 7 per cent. That is a telling statistic and a shameful legacy, which we are all determined to tackle.

The targets set for individuals, schools and LEAs will take SEN into account more than ever before. The new entry level awards as outlined in the Green Paper will be available for pupils for whom GCSEs and GNVQs at 16 are not appropriate. If we are not to repeat the mistakes of the past, we must take care that those awards are not offered as a second-class alternative to GCSEs, when higher expectations of pupils might lead to GCSE success. Although we should welcome those awards, we should not see them as an alternative, formalised secondary route for pupils with SEN. They must not dampen expectations that might otherwise exist were those awards not available.

Targets should be qualitative as well as quantitative. We should not run away from the fact that they should include factors such as the successful integration or reintegration of children with SEN in mainstream schools, as well as targets connected with the league tables.

The fear has been expressed that such targets will encourage and formalise inclusion into mainstream schools to the exclusion of any other option, but when inclusion works for SEN pupils, that should be recorded faithfully when we measure the performance of our schools.

We must not lose sight of parents and carers. Should I mention parents later in my speech, hon. Members should take that to mean parents and/or carers depending on what is appropriate. There is no reason why parents and carers of children with SEN should not know where to turn for help, but all too often that has been their experience. In many cases, that help has been available, but I accept what has been said about the geographical lottery of such help. In the past, parents did not know how to gain access to it and in other cases, that help was simply unavailable. The Green Paper proposes concrete measures to ensure that that is no longer the case.

Parents and carers will be given a greater ability to place their children within an integrated mainstream environment, while retaining their current right to express a preference for a special school place for their child. I partly understand the fear that that might mean that a child's right to a place at a special school will be downgraded, but I do not believe that that will happen. That option must be retained as part of the overall comprehensive provision of SEN. It is absolutely right, however, to reverse the balance so that, where possible, inclusion in the main stream is the norm and special school placement is the alternative. If that emphasis is reversed, it will change fundamentally the role and nature of special schools. They will be rejuvenated and reinvigorated as part of total education provision within an LEA, rather than being considered as an add-on sideline.

Under existing legislation, parents are offered independent advice only when a child receives a statement. The Green Paper proposes that that option should be available to all parents as soon as their children's needs are formally assessed. It is crucial that a child's problems are assessed early. From next year, parent partnership schemes, another vital source of support, will be eligible to secure resources from the standards fund. By 2002 there will be one scheme in every LEA. I am happy to tell the House that Harrow already has an extremely successful parent partnership scheme, which acts effectively as a go-between for parents and the LEA, and it has led to increased understanding and consensus. Harrow also has a network of locally trained named persons to offer a vital source of support. That, too, is part of the Green Paper proposals.

The SEN tribunal will remain the final arbiter in a dispute between parents and an LEA. There is a real chance, however, that the number of appeals to it will be reduced because of vastly improved arrangements for dialogue between parents, schools and LEAs. Parents and carers will become empowered, supported partners with

[Mr. Tony McNulty]

local services, working to get the best for every child with SEN. They will no longer be the last, if not often forgotten, element in the equation.

It is right that people should ask how the proposals will work in practice, because a robust framework for monitoring SEN is essential. The emphasis should be on practical support, not procedures. In the past, all Governments have been guilty of concentrating far too much on such procedures, bureaucracy and the associated processes rather than on practical support. They should have concentrated on the key elements of implementation, to ensure that the best is offered to each child.

As has already been said, LEAs spend £2.5 billion a year on SEN. It is vital for all concerned, and for the House, that that money is well spent. Under the Green Paper proposals, an improved SEN code of practice will build on past good work, and greater emphasis will be placed on intervention at the earliest stage. Such intervention may take place while a child is still receiving help at school, and, for many, before they enter the statementing process.

I accept people's fears about the role of statements in terms of their legal position, but I believe that those fears are unfounded. The emphasis of the Green Paper is that action should be taken at the earliest possible stage, so that one can focus more and more on what a child needs before one reaches the statementing process and tribunals. Surely that must be a good thing. Early intervention will in some cases, although not in all, obviate the need for statements, and that will avoid possible subsequent difficulties with tribunals. Paperwork will be kept to a minimum and the result of such improvements will, I hope, be fewer delays for parents and their children.

Our strategy for raising standards for all as laid out in the School Standards and Framework Bill and the White Paper will lead to fewer children needing a statement, because their SEN will be met by other means such as the national literary strategy, early intervention and improved behavioural expectations.

I am not suggesting that the proposals outlined in the Bill will act as a panacea and that SEN will disappear—far from it. If a child is subject to early intervention on literacy and numeracy, he might not end up being labelled SEN or be statemented later. I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister said about the access fund increasing to £11 million. As ever, that was met with a rather muted welcome by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who said that that is not enough. We know that. I do not recall my hon. Friend saying that, because the funding had gone up from £4 million to £11 million, all problems with access to mainstream schools had been solved. That increase must be a step in the right direction.

The Government are committed to comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. Our aspirations as a nation must be for all our people. For that reason, it is important that children with SEN should be educated in mainstream schools wherever possible. "Wherever possible" does not mean that such an option is an afterthought designed to cope with the most difficult cases; rather, that we must genuinely consider what is best for a child. I accept that in many cases it may not be possible or the best thing for certain children to be taught in a mainstream school. That is fine, because it is no better or worse than if that child were taught in a mainstream school—the fundamental focus must be the interest of each child.

Where children with SEN can be taught in mainstream schools, the benefits will be experienced by all concerned. Other children will grow up less ignorant about those with SEN, with all its complexities, if they are sitting next to such children in the class every day. Children with SEN will be better prepared for life after school if they are included in mainstream schooling.

I applaud the fact that the Government support the UNESCO Salamanca world statement on special needs, which adopts the principle of inclusive education wherever possible, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise. Those compelling reasons must be connected with the interests of the child, rather than resources or the convenience of some in the teaching profession. The interests of the child must be paramount.

I am proud that Harrow is the sixth most inclusive LEA in the country. We have had particular success with including children with sensory impairments, such as those who are blind, the physically disabled, those on the autistic continuum—that is particularly appropriate, given that it is National Autism Week—and those with moderate learning difficulties.

Harrow also has a good record in providing integration experiences for many of our children in special schools. Inclusion need not mean having children with SEN taught completely in the main stream or in special schools, and never the twain shall meet. There are some good programmes throughout the country providing integration experiences for children who, for compelling reasons of what is best for them, are taught in special schools, but who also benefit from structured visits to the mainstream.

In the spirit of the non-partisan approach that we have adopted, I freely admit that the foundations and building bricks of Harrow's successful approach to SEN were introduced by an enlightened Conservative council. Our success does not date from the hung council from 1994 onwards, but goes way back to the mid-1970s, when Harrow became a comprehensive LEA. We now see the fruits of the good practice implemented when the Conservatives commanded a huge majority in Harrow. To move slightly away from non-partisanship, I am happy that that huge majority no longer exists, but their good work in respect of inclusive education for children with SEN is still there. All local parties in Harrow, including the Conservatives, can be proud of that.

Above all else, the needs of the individual child are paramount. Specialist support must be made available wherever needed. It has been argued in certain quarters that the Green Paper's proposals somehow constitute a threat to disabled people, but that is utter nonsense. Improved access to school buildings for the physically disabled and the use of new technology for those with sensory impairment will be a fundamental first step. Specialist schools, of which there are three in Harrow, will not be made redundant by the proposals, but will be rejuvenated. They will work together with mainstream schools in support of one another.

Particular attention has rightly been paid to schemes to help children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Discrepancies in facilities, funding and demand for services will be evened out by greater emphasis on provision at a reasonable level. National and local

programmes to support increased inclusion will be in place by 2002. We have been talking about the geographically patchy distribution of access to support for SEN, but the confused and complex field of emotional and behavioural difficulties is even more of a lottery than SEN, where the needs of the child are more readily recognised and identified.

All this talk of schools cannot ignore the essential contribution made by professionals working with children with SEN. Teachers are an essential asset to national life, but in the past they have been overlooked, deprecated and, far too often, demonised. That will not be the case under our plans in both the new Bill and the Green Paper. I fully endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) about understanding the real difficulties faced by teachers.

Teachers will receive more information about SEN in their initial training, which is right and proper; and will have enhanced opportunities to improve their skills in teaching children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Head teachers, SEN co-ordinators and other specialists will have their training programmes enhanced. Teachers' helps will receive professional training and governors will receive guidance on their responsibilities towards SEN children. By 2002, there will be a national agreement on ways of reducing the time spent by educational psychologists on assessments and developing the service that they offer to children with SEN. Another highlight of the Green Paper is the welcome recognition of the important role of learning support assistants and the need to provide training for that undervalued group of staff, which grows larger each year.

I feel bound to rebut the unfair criticism levelled at the Green Paper by certain representatives of the teaching profession, who really should know better. Rather than be polite, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham, it is time to name names. Nigel de Gruchy of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers was quoted in *The Times Educational Supplement* of 24 October as saying that there is a "strong possibility" of industrial action by teachers if they face an influx of "impossible children". That was the best reaction he could manage to a far-reaching and comprehensive Green Paper on SEN. Mr. de Gruchy should be absolutely ashamed of himself. Children with SEN are not impossible and such labels are not appropriate in such a sensitive matter.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman is obviously not affiliated to that union.

Mr. McNulty: I should declare a partial interest, in that I am a member of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, so I am a bit higher up the teaching ladder.

Children with SEN are not impossible. As other hon. Members have said, labels and symbols in such a sensitive area are not useful and people should think before speaking. We must never give up on those with the worst behavioural and emotional difficulties, who often present teachers with the biggest challenge. Times are changing and the old ways of thinking are not good enough any more—Bob Dylan is 56 and the Spice Girls might well be No. 1 at Christmas. Institutionalised under-achievement will no longer be tolerated—there is no longer a role for acceptable levels of under-performance. All must embrace the principle of excellence for all. How dare people write off our children and blight their future in such a way? We shall fully support teachers who are facing fresh challenges, and I believe that they will support us in trying to do the best for all children, not merely those whom Mr. de Gruchy would presumably label "possible".

Harrow manages both to achieve high levels of attainment for all its children—we are third or fourth in the latest league tables—and to be one of the most inclusive LEAs in the country in terms of children with SEN. Harrow's learning support policy is well supported by schools and all in the local education community. The importance of a positive approach to SEN cannot be underestimated.

The most exciting and potentially the most fruitful of the Government's proposals are the ideas on disseminating good practice in SEN. LEAs, social services departments and health authorities are to share information, and up-to-date research will be made more widely available. In particular, speech and language therapy will be more effectively provided than ever before.

There will even be a post mortem by the Department for Education and Employment on the experiences of young people with SEN after leaving school. That cannot fail to help schools and colleges to prepare young people for adult life more effectively. It is about time that that was marked out as an exciting way forward—finally, as much as schools and LEAs, all the appropriate agencies will, in a more formalised fashion, have to talk to each other, work together, integrate their approaches and be inclusive.

What happens now? It is time to catch our breath. The first step is a wide national consultation on the Green Paper proposals. All this week, consultation meetings have been taking place in Harrow: councillors, teachers, parents, governors, support services and local education officers all came together to discuss these issues. It is no exaggeration to say that packed audiences gathered on Wednesday and Thursday to help to fashion Harrow's contribution to the consultation process. It is hoped to follow that up with discussion with the children in our schools. The Government are asking this country's education community and everyone concerned with our children to give their best ideas for the development of SEN provision. This is the most far-reaching review of SEN for almost 20 years, and people can and will have their say.

The result of the consultation and the final implementation of the policies outlined in the Green Paper will, I hope, be excellence for all our children. Gone are the days when children could be excluded on the ground of their needs and banished to schools where their failure and under-achievement were assumed and where they were kept out of the way of brighter and "possible" children. With the White Paper, the School Standards and Framework Bill and this Green Paper, the Government have shown that all our children matter; that the standards set for all our children will be improved; that every child will be stretched to perform to the best of their ability; that no child will be given up on; and that, where possible, all our children will be taught in an inclusive, supporting environment.

We demand excellence for all our children—they deserve no less—and all parents, carers, teachers, heads, learning support assistants and other professionals will

[Mr. McNulty]

work with LEAs and the Government to achieve that excellence. We should let every child flourish and all dreams become reality. We should help all our children, especially those with special educational needs, to realise their full potential. We owe them that and much, much more.

I commend the Green Paper, and I hope that the cross-party approach will be continued.

11.39 am

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I believe that the former hon. Member for Harrow, East, Mr. Dykes, was well known for being able to see the Labour party's view, and I welcome the fact that the new hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) is prepared to see the Conservative party's view. I hope that he will continue to do so—believe me, there are more issues on which that may be possible.

The fact that for every 100 Labour Members of Parliament who were here a week ago to enshrine the legal rights of foxes there is, in the Chamber today, barely one to consider the rights of needy children, speaks for itself. None of those Members appears to be truly prepared to defend those children's needs, which is what we need to do today. The fact that this debate was chosen for a Friday morning following a busy Friday the week before also arouses my suspicions.

Yesterday, I was at a meeting with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), who was not even aware that this debate was to be held this morning. I hope that she and her colleagues on the Labour Benches who will be with me during the Select Committee's deliberations next week when we address special educational needs will show more vigour when it comes to examining what the Government are doing.

Bipartisanship generates a nice warm feeling, but I cannot help remarking that the Government are selective about bipartisanship. There was no bipartisanship when the Chancellor stood up the other day with his little bag of Christmas goodies; there was no suggestion that he should compliment the Conservatives on the superlative performance of the economy under their Administration, which made it possible for him to stand up and deliver his bag of goodies.

In my limited experience, when Labour Ministers talk about bipartisanship, it is normally because they intend to do something unpleasant and want to have us on board while they do it, so that they cannot be fingered with the blame. While I do not dispute the sincerity of the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I am concerned that she, too, may be having the wool pulled over her eyes by her Department.

There is something almost Orwellian in the language used in the Green Paper on the subject of special educational needs. We are told on one page that the Government do not intend to impose targets, but we are told on the next that they want to see the proportion of children with special educational needs reduced from 18 per cent. to 10 per cent. What is that, if it is not a target?

We were told this morning in the Minister's intervention that the Government had no intention of introducing quotas. I am sure that I speak for all Conservative Members when I say how warmly I welcome that. But do the Government need quotas to achieve their aims when clause 31 of the School Standards and Framework Bill due to come before the House enables the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to impose his will and close some of the special educational needs schools?

I also have a concern, which I am sure others will share, that the Government are the captive of fashion. Words such as inclusion and phrases such as early intervention are important in this debate—I do not want to deny that—but should we derive from the fact that inclusion is a success for some schools that the same formula will work in every case and every area? That would be a great mistake on our part.

Concerns about the Green Paper go wider. The Independent Panel for Special Education Advice said that the Green Paper's proposal, promising "named people", as they are called, but without legal backing, "rings hollow", as does the proposal to cut the number of children who have statements. In one of its articles, it states:

"This is a crude attempt to save money at the expense of large numbers of needy children."

IPSEA also estimates that as many as 20,000 children a year could lose, as a result of the changes, their legal entitlement to services that they can currently receive.

The matter worries not just that organisation, but my constituents. I have received a number of letters from constituents who are concerned about a range of issues relating to the Green Paper. I received a letter from parents in Cranleigh describing their difficulties getting their child's needs recognised. They say that, as a father myself, I will understand the long-term effects on the whole family of their child continually struggling in the school environment. It has affected both of them and their three other children, who are aged between 16 and six, enormously. What hurts them most of all is seeing their child suffering unnecessarily, both mentally and emotionally, because he is wholly aware of the widening gap between his own and his peers' abilities, and teachers report him hiding his work to avoid being teased or ridiculed.

The idea of inclusion may sound fine in theory, but there are limits on how far one can impose it in practice without damaging the chances of some needy children who, if their needs are addressed, have an important contribution to make to our society.

As has been mentioned, this is the week for autism. I received another letter from a constituent in another part of the constituency who has a five-year-old child with severe learning difficulties and autism. The letter describes how the parents fought long and hard to get a place for their son at his present school. They are worried that

"with the weakening or removal of the current legal framework, our situation would be hopeless."

Those worries are the result of the casual way in which the Green Paper has thrown open the issue and thrown up the prospect of the number of children recognised as having special educational needs being reduced, and the effect that that will have on children who are entering the school system today. I hope that we can hear more reassurances from Ministers on their intentions in terms of the numbers and whether they will impose a top-down

approach, or whether, as the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) suggested—and I agree—if we are to reduce the numbers with special educational needs, we will tackle the problems early enough to resolve them. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on that.

The third case that I wish to mention from my constituency is positive and relates to the positive environment that can be created in some of the residential schools for these children. The letter describes a child at a residential school in my constituency who has been there since the age of five and will remain there until she is 16. The letter states:

"This has provided her with a secure environment with children of similar abilities and dedicated staff, which has given her confidence in her own skills . . . In our opinion, our daughter would not have flourished, as she has, in a mainstream school where class sizes and peer pressure would have given her such an inferiority complex, that she might never have found the confidence to live an independent life."

The examples that I have given are telling, and show that the Government bear a heavy responsibility in presenting ideas that will change provision for the children we are discussing today.

I have mentioned that we have a number of special needs schools in my constituency. I am concerned that the Department will not take into account the major steps taken by such schools in recent years. Two schools in particular deal with those who suffer from emotional or behavioural difficulties. The way in which those failing schools have been turned around and become a success has been remarkable. Last year, one girl left one of the schools at 16 with 10 As in her GCSEs. That was an outstanding performance and a great credit to the school.

I am concerned by the words in the Green Paper on the appeals process. We have been told that it is bureaucratic and adds greatly to the costs of running the system but, as the hon. Member for Harrow, East said, we have to put that in the context of the fact that £2.5 billion a year is spent in this sector—a seventh of the entire education budget. I should like the Minister to clarify that point. In written answers, the Department said that the average cost to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal of a hearing

"is about £820"

and that, in the year to August 1996,

"the Special Educational Needs Tribunal conducted 903 hearings".

The cost of those 903 hearings is not vast in the context of the budget. Even more important is the fact that, as the reply states, in the same period

"parents' appeals were upheld, either in full or in part, in 620 cases."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 756.]

That is more than two thirds of cases. Parents are concerned that, if these procedures are not adhered to and if a short cut is found to save a relatively small sum for the Department, the real needs of children will be overlooked and legal cases such as the one my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned will come back to haunt us. By the time such cases are dealt with, it will in many ways be too late for the children concerned.

The Government have said much about consultation. Again, as with bipartisanship, I am sceptical about their motives when they talk about consultation. It is often a means by which a public relations exercise is carried out, the Government already having decided what they want to do.

Mrs. Browning: Although a spirit of co-operation has prevailed during the debate, which I welcome, I assure my hon. Friend that, as we are in a consultation, we are seeking answers to questions, but that if, at the end of that consultation, some of the fears raised in the House become a reality, we will bring the Government to account.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. She makes it clear that, although some Labour Members have read their speeches in an almost thoughtless manner this morning, we are on the ball and determined that the real needs of children will not be overlooked by a departmental agenda that, at heart, many of us mistrust.

As the School Standards and Framework Bill sets up a framework by which local authorities can, if they deem it necessary, close special educational needs schools, why is it necessary to have clause 31, by which the Secretary of State may in effect override the local decision-making process and impose a decision to discontinue a school? Clause 31 states that the Secretary of State may

"give a direction to the local education authority by whom the school is maintained requiring the school to be discontinued on a date specified in the direction."

The Government will not even give the local authority a second chance to consider how long the school has to close. That could cause immense disruption for the children.

As I have mentioned, we have several special needs schools in the Guildford area. At least two are at the cutting edge of new ideas and new ways of dealing with some of the most disadvantaged, in educational terms, children in society. There is a further danger in the top-down approach from central Government: the knowledge, understanding and skills that are developed in those special schools will be lost and dissipated as a result of ill-thought-out changes. Clause 31 will only add to the worries of such schools. I hope that, in her reply, the Minister will deal with that point.

I hope that we can be bipartisan about one thing. It seems that the issue of having inclusion where it can work is not in dispute, but do the Government realise what that means? If we are to have children of much less academic ability in a school and they are not to feel as if they are second-rate citizens there, we have to be imaginative. It is important that the esteem of those children is promoted.

Often, children with educational difficulties have talents in other areas—perhaps in music, on the playing fields or in drama. Will the Government give schools the resources to promote those activities, in which such children may excel and therefore come to win the regard and respect of their fellow pupils even though their academic performance may not be on the same plane? That gets to the heart of the challenge that faces the Government if they are sincere in their policies on inclusion and are not involved merely in a money-saving exercise under the guise of some warm words.

11.57 am

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State on her speech, which covered and dealt with many of the issues that the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) has mentioned. I do not think that he was in the Chamber for my hon. Friend's speech. I was not either, but I listened to it in my room and I was impressed.

[Mr. Tony Colman]

One of the claims we need to nail immediately is the idea that this is a cost-cutting exercise. My hon. Friend said that this is an attempt to move money. Other hon. Members, who have not been quite as testy as the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), have stated that resources should be shifted to early intervention and practical support.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Is the hon. Gentleman comfortable with clause 31 of the School Standards and Framework Bill? Why does he think it is necessary to override local decision making?

Mr. Colman: I shall come to that. The hon. Gentleman obviously has no experience of local education authorities. He had a distinguished career in banking. Many of the areas that he criticised are the responsibility of his local education authority and local council. I shall give good examples of how LEAs are able to deliver later. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) spoke on that subject.

There are no quotas and targets to be met because there is a partnership between central and local government. As many hon. Members would agree, there is a need, in areas such as Hackney, for reserve powers. The House must not abdicate its responsibility for the delivery of many policies by delegating to local government. I think that the hon. Member for Guildford will accept that the spirit of reserve powers is in the Bill, which has yet to receive its Second Reading.

Before the hon. Member for Guildford spoke, I was heartened by the general agreement that we are debating a cross-party matter. Certainly at local education authority level and within education committees it is seen in that way. I hope that that continues. I was pleased to note that the hon. Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for Bath (Mr. Foster) and other hon. Members paid tribute to the National Autistic Society. I commend to those who have not yet signed it my early-day motion on Autism Awareness Week, which brings the matter to the attention of the House.

The early-day motion has interesting signatories in that it contains the signatures of fellow members of the Treasury Committee. I think that its signing is a first for the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) and for the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies). The motion clearly suggests support from the banking community and from others who wish to deal with issues related to autism and special educational needs.

I commend to the House the "Timetable for autism" which is mentioned in my early-day motion. It has not been mentioned in the debate but I am glad to say that some hon. Members have a copy of it. I commend to the Minister pages 12 and 13 and ask her to ensure that the National Autistic Society's work on training and accreditation is considered before the Government publish a White Paper and possibly a Bill. I endorse "SPELLcheck", which has nothing to do with the function on our word processors, but is an autism-specific training and development audit for local authorities who seek to enhance and develop their provision for people with autism.

I draw to the Minister's attention the six proposals on pages 14 and 15 of the document in the context of the National Autistic Society's view on what every LEA should provide. First, the earlier specialist intervention starts, the better the outcome. I know that the Green Paper and the Minister support that. I commend to the House the society's early intervention project, which is called "EarlyBird". That will be a great help in ensuring that children who have autism can be identified early.

Secondly, I strongly endorse an informed balance of mainstream and specialist education. Planning for that is important. The society states that all children should be monitored and that there should be a clear approach to how that can be done. Thirdly, LEAs should provide informed staff. Everyone who teaches children with autistic spectrum disorders, whatever the type of placement, should have knowledge of autism. Fourthly, LEAs should provide the right educational environment for children with autism. Whatever the location, teaching approaches must be deeply empathetic and the environment must be organised to reduce clutter and promote calm. A structured routine and consistency are all important.

Fifthly, there should be individual help for the child. Children with autism have highly individual needs in the areas of thinking, self-organisation and communication. The programme of support must be individually determined.

Sixthly, where appropriate, a statement of special educational needs must be based on the child's individual condition. If autistic spectrum disorder were to be mentioned as a specific condition, which I would wish in any revised code of practice, it would greatly assist in ensuring that the child received support and education that is appropriate to his or her needs. I regret to say that there is currently no specific requirement that autism be indicated on a statement of special educational needs. I commend to the House those six items in the "Timetable for autism".

I mentioned the differences between one local education authority and another. I am the hon. Member who represents Putney but, for the previous six years, until July 1997, I was the leader of Merton council. I commend the excellent offices of that borough, from which I know the Minister has received and continues to receive advice on projects and ways of working with special educational needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) has drawn attention to the need to deal correctly with pupils with emotional/behavioural difficulties. I am proud to say that, in Merton, we have very few such exclusions. Nevertheless, I agree with him on the need to deal correctly with those pupils and particularly on the need to monitor possible exclusions among ethnic minorities—which we are doing.

Across my local education authority, only 19 children from the secondary sector and eight from the primary sector are in special schools. Despite Mr. Nigel de Gruchy's suggestion, it is possible to retain within the school system children with emotional/behavioural difficulties.

In my six years in Merton, we reduced, with parents' agreement, the number of children in special residential schools. As the hon. Member for Guildford said, there are excellent residential schools. However, many parents are concerned about children being away during the week, not being part of the family and being unable to take part in family activities except during holidays.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some children's home environment is, sadly, so disrupted that they can learn to cope with that environment and to appreciate the need for education only by being removed from it for a few nights a week? Those schools play that vital role.

Mr. Colman: I fully accept that and I am pleased that we have returned to cross-party agreement. As I said, parents particularly wanted the change that occurred during my six years as leader of Merton council because they wanted their children to be integrated with their neighbours' children. Individual cases will have to be dealt with as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but the parents with whom I spoke in those six years much preferred to have their children back in their neighbourhood's special or mainstream school—whichever they decided.

Statements should contain success criteria. Far too often, statementing has been extremely negative: that is not the way forward. The hon. Member for Guildford may not agree, but goals should be set towards which children are helped.

The most important change that I registered when there was a change of control on Merton council was the enormous time required for the statementing procedure. In some boroughs—not Labour boroughs—delay was sometimes used to keep down the number being dealt with.

Mrs. Browning: They all do it.

Mr. Colman: The hon. Lady is quite right; I am now doing it.

In Merton, statementing occurs within 18 weeks. I hope that the Minister will publish the timetables regularly so that we can see how the statementing procedure is progressing. I am concerned that more than 60 per cent. of LEAs are nowhere near the level achieved by Merton. Perhaps central Government should intervene in this area to point out clearly where those LEAs should improve their performance.

I want to ensure seamless provision across local and central Government and I am concerned that different Department for Education and Employment policies could cause tension. I shall give three examples, to which the Minister may wish to refer later.

First, as Merton shifts more pupils from special to mainstream schools—I am sure that Wandsworth also has an excellent record in this area—it is important that money is made available through the phasing-out of the assisted places scheme. We are moving to the excellent situation of maximum class sizes of 30 for five, six and seven-year-olds. There must be co-ordination to ensure that, as pupils with special needs enter mainstream schools, account is taken of resources in order to benefit both education streams. The integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools should not cause problems if that is what their parents want. However, financing may be an area of concern.

My second concern relates to literacy and numeracy targets in mainstream schools. I hope that the Minister will ensure that those targets take account of children who find it difficult to catch up and attain the same standards as other pupils. Such children should not be castigated for their performance: it is not their fault. The system must assist them. It is important that that factor is taken into account in any examination of league tables and literacy and numeracy targets.

The previous Government set targets for training and enterprise councils and phased out support for many young people with special educational needs who wished to enter the work force. That has now eased, but it is important to ensure that any literacy and numeracy targets take account of the mixed abilities of children in schools in particular areas.

I come now to my third area of concern. I am proud of the facilities that SEN makes available to children across the borough of Merton, but as we move towards a 100 per cent. delegated schools budget and there is less money for LEAs to spend on central services, we must ensure that specialists and SEN facilities continue to be available to all schools on a cost-effective basis. Not every school can have its own specialist facilities, so it is important to retain access to those services in the local education authority area.

I shall now consider the matters that my hon. Friend the Minister raised when she opened the debate. First, help should be given for early years education, with money being reallocated and, I hope, new money being provided. As the National Autistic Society has said, it is important to identify and provide help at the earliest point.

Secondly, mainstream schools should be encouraged to take children with special educational needs, but only when appropriate. The knowledge that I gained as leader of Merton council for six years leads me to support that view. It is important that it should not happen without parental agreement. Parents should decide.

Thirdly, parents must be empowered. It is important that they know that they are in the driving seat. Fourthly, the training of teachers must change. That is one of the three key points raised by Autism Awareness Week—early years development, training and a third element that I have forgotten; I shall come back to it.

The fifth item is co-operative working. I have talked about the need for services from the local education authority. I also applaud the idea of regional working. I look forward to the Greater London authority having an interest, just as I wish it to have an interest in health. I do not want it to take on responsibility for delivery, but to ensure co-ordination of services.

My last point—the point from which we started—is that we do not want a reduction in resources. I have support from the Minister on that. Resources are being shifted to early intervention and practical support. That is the third point made by the National Autistic Society. I remind hon. Members that the three points were early intervention, teacher training and development, and resources in schools to deliver the policies that we all want.

12.16 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): This is an important debate. As the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) said earlier, it is a pity that it is being held on a Friday morning. The attendance today contrasts with that last week. It is also a particular pity for me, because my wife is nine months and one day pregnant. I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I do not linger for the winding-up speeches in view of the rumblings on my pager.

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

I have been a governor of inner-city primary schools and technology colleges in Wandsworth with a high proportion of special educational needs children. I have also been struck by the many desperate surgery cases that have come to me since I became a Member of Parliament. Parents and grandparents bringing up afflicted children are struggling against the system to get the special educational treatment that those children deserve and need. I am still dealing with many of those cases. We have some excellent special educational needs schools in my constituency and throughout West Sussex, which has a proud tradition of provision for SEN children.

I will concentrate later on severe SEN cases and the principles of funding. I welcome the Green Paper, but it raises important questions that need to be dealt with. They are fundamental to our approach to special educational needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned the scale of the problem. It is a growing problem, with 1.5 million pupils regarded as having special educational needs—that is 18 per cent.—and 233,000 statements in the past year. More than half of those are looked after in mainstream schools and fewer than half in specialist schools. I recognise, of course, that the increase is due in part to a better awareness of special educational needs.

I am grateful for the Minister's tribute to the work of the previous Conservative Government, beginning in 1981 with the setting out of the terms of SEN, which was followed by the Education Act 1993 and the establishment of SEN tribunals. We have heard about the tribunal cases which have increased from 1,200 to 1,600. Tribunals are an important part of the process, as is the code of practice which identifies and assesses need, which was introduced in 1993 as well.

In the spirit of cross-party bonhomie, I want to take up a point mentioned by the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) who said that the Spice Girls might not be No. 1 by Christmas. If they are not, it is most likely that they will have been pipped at the post by the Teletubbies. If ever there was a case for a need for SEN statementing, particularly for speech therapy, we have it in the Teletubbies. I say that as the father of two children who are addicted to the Teletubbies; I am determined that my third will not be brought up in a similar vein.

We welcome many parts of the Green Paper and I want to highlight the early identification procedures outlined in it. It is essential that we identify SEN children early and that the necessary measures are taken from the age of three or four, or as soon as possible. As a former school governor, I especially welcome the national guidance for the training of governors with SEN responsibilities. When I was a governor, SEN was very much a grey area. Far more detailed training must be given to governors, especially in view of the additional responsibilities that they now have with the local management of schools.

I also welcome the greater emphasis on training in information and communications technology, although we take issue with the fact that it is to be lottery funded. The money should come out of mainstream funding rather than being pinched from the pot that is meant for other things.

Another great concern mentioned in the Green Paper is the national variation in statementing. In some areas, fewer than 2 per cent. of children are statemented while in other local authority areas the figure is more than 4 per cent. That problem must be addressed. We need far greater national consistency; although, of course, we must take into account regional, social and economic differences. I am sure, however, that the divergence is not so great as the figures might suggest.

We also need to consider the temporary as well as the permanent specialist requirements of children with special educational needs. The Green Paper also emphasises the importance of co-operation between local agencies. We cannot see SEN as just as a local education authority problem, because it brings in the whole school system and, in many cases, the social services.

Many special educational needs children and disabled children need special facilities, such as special shoes or special boots; I have had cases involving such matters in my surgeries. Transport is also important. Special educational needs schools require specialist transport; again, that is a matter with which I am dealing in West Sussex.

Another important issue is respite care which is so essential for parents who have to look after difficult children day in and day out. I have come across some desperate cases, and I pay tribute to parents who are saving the state enormous sums by looking after their children at home, as they want to do. Looking after such children places an enormous strain on many families, especially where there are other children who are in mainstream education. The parents have to concentrate on the child who has special educational needs and there may be behavioural problems which can cause serious upheaval to the family environment. We need to take a holistic approach: I hope that the Government will take account of that when they look at co-operation between local agencies.

The overall thrust of the Green Paper is that there should be more integration in mainstream schools, and we agree with that. Integration is good in principle because inclusion has to be the right way forward, but we have to approach the matter carefully and sensitively. Integration must not be used, as some may see it, as an excuse for cost cutting or siphoning off SEN money to patch up gaps in classrooms in mainstream schools. There must be appropriate, well trained support staff in mainstream schools, who are dedicated to SEN children, and who have had the proper, specialist training.

I am pleased with the Government's statement about disabled access and the schools access initiative. That must be a step in the right direction. We shall not quibble about the amounts involved, as the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) would have us do.

It is appropriate to raise the subject of autism, given that it is national Autism Awareness Week. I was pleased to read my copy of "Timetable for autism". Adaptations will have to be made to mainstream schools to accommodate autistic children, of whom there are in excess of 120,000.

Many autistic children are sensitive to light and sound, especially if they are epileptic. Classrooms will have to be adapted so that they can cater for those children properly. We shall have to review discipline procedures at schools, where autistic children may become victims of

bullying. Those considerations are not necessarily at the top of the priority pile in the Green Paper, but they are important and could make the difference between autistic children having a happy and fulfilling life in mainstream schools or its being a nightmare for them.

I should like to refer to some of the problems with the Green Paper. The Independent Panel for Special Education Advice has undertaken some interesting work, which has not yet been mentioned. Its response to the Green Paper contrasts with that of the National Association for Special Educational Needs, which was less critical. Both organisations were constructive and positive about the way ahead.

IPSEA makes the fair point that more than three quarters of the members of the advisory group that the Government have established are local education authority employees. I am sure that that was not deliberate, but it arouses suspicion. The group contains no parents of disabled children, and no representatives from special educational needs organisations. That worry has been expressed.

There is also a suspicion that proposals to cut the number of statemented children are a crude attempt to save money, and that as many as 20,000 children a year could lose their legal entitlement to the provision that meets their needs, which is the fundamental provision behind statementing. The Minister has refuted the claim about quotas, but when is a quota not a quota, if it involves a drive towards a 2 per cent. target? I question the arbitrariness of that target. I want more details about how that target was arrived at and how it can reasonably be achieved under the Green Paper proposals.

Mr. St. Aubyn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. With the power in the new Bill to close some special schools, the Government could achieve their target without quotas, although in an equally crude fashion.

Mr. Loughton: Indeed, unscrupulous local education authorities may use some of the provisions in the Bill to lessen their responsibilities. The legal responsibility of LEAs to provide appropriate and necessary education for children with special needs must not be lessened as a result of the Green Paper.

IPSEA also referred to the greater emphasis at annual reviews on ceasing to maintain a child's statement. That could be used by cost-cutting LEAs to reduce their liabilities, which I fully acknowledge is not the point of the Bill. We must be sensitive to that problem, and I encourage the Government to take those points on board when framing the final legislation.

I wish to refer to the more severe SEN cases and the pressure on local authority finance. I visited recently Heronsdale school in Shoreham in my constituency; an excellent SEN school with a first-class reputation which received an excellent Ofsted report. It provides an excellent service for parents whose children are not at that school, by advising them on how to deal with SEN problems. It is a real community asset.

Many parents who have visited my surgeries have not been able to get their children with special educational needs into that school, or others like it, because they are victims of the school's success: it is over-subscribed. Unless there is enormous additional funding to expand such schools, I fear that many children will be left outside it.

I have a particularly desperate case of a 10-year-old boy who was diagnosed with severe autism at the age of four. He is currently at a non-specialist school, in a mixed disability class. His parents and grandparents are coping admirably with him but claim, with some justification, that the teachers cannot give him the special attention his severe autism requires. He rarely speaks and is constantly excluded from the school's mainstream activities. He also wets himself, and his parents are at their wits' end.

Two schools have been identified for the child—Hope Lodge in Southampton and Purbeck school in Dorset. They are excellent specialist schools, dealing particularly with autism. The parents visited the schools and spoke to parents from the same area with children who go to those schools and who have benefited enormously.

The problem is that, if West Sussex county council—the education authority—were to allow the child to go to one of these schools, it would cost more than of £40,000 per year. That is £40,000 which will come out of the general education budget, and £40,000 a year dedicated to one greatly deserving child means that a lot of resources, potentially, will be taken away from mainstream children in mainstream schools for a range of other activities. This is a problem faced by LEAs.

I have other constituency cases, but I will not go into them all. However, there is one desperate case of a family who have coped admirably with two sons, each of whom has cerebral palsy. It is very rare for two children in the same family to suffer that dreadful disease. One has gone to a special school within the county and is doing extremely well. Under the old terms of reference, he had help from social services for the special footwear he requires. His brother is now old enough to go to that school, but the county cannot guarantee him a place and social services cannot guarantee him the generous footwear allowance that his brother received. That raises enormous problems.

These are two comparable children in the same family. The system has worked for one, but due to the nature of the allocation of resources there is no guarantee that the younger sibling will have an opportunity to go to that school. That is causing real problems.

When my constituents see other children going to special schools because they have qualified on discretionary criteria while their own son or daughter—however deserving—cannot meet those criteria, desperation sets in. That is where I think that we have real problems, particularly with facilities outside the parents' LEA area. I appreciate the difficult position of LEAs due to the competing claims of SEN and mainstream children on the budget.

I wish to mention also the high cost of tribunals. The tribunal system is necessary and has worked well—the majority of parents who have gone through it are happy with it. More than two thirds of tribunal cases—as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford mentioned—have found in favour of the parents. However, the tribunal system involves a high cost to the local authority in preparing cases, many of which do not get as far as a tribunal hearing but involve an enormous amount of time and resources, which come out of the budget that would otherwise go into front-line SEN provision.

Local authorities also have a problem when children with severe statementing move into their area from another area: the local authority has to pick up the tab for

[Mr. Loughton]

something for which it had not budgeted, but just try telling the parents of a child who has moved to a neighbouring county that the special educational needs treatments that their child received in one county cannot be repeated in the county next door. Very real problems can be foisted on to local education authorities.

It is worth pointing out that more than 40 per cent. of tribunal cases are purely involved with literacy and numeracy need rather than severe disability requirements. I cannot believe that it is beyond the wit of man to come up with a better procedure to simplify some of the more straightforward cases—current procedures take up time and resources and involve stress—without taking away the legal rights of parents to have their cases heard in another manner. That is an area of detail that the Government may be able to consider beyond the Green Paper.

I also mentioned earlier the implications of providing transport for SEN children. As many parents have complained to me that their children cannot get into a special school as have complained that they are not in a position to provide transport and cannot afford public transport for their children, but because they are out of area, the local education authority is not obliged to lay on specialist transport. In some cases, that has meant that children could not take up a much desired place at a local authority special needs school because their parents could not afford the transport to get them there. That is a most desperate circumstance for people to be left in.

I hope that a degree of ring fencing to finance special educational needs—aside from mainstream education budgets—can be found, because we put local education committee chairmen in an impossible dilemma when they have conflicting claims on their budgets, which will not be helped by the local government finance figures announced earlier this week. This will not get easier.

We on the Opposition Benches welcome the Green Paper, but there is scope for improvement, certainly for much greater sensitivity to the perceived—although the Minister denies it—quota system on statementing. More sensitivity is required towards greater integration. It must include appropriate resources to maintain the rights of parents whose children need specialist schools for more severe conditions, while enabling mainstream schools to take on lesser SEN cases without disrupting the existing pupil role. None of this will work while LEAs are straitjacketed on competing priorities for funding between SEN and mainstream schools.

12.38 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) on a very fine speech, especially as his wife is expecting to give birth. I made my own maiden speech the day after my fourth child was born, so I know what the hon. Gentleman is experiencing. I wish him and his wife well on the birth of their child.

As I said, I have four children, and next to my wife they are the most important people in the world. That is something that all parents can say of their children. Therefore, it is impossible to explain to parents why the provision made for every other child in the street, borough and local education authority should not be equally open and accessible to their child.

Last night, in my office, I responded to the following letter, which I had read with horror. It reads:

"Dear Mr. Gardiner,

I am writing to ask for your help in a very distressing matter regarding my son Simon who is unable to walk. You may remember meeting Simon recently"—

indeed I do, as I will explain—

"when you visited Kingsbury High School to take part in their assault course for charity. As the only child in a wheelchair at the school he tends to be quite noticeable.

It took a lot persuasion to get Simon into Kingsbury High as there are several levels and no lifts but Simon's determination showed them that it was worth a try and he is very happy working alongside his friends. As a statemented pupil he had to have a complete reassessment of his needs before moving into secondary education and a number of things were said to be essential. Ramps, a disabled toilet and a wheelchair at each level he would need to use were all stated by the various experts who assessed him. Kingsbury High (a grant maintained school) accepted him assuming that these things would be provided by the LEA or Health Service but to date neither these nor the lap-top computer clearly identified in the statement have yet appeared. Indeed I have just been told that as Parkside Wheelchair Service has run out of money Simon cannot have a chair to replace the one which they have agreed is dangerous and too small until they have more money—next April presumably. I enclose a letter I wrote to the Service manager which explains the situation more clearly.

Given your Government's proposals in the Green Paper to fully integrate pupils with disabilities like Simon's I expect that you will be horrified to hear of his predicament. I hope that I can count on your help to get this matter sorted out at the earliest opportunity because I really do fear for his safety, not because he is in the wrong school but because he has not been given the basic equipment he needs to move around."

That letter touched me to the core and it goes to the very heart of our debate. Simon's mother says that I might remember him and indeed I do. The assault course was for Help the Aged. Incidentally, my wife tells me that I should remember that I really am one of the aged now and that doing assault courses is no longer appropriate. I remember running up a 10 or 12-foot ramp and jumping off at the beginning and then completing the rest of the course. As I got to the end, I saw a young boy in a wheelchair wheeling himself up to the top of the ramp, where he applied the brakes and propelled himself 12 feet into mid air and down so that he could continue the assault course.

Simon is no ordinary young man. He is, indeed, special and any school should be proud to have him as a member. Naturally, as soon as I had read that letter I wrote a strongly worded letter to the local education authority asking exactly why provision had not yet been made in accordance with the statement. I am acutely aware of the financial stringencies under which Brent local education authority operates. Its central hold-back per pupil, from which such provision might be made, is 47 per cent. below the national average.

I welcome the extra resources that the Minister announced this morning when she said that £11 million will become available next year for special educational needs. Simon's needs cannot wait until next year, so I shall work with the LEA to see how they can be met immediately.

The Green Paper has been a genuine consultative exercise. Earlier in the summer, I organised two meetings in my constituency at different schools on the education White Paper. They were well attended and I now have a group of some 140 people who will act as a sounding

board for me on all educational matters. Next Thursday, I shall have a further consultation meeting in my constituency on the Green Paper, "Excellence for all children". I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I increase her postbag, subsequent to that meeting, with that group's concerns and responses to the Green Paper.

I welcome the way in which the issues have been set out in the Green Paper and the approach that the Department wants to take in listening to local people and their concerns. Through listening to local people who are intimately involved in those matters we can extend cross-party agreement—which has been so valuable this morning—into good, coherent and constructive legislation that will benefit all our children.

On emotional and behavioural difficulties, the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall)—I do not mean the juxtaposition to be offensive—said that the Government should consider not paying schools to keep children at risk of exclusion. I find it strange that he should question the wisdom of paying schools that took on that added burden and rose to the challenge. It is particularly strange given that when his party was in government it adopted a procedure whereby schools were given additional money to select children who were least likely to cause those problems. The sensible way to tackle the problem is to put resources where they are most needed—where children are at risk of exclusion.

Brent LEA has an extremely proud record. The House will be aware that in the past couple of years the national exclusion rate has risen by more than 20 per cent. per year, whereas in Brent it has dropped by 26 per cent. year on year. That has been achieved simply as a result of its approach, which is designed to try to maintain students in school for as long as possible. It has devoted to those students the resources necessary to provide them with a stimulating environment in order to bring them back into the mainstream.

In the Green Paper emphasis has been placed on practical support rather than on procedures. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham spoke about the safeguard of statementing and I agree that we must take that extremely seriously. I trust that my own Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley)—who I believe is to speak after me—may corroborate the example that I am about to give.

About four years ago, the Cambridgeshire LEA had an agreement with schools encouraging them not to put children through the process of statementing and not to statement those with special needs because of the stigma that might be attached to that and the lengthy process of statementing. Instead, it promised to ensure that the necessary resources to meet the needs of those children would still be supplied to schools, but according to a less formal arrangement.

I do not want to make a party political point, but control of the LEA changed hands and as a result the funds available within the education budget were reallocated. Resources previously made available for children with special needs attending local schools were taken away unless the children were statemented. Everyone in the county responded by reminding the LEA that there had been an agreement, but it was hard to try claw back the money because, as has already been said, the sums available for SEN have to compete with other demands on the overall education budget of an LEA. That money was desperately needed by those pupils.

Yes, let us do away with unnecessary bureaucracy and procedures, but let us never lose sight of the fact that statementing offers a legal safeguard for the most needy children in our schools.

12.53 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) paid a warm and generous tribute to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton). Likewise, the hon. Gentleman has done the House a service by reminding us of the needs of children and how they are manifested. That is at the heart of the debate.

Several colleagues have referred to the fact that the debate is being held on a Friday. It is my experience, and I hope that it is yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many colleagues take the trouble to read Friday speeches. They will find much of value in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham and that of the hon. Member for Brent, North, which may be of use not only to Ministers in relation to the Green Paper but to those colleagues' contributions to the further development of policy.

I apologise to the Minister for my neglect in not managing to get here in time to hear all her opening remarks. I understand that I missed a point relating to the welcome increase in resources for the schools access initiative, but I shall take the trouble to read on Monday precisely what she said on that and other subjects.

When debating special educational needs, we must be conscious of four trends in recent years, none of which is likely to change in future. The first is that there is increasing awareness of the range of children's special educational needs. Today's debate has highlighted some of those needs, and all hon. Members know from their own constituency experience that some of those needs—for example, those of children in the autistic spectrum—are better able to be diagnosed than was once possible.

The second trend is that, within schools, there is increasing use of assessment and performance data as a basis for the measurement not only of the school's performance, but of children's progress within the school. For parents and schools, that has highlighted the range of pupils who are not making progress in accordance with targets and with the generality of their peers. That has, in turn, highlighted the need to take special action to try to bring pupils—especially those with less severe difficulties—up to the standard of the rest and to meet their own expectations.

The third trend is that, in relation to special educational needs, a greater range of professional options is now available for the remedying of learning difficulties. The debate on emotional and behavioural difficulties has helped us to understand some of the new techniques and units that have been established, which are further amplifying that range of professional skills.

The fourth and perhaps the most important trend is increasing parental involvement and an increasing demand for special educational needs provision for their children, where those needs can be identified. All hon. Members know that some of that parental demand arises well before there is professional recognition of the needs of children, and parents are right to have their own

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

children's needs at the forefront of their minds and to make their demands, as the hon. Member for Brent, North described so well.

We live in a set of circumstances in which we cannot be sanguine that the rate of increase in demand for special educational needs provision will necessarily decline. The Green Paper seeks to manage that demand, rather than to frustrate it. The Minister has specifically made it clear that she is engaged not in trying to cut the cost of provision for special educational needs, but in trying to manage it better. It is important that we focus on that objective rather than on cost cutting.

It is also useful to look at the issue from the standpoint of schools. I have talked to many children, teachers and parents in Cambridgeshire over recent years and I find that it has been the experience of schools that, as a consequence of those trends, an increasing number of children are being recognised as having special educational needs; and that that is occurring alongside resource constraints within the school as a whole and increasingly heavy demands on teaching staff. When children are recognised as having special educational needs, that leads to increased pressure on schools from parents who are anxious that extra provision should be made for those children.

In such circumstances, it is perhaps inevitable that the response of parents, teaching staff and school administrators is to make additional demands on the local education authority through its special educational needs budget, which is effectively top-sliced from the education budget as a whole. The rate of increase in special educational provision in Cambridgeshire, which gave rise to the difficulties to which the hon. Member for Brent, North referred, has been dramatic.

That process provides an incentive—some might regard it as a perverse incentive—for the school and the parents to seek additional access, through the special educational needs budget, to resources for the school, especially where it includes statementing. As has been mentioned, statementing provides that additional legal obligation on the local education authority to provide specific provision.

The increase in resources to support special educational needs, especially where the process of statementing is involved, perversely limits further the resources available to schools. There is a potentially vicious circle. The top-slicing of budgets for special educational needs further exacerbates the pressure on resources in schools; that causes parents to react more strongly as they try to secure additional provision from the protected budget to try to compensate for the demands in the school.

In practice, access to additional resources does not necessarily relieve the pressures on teachers in the school. I am sure that we all appreciate the value of the work that learning support assistants do in relation to children. However, notwithstanding the welcome reference in the Green Paper to the creation of a further national framework for the training of learning support assistants, those people are not, and will not become, teachers.

The presence of those assistants, even when they work on a one-to-one basis, does not obviate the requirement for a teacher to teach the child. Often, the teaching of that child remains disproportionate in relation to the teaching commitment to other pupils in the class. The presence in a class of a pupil with learning difficulties may consume an additional increment of the teacher's time. Even though additional resources—in terms of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties—may be gained for the school, that does not necessarily correspondingly reduce the pressure on other teachers.

I recognise the value of the Green Paper in addressing this issue—which I have described in my own terms—and the fact that it is important to break out of the vicious circle. I therefore endorse the view that we increasingly need to enable mainstream schools successfully to accommodate pupils with special educational needs. In order to do that, those schools should increasingly use their own judgment on how to call upon resources, expertise and external help where necessary.

I agree with the approach taken in the Green Paper that, to the greatest extent possible, we should avoid lengthy and expensive reliance on procedures and the bureaucratic process to do that. We know that, within the vicious circle, the lost resources are those lost in undertaking bureaucratic procedures rather than providing resources to the child.

I welcome the broad approach set out in the Green Paper: it is right that we should have high expectations for all children. If 20 per cent. of children will have special educational needs at some time during their school career, it is right to expect that those needs should be met in mainstream schools as much as possible, so that as many of those pupils as possible can remain with their peer groups for as long as possible.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) made the points that I would otherwise have made about early intervention and preventing learning difficulties in schools—he was right to emphasise that. Other hon. Members have rightly spoken of the importance of the additional provision of training and skills for teachers: not only initial teacher training, but additional support for trained teachers in mainstream schools. Those teachers must be able to respond to the increasing presence of pupils with special educational needs in their classrooms.

Many practical issues remain in relation to the Green Paper; I should like to highlight a few. We would do well to recognise the difficulty of the task that special educational needs co-ordinators still face. In smaller schools, they can often undertake assessments without lengthy observation of the children concerned, because they are familiar with those pupils. In larger schools, however, that is much more difficult and the co-ordinators' work in observing an individual pupil in order to become familiar with his circumstances can be particularly time-consuming.

I do not offer any particular solution to the Minister, but we have to recognise that a lot of teacher time may be consumed by co-ordinators in a large school, and that that may not necessarily be the best use of resources. We may need to rely more on greater professional awareness on the part of classroom teachers and on other teachers who have contact with pupils undertaking necessary observations.

In my constituency, there is interaction between the importance of early intervention and the activities of the community health trust and of the school nursing service. The Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority has reduced the school nursing and the health visitor services dramatically. One consequence is that it is proposing henceforth not to undertake the three-and-a-half-year check for children.

The health authority's argument is that no child who has a statement at the age of seven in Cambridgeshire schools was not known to the community health trust at the age of three to have learning difficulties and special needs. With respect to the health authority, that answer is deficient because, first, not all the children who will go on to have statements have statements by the age of seven. We all know that, in practice, that is one of the earliest points at which a statement might be provided, and that many other children have statements later.

Secondly, in the main, we are dealing with children who do not reach the stage of having a statement. The health authority neglects to consider the range of learning difficulties to which young people may be subject and which fall short of a statement, but which may be identified at the age of three and a half if there is full screening. The substantial, and I dare say incontrovertible, evidence is that, if remedial work can be undertaken before a child's entry to school—so that the child can enter with its peer group and move along with it through school, rather than having to undertake remedial and special work later—that is much less expensive, much better for the child concerned and a better use of resources. From that point of view, I am saddened that the health authority is to abandon the check. I hope that it will do otherwise.

We would do well to consider actively how the health authority and local health agencies will be able to deliver the early years development partnership that Ministers talk about in the Green Paper, if those health bodies do not undertake such a broad screening check. The suggestion that they will be able to identify at-risk groups and to target sufficiently is complacent, and we have to challenge it.

As I am sure the House knows, a high proportion of children who are looked after by local authorities have special educational needs and, often, severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Unfortunately, many of those children are excluded from school as well and too many are not in school, even though they may not be excluded, at any given time.

Local authorities often have dual responsibilities in relation to such children. They are in loco parentis for children looked after by the authority, and are also responsible for their education. It is unfortunate that there seems to be a lack of co-ordination between schools, local education authorities and social services departments to try to make sure that the provision of special education meets the needs of such children. There is an unhappy consequence in relation to the proportion of children looked after by local authorities who later have substantial difficulties, including being at risk of offending or falling into drug abuse or other problems.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that the Select Committee on Health is currently undertaking an inquiry into children who are looked after by local authorities. The contribution that local education provision, schools and educational psychologists can make is significant in improving the outcomes of children who are cared for by local authorities. I hope that the Minister will remember that when considering responses to the Green Paper. I am not sure that the Select Committee will have finished its work by 9 January, but I hope that she will bear in mind that it is a source of advice and input to the further measures that she and her colleagues may take.

In general, for reasons that I hope I have outlined, the Green Paper's approach is encouraging and it promises much. However, it does not say how many of its recommendations can be afforded. The hope that the proposals in the White Paper, if I may turn to that, will lead to improved attainment in schools is at the moment a leap of faith. The Labour party may be willing to take it, but the hope is so far unproven. The hope that the increase in achievement and attainment in schools generally will also lead to a reduction in the number of children who require special educational needs provision, from 18 to 10 per cent. or, in the case of statements, from 3 to 2 per cent., is a further leap of faith.

The combination of those two leaps of faith slightly stretches one's credulity, and I am afraid that it is somewhat akin to the original concept of the national health service, which was that improvement in the health of the population would lead to a reduction in demand. It may not happen, so we must be prepared for demand to remain high and to be managed within the system.

Many local education authorities, including the one in Cambridgeshire, have for some time been trying to work in some of the ways that the Green Paper has outlined. As the hon. Member for Brent, North said, they are trying to work within schools to tackle learning difficulties and special educational needs in stages 1 to 3 rather than allowing children to be statemented. The experience in Cambridgeshire was represented to me by the chief education officer. In a letter to me, he stated:

"we have been pursuing this aspiration for some little while now"—

that is, operating at stages 1 to 3—

"and you are already aware of the spiralling cost of statemented provision. It is much easier said than done."

There is much to applaud in terms of aspirations, but there is not yet the evidence to show how that is to be accomplished. Notwithstanding the Green Paper's examples, perhaps the next stage is to draw upon experiences around the country during consultations, so that we can implement practical action in a way that is likely to work.

The ambition to develop special schools as centres of expertise to collaborate with and support mainstream schools is a correct aspiration, but the head teachers of special schools in my county have said that they have heard such ideas before and are all too aware of the funding implications. The issue is how that is to be afforded. That is also true of the obvious need for special units in mainstream schools and for pupil referral units if mainstream schools are asked to undertake much greater provision for special educational needs.

There is much to welcome in the Green Paper. I have already mentioned the schools access initiative. Help to primary schools in tackling emotional and behavioural difficulties will be welcome, as will the proposed revision of the SEN code of practice.

We must recognise a continuing dilemma: making the best possible provision for young people with special educational needs is expensive; and legislative requirements and the code of practice rightly help parents to secure the best possible provision for their children, almost regardless of cost. Practice and priorities in education budgets are changing to the extent that serious compromises are having to be made in provision for the general school population. There is a danger that we shall make ever better provision for children with special

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

educational needs, who enjoy the protection of a very specific set of legal requirements, to the possible detriment of other children.

In such circumstances, it is all the more important that we succeed in tackling special educational needs in early years. It is equally important that we give priority to tackling needs within schools at stages 1 to 3, and that we include children with special educational needs within schools as much as possible. Such policies are most likely to enable mainstream schools—increasingly within their own resources—to make judgments on setting priorities and on balancing and meeting the needs and priorities of all children.

We therefore need to give greater powers to schools to strike the necessary balance—while recognising the needs of the many and of the few, and that an objective for schools is to hold high expectations for all children. Schools will increasingly have the responsibility for balancing their resources against those expectations.

1.16 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley and Holderness): My speech will be short because, as I am the final speaker before the Minister's reply to the debate, it has all been said. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that Friday debates are undoubtedly the best informed in the House. So it has proved today.

I am not an expert on special educational needs, although I am the first hon. Member to have said so in the debate. Members of Parliament, however—almost by definition—collide with the issue because of the problems of some children and parents in our constituencies. As hon. Members have already said in the debate, we are dealing with vulnerable people, and we want to ensure that there is a non-partisan approach to the issue. I think that we have achieved that goal, and that anyone following our debate will take comfort from the fact that the House can occasionally reach such a state—would that we could do so more often.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) made a very knowledgeable speech and raised some detailed and pertinent issues, which I know that the Minister will address. Like the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), I shall study particularly carefully, in the *Official Report*, his points on emotional and behavioural difficulties. Clearly, he knows a great deal more about the subject than I do—or, I suspect, most hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) is responsible for having filched at least three quarters of my intended speech. I had to fling away pages of my speech as he mentioned many of the strategic issues that concern not only hon. Members on both sides of the House but parents and experts. I should simply like it to be known that, if anyone eventually reads my speech—although the ribaldry on Conservative Benches makes me think that no one ever will—he or she will have to read the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford for a fuller view of the points that I would have made, had I had the time to do so. Later in my speech, I shall outline several concerns raised by my local authority.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) deserves a medal for attending the debate. I had no idea that his wife was about to give birth—I trust that that event is not imminent. He gave a knowledgeable speech, which was clearly based on first-hand knowledge derived from his service on a school's board of management.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire never fails to mesmerise me. He has such a wide knowledge of so many subjects that I am getting an inferiority complex. He did not disappoint me today. I took particular note—as I am sure the Minister did—of his comment that the Green Paper promises much. There is very little doubt that that is so. I hope that the Minister will confront the concerns that have been raised today and provide an assurance that the Government will allocate resources and introduce changes in order to fulfil the Green Paper's potential.

I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire and several other hon. Members that a number of agencies are involved. However, I shall concentrate on the views of my local authority, East Yorkshire council. It is concerned about good practice in several areas. There is no doubt that that is important, and I suspect that the Minister agrees that probably good practice can be set only by the Government after consultation.

East Yorkshire council is particularly concerned about target setting for SEN pupils in mainstream schools. My local authority believes that the Government should encourage schools to set different targets for children with different needs. Will the Minister address that suggestion in her winding-up speech? My local authority also favours the introduction of a finer grain for early national curriculum levels—which, as the Minister knows, some children never leave. I hope that the Government will consider that point—the Minister may not be in a position to respond today. At the end of the day, a finer grain would allow us to chart more effectively the progress of the children involved and would assuage parents' concerns in that area. Will the Minister bend her mind to that?

I have culled another question from a full brief provided by my local authority, which tells me—and the Minister—that it is taking the matter seriously. No doubt all local authorities do. The document asks how we can encourage dialogue between parents, schools and LEAs and resolve disputes. However, I found the answer rather bland. I shall go hot foot from this debate to my local authority to—upbraid is not quite the word—ask it for a little more information. The answer in the document is:

"This is best achieved through good communication. There is a need to encourage easier access to LEAs to discuss concerns"

and all the rest of it.

That is fine as a mission statement. It is what everyone wants. It is what anyone would say about communication between management and work force in a company. It is more difficult to set up a mechanism that allows that. Communication systems also have to be reviewed often. I want to know about the nuts and bolts. If the Minister has anything to say that I can tell my local authority, I shall be delighted.

I should like to reinforce a point made by one of my hon. Friends—I cannot remember which one—and by Labour Members about the need to improve the effectiveness of SEN tribunals. I am not involved in that, as I have said, but, having been taken through the procedures by my local authority and others, I am

astonished by the enormous amount of paperwork that is involved in support of cases going to tribunals—as happens in all Government and local authority systems. There are delays of many months in the tribunals. Ministers must bend their minds to the problem—I know that they will. The Green Paper is one of the more readable that I have come across. I pay tribute to the Government for that.

I have consulted experts in my constituency, who have concluded that decisions should be reached on the basis of written evidence only. Perhaps the Minister would like to take a view on that. Of course, that cannot happen in the most complex cases, but the suggestion should be considered. It would reduce the enormous amount of time and the costs in my large rural area.

I am coming to the end of my few remarks, so that the Minister can put us right. I have asked how we can reduce the paperwork associated with the code of practice. I welcome the fact that the Green Paper addresses that question. My local authority and others have very little to say. I suspect that it is not sure how to reduce the amount of paperwork. How does the Minister think that that can be done? I hope that she will give direction to the local authority, because, as she knows, she is pushing on an open door.

I could ask any number of other questions. I have them all with me. I shall write to the Minister with them. I see Labour Members nodding. Perhaps they have legitimate constituency engagements, as do my hon. Friends—I am not making a party point. I will, therefore, conclude my remarks simply by saying that I have found this to be an informative and good-natured debate. I look forward to the Minister putting the flesh on all the questions that we have asked.

1.29 pm

Ms Estelle Morris: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to reply to the debate.

I thank hon. Members for a thoughtful debate which has confirmed what I said at the outset: we have in the House not only a wealth of determination to try to do better in special educational needs, but a wealth of expertise—not necessarily professional expertise in terms of qualifications, but expertise gained from our role as constituency Members. Week in, week out, we meet at our advice bureaux parents of children with special educational needs. That gives us an overall perspective that is not available to others. Combined with that is the knowledge we all have of what goes on in our local schools.

One of the features of special needs education is that people are bound to see the issues from their own perspective. We need to have people who can judge matters from every perspective. Many hon. Members have commented today on the problems faced by parents whereas others have talked about the problems of financing by local authorities. The challenge is to bring all that together in the best way possible.

In the Green Paper, we do not pretend that we have all the answers, although we hope that we have asked the right questions. Hon. Members will have noticed that, at the end of some sections, we have suggested a number of possible responses to the issues raised in them. What I have to say now will be very much in the spirit of listening to people's ideas. I again assure hon. Members that when we make decisions following the consultation, we shall come back to the House.

I apologise for having missed one speech—that made by the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn)—because I had to go out for a few minutes. I am told that his was the only speech that was not in the cross-party spirit and I am sorry about that. I am also told by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) that the clock stopped the minute the hon. Gentleman started to speak and resumed the minute he sat down. I am not sure whether that happened because I left the Chamber or because the hon. Gentleman was speaking. Hon. Members will have to come to their own conclusions.

The hon. Member for Guildford asked about clause 31 of the School Standards and Framework Bill, to which other hon. Members also referred. The clause mirrors similar provisions in existing legislation. It provides an emergency power for the Secretary of State to close a special school if there are concerns about the health, safety and welfare of the pupils. We have heard too much in recent years about what has happened to vulnerable youngsters who are meant to be in a place of safety as well as one that delivers education. The report published by Sir William Utting on safeguards for children in residential placements recommended that, where the health, safety and welfare of children were at risk, there should be an emergency reserve power for the Secretary of State to act. The existing power has not been used by previous Governments, and we have no intention of using the power more widely.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I can think of at least one school in my area that, although not threatening children's welfare, was failing them. There is concern that, rather than the school being given a chance to sort out its problems and bounce back to being a good school that fulfils an important need, the decision might come from on high that it should be closed. The Minister's comments are therefore welcome.

Ms Morris: I can confirm that clause 31 covers the case I mentioned. There are other procedures after Ofsted inspections and improvement plans. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government favour the idea that if, at the end of the day, schools cannot give a good-quality education to children, including children with SEN, a fresh start or closure may be appropriate. None of us wants to keep open schools that are letting down children.

I now turn to a subject about which I am especially sensitive—membership of our national advisory group. There are parents in the group; it has one member and one observer, both of whom have children with special educational needs. The vice-chair of the group is Paul Ennals who works for the Royal National Institute for the Blind and is also chair of the Council for Disabled Children. Philippa Russell, who is director of the Council for Disabled Children, also plays an important role in the group. The misconception has probably arisen from the fact that we did not take the usual course of action and ask each group to nominate a person. The group includes parents with special needs children, the voluntary sector and others are also involved.

It will be impossible for me to answer all the questions, partly because I shall have to give some of them further thought. I shall bunch them together.

[Ms Morris]

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. Many referred to early years provision. There is general agreement that we should try to get it right. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) referred to transfer of information from one sector to the other in the early years. The early years development plans that we have set in motion will be drawn up by the early years partnerships, which will include health authorities, social services, the education service, parents and others. We hope that those partnerships will facilitate the transfer of information. That should happen, because they are all dealing with the same children. We will serve those children ill if action is not co-ordinated.

We shall monitor the process carefully. We have charged the early years development partnerships with paying special attention to special educational needs. We have requested that partnerships include people who have an interest in that area of education. Structure, by itself, will not arrive at the answer, but it will take longer if we have the wrong structure. I am confident that, with the early years partnership, we are providing the structure whereby special educational need can be identified and supported at an early stage.

The Green Paper is partly about giving assurances, which is what I want to do in my winding-up speech. It is also about pushing out boundaries and asking the difficult questions that need to be asked. These two do not always sit easily together. Difficult questions make people feel insecure.

We have no intention of operating quotas for statements. I was surprised to discover that the local education authority with the highest number of statements is in the area represented by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton and that the second highest is that in the area represented by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), which is just above average. The LEA with the fewest statements is my authority, Birmingham, which is well below the national average: given that my LEA covers the two most deprived areas in the country, one might have thought that the situation would be the reverse, but I make no comment on that.

St. Helens and Doncaster statement almost 4 per cent. of their children; Oldham and Salford, which I imagine are of a broadly similar size and deal with children from a similar socio-economic background, statement only 2 per cent. I am not saying which is best or that any of them have let any child down, but it is right to investigate how authorities with different numbers of statements meet children's needs. Perhaps we will learn something and come up with the best practice to which the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran) referred. The furthest we want to go is to consider guidelines for statementing and perhaps targets. LEAs may be conscious that they are not statementing in the best way, and such an approach may enable them to support other authorities.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I apologise for not being present during the earlier part of the debate. Does the Minister accept that the wide variation in the use of statementing may have a bearing on resources? Adequate resources may not be available everywhere. Will she comment on the issue that was raised in the discussion document? Is there an alternative to a statement? Is a different approach to this matter being taken in Wales from that taken in England? That has been flagged up by the Independent Panel for Special Education Advice, which is concerned that there may be a move in Wales to drop statementing. As the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) is sitting by the Minister's side, can she tell us whether there is different thinking on that matter in Wales?

Ms Morris: I do not answer for Wales on education, but my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales said, "No, no," as I stood up. That is not a statement on behalf of Wales—I am merely repeating the mutterings made in my ear.

The right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) is right; resources have an effect. The rough figures are that £1 billion is spent on the 1 per cent. of children in special schools; £0.5 billion goes on the 2 per cent. of children with statements in mainstream schools; and a further £0.5 billion goes on the 15 per cent. of children with special needs who do not have a statement and are not at special schools. The way in which we deal with this matter will partly determine how we use resources. We want to pause and make sure that everybody is getting the best deal and that we are working in the best way.

The issue of tribunals was mentioned and the figure given in that context is of great concern. There has been an increase in the number of people going to tribunal but, in almost half the cases, parents who say they want to go to tribunal decide not to do so just before the tribunal sits. I suspect that, in such cases, the problem is solved by the pressure of a tribunal hanging overhead. We must try to solve the problem without making parents feel that they have to go to tribunal.

When we say we want fewer cases to go to tribunal, we do not want to remove people's right of access to a tribunal. I am worried that almost half of parents are eventually satisfied with an answer they could have received before going to tribunal. We need a new system of partnership. I refer the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness to Bradford—which is mentioned in the Green Paper—which has set up a partnership involving parents, Barnardos and the LEA to improve communication.

There is a dilemma in trying to reassure parents that their statutory rights are being protected while asking questions that need to be asked. I must inform the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton that, in trying to reassure parents by having an agreement or strengthened individual action plan for stages 1 to 3, we do not think that it needs to be statutory. That is not our intention, as we would be doubling the bureaucracy of cases.

I am conscious that if parents are confident enough not to push for a statement, we have to do better in stages 1 to 3 with the code of practice. In the consultation, I want to find a way of saying to parents, "It can be done without seeking a statement." We need agreement, and an individual action plan was one of the measures we proposed.

During the debate, we heard a call from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton)—I will not go as far as he did—to ring-fence the money. Given that we delegate a fair amount of money to schools for special needs, there should be some notion of how it is spent so that we can monitor whether it is spent on children with SEN. At the

moment, it goes into the general schools budget. That causes pressure—the school knows that a statement will bring extra resources.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) referred to children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Our guiding practice must be to give money to the people who are responsible for delivering the service. That is the problem we face with speech therapy, a subject to which I shall return. In accordance with our philosophy, we want to devolve as much money as possible to schools so that they can purchase the services they need. One consequence of that is that there is a danger that we will not leave enough centrally to keep a valuable service, and my hon. Friend referred to the pupil referral unit.

There is a great difference in practice as to how much of the special needs budgets we devolve. I genuinely have an open mind on this matter and look forward to the comments that will come in. There is provision, which is not with local authorities and which schools might want to access, for EBD children. I am thinking of the voluntary organisation Cities in Schools, which does much good work. We want to bring these elements together and enable schools to choose how the resources are spent without damaging overall provision.

In a previous job I was a secondary school teacher in the inner city, so I know only too well how very difficult EBD youngsters can be and what a difficult task many teachers have dealing with not just one, but perhaps two, in a class of 30. It is not easy. My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham will be interested to know that the Department has financed research by the university of Birmingham—I shall attend the launch in the new year—to examine best practice for dealing with children with EBD. It is a small project, but we look forward to it and welcome it. We shall see whether we can learn from it.

The problem with EBD is that it covers such a wide variety of behaviour. Some children can have the most severe psychological and mental difficulties; others—a number of hon. Members referred to this—exhibit EBD behaviour because of factors in their life outside the school. When we talk about EBD, it is very important that we are fully aware that each child has different needs.

I think that the increase in the number of children with EBD reflects the breakdown in communities and the increasing difficulty some parents have parenting in complex social situations without the support of extended families that was, perhaps, available to their parents. There are many causes for the increase and there are probably many solutions, but I take the difficulties very seriously.

The irony is that many of these youngsters—usually boys—are very bright. If we could keep them in school and keep them learning, they would be high fliers. They would go on to higher education and occupy leadership roles. We have to solve the problem, but I do not want to put it all in the hands of schools and teachers. Sometimes, schools are the most orderly places in these children's lives. If we are to tackle the issue, we must all accept our responsibility for working with this vulnerable group of children so that they do not grow up and, in turn, find it difficult to parent.

On teacher training—a point raised by the hon. Member for Bath—we have to do more. He will know that the new standards implemented for teacher training this year ensure that teachers in training are familiar—I know that it is a minimum—with the code of practice, with how to assess, and with things that they need to know. The irony is that, because there is no inclusion, when they go out for teaching practice, they often do not work with children who have SEN. I suspect that teachers could finish their initial teacher training having had very little first-hand experience of such children. That is why we made our announcement on induction; it is important that the matter is seen as one for continuing professional development. We will try to ensure that we enhance awareness of SEN in initial teacher training.

I can reassure Ryan Gross and his mum that we do not wish to take away any of their legal rights and protections, but we want to show leadership and be brave enough to ask the questions that need to be asked.

Autism is an important issue, and it is important that we acknowledge it this week. One of the things that the Government have agreed to do is to trawl all the evidence and research on autism. Parents—we would all do this—will follow anything that might help their child, sometimes without much evidence or information as to whether it is worth the emotional energy, let alone whether it is in the child's best interest, or whether it is worth the resources and the pressure on the family. Much work is being done, such as that by Higashi in Boston. We must collect the evidence and ask ourselves what might work and what we might want to pursue. That is not an academic exercise, but an important first step. The trawl of research that we have financed is important and I know that the Local Government Association wants to continue its work.

Regional planning is the next step. We must link in special needs to the research that is being done. Our plans for regional planning will bring regional health and education services together. We want to link them with schools of education and universities in the region so that the practitioners and the parents can always have good-quality information at their disposal when making decisions.

Finally, I must thank all hon. Members for their contribution to what I hope will be widespread consultation on the Green Paper. I think someone said that yesterday's paper and the Green Paper are a leap of faith. I feel strongly that if we do not say that we will make that leap of faith now, we may never do it. This is not merely about children's expectations but about our expectations. We want to be a Government with high expectations of our ability to make a difference.

Sometimes a step will look like a leap of faith, but unless we try it—unless we have those aspirations, show that we are prepared to face the difficult questions and make the necessary changes in what we do—how on earth can we ask it of parents, schools and local authorities? This not easy. It will not happen without resources and it will not arrive with the millenium, but in that spirit and whether or not the progress that we have made in the past decade and more has been welcome, we have the sure and certain knowledge that we have not got it all right and there is so much more that can be done.

For the sake of children who have not yet reached their potential, of parents who need the support and of the teachers, local authorities and voluntary organisations that work day in and day out with that vulnerable group, it is right that we have shown leadership and pointed the way forward.

[Ms Morris]

Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Wavertree): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Wigley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be very much aware of the strong feelings that have been expressed in Wales and elsewhere this week by farmers, in particular beef farmers, because of the acute desperation of the plight that they are facing. Yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that there may be some rethinking of the compensation scheme. You will be aware of the meeting between the Secretary of State for Wales and agriculture representatives in Cardiff this morning. I wonder whether you have received any request for a statement to be made in the House so that farmers know before the weekend that some progress can be made. The depth of their present plight is driving some to be nearly suicidal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I have had no indication that a statement of that nature is to be made.

DEREGULATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Edward Leigh and Mr. Richard Spring be discharged from the Deregulation Committee and Mrs. Jacqui Lait and Mr. John Randall be added to the Committee.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 17th December, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Fisheries not later than Seven o'clock.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Postal Services (North Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

1.53 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I am conscious of the topicality of this motion as Christmas draws near and increasing demands are put on the employees of the Royal Mail. I must begin by paying tribute to the servants of the Royal Mail and to Post Office workers not only in my constituency but throughout north Wales and all parts of the United Kingdom. They work hard in sometimes difficult circumstances to provide what has been, on the whole, an excellent service.

I also pay tribute to those members of the Royal Mail and the Post Office group who work in this House for the benefit of hon. Members. As a new Member, I have found the service that they provide here to be of a high standard and I commend them for their courtesy and efficiency. I am sure that the Minister and other hon. Members would endorse those sentiments.

On the subject of Christmas, a wise man once said that to err is human but to really foul things up requires a computer. There is a strong grain of truth in that statement, which goes to the heart of the subject of this debate: which can serve us best—humans or machines?

The Royal Mail prides itself on its ability to collect a letter anywhere in Britain and deliver it the next day, charging a flat rate across the United Kingdom. It has succeeded in doing that through its commitment to maintaining a network of sorting offices throughout Britain, including—this is of specific interest in north Wales—in rural communities. However, that important network and the vital service that it provides now seem to be under threat, especially in north Wales.

As part of its strategic plan for the region announced on 5 June this year, the Post Office has said that it will close all sorting operations in north Wales and centralise sorting functions in Chester. Offices in Colwyn Bay, Bangor, Rhyl and Wrexham will cease all sorting operations, known in the business as "outward vouching".

I raise this subject in an Adjournment debate because I am far from convinced by the Royal Mail management's assurances that those changes will not deleteriously affect the quality of the service that we have come to expect from the Royal Mail. I am particularly concerned about the effect that the changes will have on first class letter delivery within north Wales. Although there may be a case for saying that the speed with which letters can be delivered from north Wales to London or other big conurbations in England will not be affected, there must be a question mark—given that mail will have to be delivered to Chester—over whether mail to be delivered from one end of north Wales to the other will arrive the same day. That concern has been expressed by many members of the business community.

The effect on services in rural areas particularly concerns me. May I give one example? If a customer mails a letter from Llanddulas to Betws-yn-Rhos, or from Rhyd-y-foel to Abergele, the letter goes to the Colwyn Bay sorting office, where it is sorted and delivered. However, under the Post Office's proposals, mail from the village of Rhyd-y-foel will not go to Colwyn Bay but will have to go first to Chester, where it will enter the

new-fangled integrated mail processing unit, known as IMP to its friends. The letter will enter the IMP and come out the other end, only to be sent all the way back to Colwyn Bay, the local delivery office.

The Minister who is to reply to this debate is familiar with the geography of north Wales and will know that it makes little sense to many people in Wales to take mail from Llanddulas to Chester and then back to Colwyn Bay. Even the Post Office accepts that there may be what it rather euphemistically describes as "local anomalies". I believe that there are serious and justifiable concerns about the efficiency of the services to be provided under the new proposals.

There is also likely to be an effect on the rural communities of my constituency. I will name a few to give an indication of the Welsh nature as well as the rural dimension of my constituency. Those communities include Llangernyw, Llansannan, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, Cerrigydrudion, Llanrhaedr yng Nghinmeirch, not forgetting Llanarmon yn Ial.

The Post Office has argued that its investments will improve services across the entire north Wales north-west division. That strategy is linked to similar plans to improve and mechanise the service in the north-west England. The difficulty is that, although those improvements may make some sense in the more populated north-west England, they will not work in north Wales.

There is every likelihood that collection times will have to be brought forward, in some cases to the mid-afternoon. That will greatly affect the business operations of small and medium-sized enterprises across the region. Hon. Members may be aware that there is a great need to boost that particular sector of the economy in Wales. Furthermore, in the event of severe weather conditions—I am not doing a disservice to Wales by saying that the weather can sometimes be inclement and unpredictable—there is an increased chance that mail will be delayed on its epic journey across Offa's Dyke.

It may interest the House to learn that a similar scheme was attempted by the Royal Mail in 1982, when a mechanised sorting system was centralised in Chester. Following a barrage of complaints from customers, the system was scrapped. Again, to use the jargon of the Post Office, it was felt necessary to de-concentrate mail services back where they belonged, in the local communities.

Let us consider the required technology and machinery. I have made inquiries of the Communication Workers Union and I pay tribute to the excellent work done not only by Welsh postal workers in Colwyn bay and other areas, but by Mr. Ken Hanbury, Mr. Ken Moxham and Mr. Terry Hughes. They are excellent servants of the CWU and the Post Office. They tell me that there are grounds for being sceptical about the ability of the new IMPs to do their job. The jam rate—the number of breakdowns—can be high: 11 jams an hour compared with the target of seven. Let us not forget that machines are made by humans and not averse to fouling up.

As a matter of interest, perhaps the Post Office, when it realised that I intended to initiate this debate, felt that it should fire a warning shot across my bow, because I received an important item in the post this week and it had been shredded. I hasten to add that that is not the norm, and I am extremely pleased with the level of service that the Royal Mail provides. I understand that the complete destruction of that letter—I received its contents in a plastic bag—was caused by an automated machine, so it does happen.

The environmental impact of the proposals are also worth mentioning. Grave concern has been expressed by the local councils in my area, including Denbighshire and Conwy county council, which are working on the local agenda 21. Let us look objectively at what will happen as a result of the increased traffic caused by the proposals. Surely we should be using the roads less. Local agenda 21 puts an emphasis on local sustainable economic activity. What about the national air quality strategies, which aim for full compliance with the World Health Organisation's health-based guidelines for transport-related pollutants by 2005? What about the integrated transport strategy, which aims to reduce traffic congestion? In many respects, the Royal Mail's proposals run counter to the trend of opinion and Government policy.

I reject the logic of the Post Office's view:

"Overall, throughout the North Wales and North West Division as a whole . . . we confidently expect to achieve a substantial reduction in miles travelled."

In my view, the plan might reduce road traffic in north-west England, but it is obvious that road miles will increase across north Wales as a result of these plans.

One statistic illustrates that point: the community of Mochdre is three miles from the nearest sorting office in Colwyn Bay, but it is 60 miles from Chester. One needs only simple arithmetic to work out the impact of the proposals. I note the presence in the Chamber of the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and I am sure that he would agree that this problem is accentuated in respect of communities on the north-west periphery of north Wales—for example, Trefor, with which I have strong family links, and Aberdaron on the tip of the Lleyn peninsula. To suggest that mail can go from Aberdaron to Chester and back to Aberdaron while still giving us the quality of service we have come to expect is sheer nonsense.

In terms of economic impact, the plans will have a deleterious effect on jobs: this is a case of putting technology before people. I was astounded to learn today from a telephone conversation with the Post Office Users Council of Wales that it has been told that all mail from north Wales must be sorted in Chester, simply to justify the expenditure on the new machinery—a remarkable admission. The human side of the communications industry has been forgotten. One IMP takes the work of 25 people, and many who understand the system well and have experience of the expert task of sorting mail believe that the imposition of IMPs will lead to jobs being lost.

I do not wish to sound like some latter-day General Ludd, exhorting the workers to rage against the machines. I recognise the need for automation, as does the Communication Workers Union, but for the good of the north Wales economy and mail customers across the region, the Post Office should continue automated and manual sorting in the Chester and north Wales offices. Colwyn Bay, Rhyl, Bangor and Wrexham are all towns that currently suffer economic problems. Colwyn Bay in particular requires economic regeneration—and figures published last week showed that Conway county council area had the lowest average wage in Britain. It is no use

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

the Post Office saying that there will be no compulsory redundancies; the fact is that employment opportunities in north Wales will suffer greatly.

The issue of regional identity causes concern to many people. It might seem a small thing to lose the postmark that shows that the letter one has sent or received originates in a distinct community in north Wales, whether Rhyl, Wrexham or Colwyn Bay. Under the plans, those individual postmarks will go and a generic Chester and north Wales postmark will be substituted in their place. I appreciate and pay tribute to the Royal Mail's good work in fostering the Welsh language, but the fact remains that a momentous decision was taken in Wales this year—the Welsh people endorsed the Government's vision of decentralised and democratic government in the form of a Welsh Assembly—so it jars somewhat that the Post Office should be introducing these changes at this point in Welsh history.

Hon. Members may be aware that Aldous Huxley once said:

"Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means of going backwards."

The case of the Post Office's plans for north Wales seems to prove the point. As a result of the installation of integrated mail processing units at Chester, mail services across north Wales, especially in rural areas, will undoubtedly suffer. Earlier collection times and later deliveries can be expected. The region's economy, already under pressure, will suffer another blow as jobs are taken away and the area's profile suffers.

As a public corporation, the Post Office's first duty is to ensure the continued provision of a reliable service throughout every region of our land. Its plans for north Wales put its commitment in serious doubt, and I call on my hon. Friend the Minister to seek assurances from the Royal Mail, through the Department of Trade and Industry, that services in north Wales will not suffer. I also call on my hon. Friend the Minister to support a review of the decision, which was taken without proper consultation and without proper advice from the people on the ground, including the Communication Workers Union. May I exhort my hon. Friend to put pressure on the Royal Mail to carry out proper consultation with the unions and with the Post Office Users Council and local councils, which are all very concerned about the proposals, so that we can receive assurances that services will not suffer?

2.10 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) on introducing the debate. As it started a little earlier than expected, perhaps I may take a couple of minutes to make some comments in support of his speech. The argument advanced by the hon. Gentleman affects my constituency as well as his. It affects north-west Wales, the county of Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and the counties of the old area of Clwyd, and I have received representations from constituents who are extremely concerned.

It is an irony that I was attending meetings relating to the Kyoto conference in Japan earlier this week and we are now taking specific action that will mean carrying pieces of paper, envelopes and parcels from all parts of north Wales to Chester, only to send them back again to the villages of north Wales. The unnecessary double handling of first class mail is something that we can do without. If there is to be any coherence in public policy, clearly there must be a better strategic approach than has so far been suggested.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there has not been adequate discussion of the subject. There has not been adequate discussion with those involved in the tourist industry. The identity of the areas in north Wales is important. The postcards that are sent from those areas allow friends to see the enjoyable time that the holidaymakers are having; they project the area's identity, which is vital for the tourist industry.

As the assembly is shortly to be set up, there may be pressure to ensure the full bilingualisation of the frank marks on envelopes throughout north Wales. I assume that Chester is willing to have its franking systems bilingualised—or perhaps, as is more likely, the subject has not even been thought about.

When the postal code was set up, the postal code area for most of north Wales was designated LL, based on Llandudno. There was an expectation then that any central sorting facility for north Wales would be based somewhere in the Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Conwy area to serve the whole of north Wales. We are seeing the sucking of jobs away from north Wales to Chester. I am concerned that up to 10 jobs may be lost in Bangor as a result; although it is not in my constituency, it certainly affects my constituents and the service available.

As the hon. Member for Clwyd, West has said, the possibility of earlier collection of first class mail will greatly affect small businesses that operate in scattered rural areas, whose number is growing because in other walks of life services are improving, for instance through the use of e-mail. The danger is that by reducing the service and having earlier collections the Royal Mail is playing into the hands of the new technology that will take work away from it and undermine its services.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, West mentioned Aberdaron in my constituency. As he knows, there is a posting box even further away at Uwchmynydd at the tip of the peninsula. I wonder whether people in Chester have the faintest idea where it is. We already get complaints about letters being lost. I suspect that many more will be lost between Trevor in my constituency and Trevor in Llangollen, between Nebo in one part of north Wales and the other Nebo, and between Dinas, Dinas and Dinas. How many towns and villages are there? We know where they are, but a centralised conglomerate in Chester may not.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that the Welsh Office has a responsibility to ensure that our identity in Wales is protected, that the services needed by the people of Wales will be developed in a coherent and environmentally friendly manner, and that, when the Assembly comes into being, its hands will not be tied by this mindless centralisation.

2.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing this opportunity to debate postal services in north Wales, and the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on taking the opportunity to say a few

words on behalf of his constituents and the wider region of north Wales. The points raised are of keen interest and concern not only in my hon. Friend's constituency, but in neighbouring constituencies. For example, my hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) have raised these matters with the Welsh Office or with the Department of Trade and Industry, as have Denbighshire and Anglesey county councils.

Postal services, whether in the form of mail services or services provided through the Post Office network, are an important element in all our daily lives, at either a personal or a business level. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West pointed out, they are especially important at Christmas time, and Members of Parliament find the postal service that is provided by House of Commons staff of immense importance. I should like to endorse everything he said about those issues.

My hon. Friend recognised the valuable service that is provided by the Post Office. Nevertheless, it is still natural that any plans for change cause concern. When the plans centre on a proposal for a major investment in automation and the introduction of new technology, there is concern about the loss of local employment, local identity and the quality of service, which is closely tied to local postmen and postwomen.

The Government are fully committed to the continuing provision of comprehensive and efficient postal services. In line with our manifesto commitment, we have initiated a Post Office review to identify practical proposals for introducing greater commercial freedom and to take advantage of the new challenges and opportunities for the benefit of all its customers.

The Royal Mail's overall strategy programme conforms with its strategy of improving further on service standards that are already among the highest in the world. The overall investment programme also accords with the policy advocated by the Communication Workers Union, which, in its recent consultative document, called for a substantial increase in the Post Office's capital investment programme.

New investment is an essential part of the inevitable process of change to which the Post Office must adapt in the face of continuing liberalisation of European postal services. There is a trend towards the globalisation of postal markets, and foreign post office administrations such as those of the Dutch, the Swiss and the Danes are already establishing pilot operations in the United Kingdom. There is also the factor of the higher quality of service standards that customers increasingly demand.

The Royal Mail's planned £64 million investment in the north Wales and north-west region has, of course, to be seen in the context of its progressive national programme of developing a network of automated processing centres and distribution centres to accommodate the new technology to handle the increasing volumes of mail more speedily and accurately so as to improve quality of service for customers and maintain its competitive position in the communications market.

In formulating its future investment plans, the Royal Mail assessed its locations for new automated processing centres and took into account the national network and the need for speedy and efficient transport links. The choice of Chester reflects its geographical advantages in terms of its position in relation to transport links and the Royal Mail network.

There are clearly negative features in employment terms for some areas, but it is important to recognise the scale of the Royal Mail's long-term commitment to the north Wales and north-west region, which is underpinned by this major investment programme. Decisions relating to the operational arrangements for postal businesses are and must remain the responsibility of the Post Office board and management, and it would be wrong for the Government to seek to intervene in such matters unless the Royal Mail's general policy for automating and developing the mail's infrastructure was judged to be flawed.

In the Government's view the Royal Mail is pursuing the best alternative. Its strategy of introducing the most up-to-date technology to mail processing operations to increase efficiency and improve the quality of service to its customers is essential to its longer-term competitiveness against other communications media and, therefore, to the long-term job security prospects of its staff in the region.

The Royal Mail is facing increasing competition from electronic alternatives, such as fax or e-mail, and, in the case of direct mail advertising, for example, there are other channels, such as press, radio and television, through which advertisers may choose to promote their products or services.

On concerns about the Royal Mail's future operations in north Wales, I understand that the Royal Mail has given a commitment that there will be no compulsory redundancies among permanent, full-time or part-time staff, and that any reductions in the number of north Wales staff will be achieved by natural wastage. I also understand that there will be discussions with staff on an individual basis about any changes to the composition of duties as the detailed operational planning evolves over the next two years, and that the quality of mail services in north Wales will be improved as a result of the new technology and faster processing of mail.

The transfer of the limited mail processing that is carried out at Bangor, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl and Wrexham will alleviate the severe space shortages at those offices and enable investment in the installation of large, modern delivery fittings, thereby improving both the accuracy of mail sorting and working conditions for the staff who work in those offices. Overall, the quality of mail services in north Wales will be significantly improved as a result of the new technology and faster processing of mail.

Over the past two years, the Royal Mail has invested £2.5 million in its operations in north Wales, with new delivery office facilities introduced in Holyhead, Flint, Tywyn, Rhyl, Prestatyn, Bangor, Caernarfon, Deeside and Mold. A new office for Llandudno is planned for next year, as part of the Royal Mail's plan to invest another £3.5 million over the next two years.

The Royal Mail acknowledges that a previous attempt, 10 years ago—which my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West mentioned—to concentrate mail sorting for north Wales in Chester was unsuccessful, and had to be abandoned because of the adverse impact on service quality. The Royal Mail attributes the project's failure to the relatively undeveloped road infrastructure linking north Wales and Chester and an over-optimistic—

Mr. Wigley: Rubbish.

Mr. Griffiths: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that, 10 years ago, transport and communication links in north

[Mr. Griffiths]

Wales were wonderful? I do not think so, because I heard him often enough complaining about the need to improve them. The links have been improved along the north Wales coastal belt, and there are plans to improve them further.

The Royal Mail was over-optimistic, 10 years ago, in its assessment of the Chester sorting office's mail handling capacity. The three key factors that have changed since, making the Royal Mail confident that the new project will succeed, are the greatly improved road links provided by the A55 north Wales expressway, construction of a new purpose-built automated processing centre—concentrating current mail volumes and catering for future growth—and installation of new state-of-the-art, high-speed, integrated mail processing machinery.

Integrated mail processing machines have already been successfully introduced into Royal Mail service. The Royal Mail is fully confident that, once the equipment is installed in the new Chester facility in two years, it will enable substantial improvements in processing accuracy and times.

The Royal Mail has assured me that investment in mail processing in Chester will not result in earlier collection or later delivery times. It believes that the new equipment's high-speed processing rates will mean that there will be no changes in mail collection or delivery times, even in rural areas. I can only pass on that commitment by the Royal Mail to hon. Members.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend agree that that smacks of a rather unrealistic expectation? Given the geography of north Wales, with which he is well familiar, what does he have to say about mail delivery to rural communities? North Wales has widely scattered communities that are very far away from Chester.

Mr. Griffiths: I fully appreciate the issues of geography, and realise that mail from the west and south-west of Colwyn Bay that is internal to north Wales may ultimately travel further before being delivered. I can say only—perhaps I should have heads on a plate if it does not transpire—that the Royal Mail has assured me that it will be able to provide a better service, and that there will be no need for changes in delivery or collection times.

Mr. Wigley: As we are putting heads on plates, will the Minister give an assurance that the Royal Mail has confirmed also that it will act within the Welsh Language Act 1993, and that it will therefore make available devices for bilingual franking?

Mr. Griffiths: I am about to turn to Welsh language issues—the right hon. Gentleman has anticipated the speech writer.

I am aware of concerns in north Wales that there may be problems with letters addressed in Welsh, for example. My hon. Friend illustrated that point by reciting a litany of Welsh place names. I am surprised that neither my hon. Friend nor the right hon. Gentleman took the opportunity of mentioning Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch—but perhaps everyone in the world knows where that is.

Mr. Thomas: I felt that the pressure on the Official Reporters was sufficiently severe without adding to their burdens by mentioning that extremely long place name.

Mr. Griffiths: I have written it down for them, so it will not cause them any problems later.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Mr. Griffiths: The Royal Mail has assured me that Welsh addresses and place names will not cause it any significant problems when processing the mail in Chester. A bilingual guide is currently available if necessary. For the future, the new technology integrated processing machines of the kind that it is planned to install at the new Chester facility can be programmed to read addresses in both Welsh and English. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the right hon. Gentleman will be gratified and relieved to hear that.

That will complement the Welsh language policy that was introduced earlier this year which, over the next three years, will fulfil the commitment to provide a bilingual service in Wales. It includes recognition of addresses in Welsh; bilingual stationery, forms, leaflets, signs, notices and publications; responses in Welsh to all letters received in Welsh; and provision of a Welsh speaker at public meetings if a member of the public requests it. A Welsh language customer inquiry and telephone helpline centre is scheduled to open in Bangor next January.

As to a new postmark, the Post Office fully recognises the need to continue to reflect and to respond to the particular identity of north Wales. I shall ensure that the views expressed today are passed on to the Post Office.

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry to press the Minister on this point, but this seems to be the central weakness in the consultation process—or lack thereof. No assurance has been given that bilingual franking will be possible for the whole area. If letters from throughout Cheshire and north Wales are collected in one place and there is one franking for that whole area, either there will be Welsh language franking for Cheshire—which is clearly not acceptable to the people of Cheshire—or the people of north Wales will not receive the bilingual franking that they expect. The Government must resolve that point before the Royal Mail is allowed to go ahead with centralisation.

Mr. Griffiths: I appreciate that that is an important point, which I shall take up with the Royal Mail. However, I do not know why the right hon. Gentleman is so confident that the people of Chester will not accept bilingual franking on their letters. That issue must be examined. I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the commitment to reflect and to respond to the particular identity of north Wales. Given the fact that the Post Office has already fully met the demands of the Welsh Language Act, we should proceed in that spirit. We have a little time to talk about those issues, and we should do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West and the right hon. Member for Caernarfon have asked about the environmental impact of the concentration of the mail processing operations at the new automated processing centre in Chester. The Royal Mail has advised me that more than 75 per cent. of the mail in the Clwyd area is already processed at Chester and that it does not anticipate a significant increase in the overall road transport of mail to or from north Wales.

Throughout its north Wales and north-west region, the Royal Mail expects a reduction of 500,000 miles a year as a result of the investment programme. Not all that will be in north Wales; but, rather than talking about just the Colwyn Bay office or other parts of north Wales, we should consider the operation of the whole mail service. Bearing in mind our strategic commitments to reducing atmospheric pollution, I am confident that the Royal Mail will achieve the cuts in road transport that it has told us about.

People in north Wales will get a better service. I am confident that the Royal Mail will agree to reconsider any significant points raised about the adverse impact of its plans. I believe that the strategy will lead to better services for people in north Wales and a reduction in atmospheric pollution, because of the Royal Mail's overall targets. If the Royal Mail fails to meet its commitments, serious questions will need to be asked about the suitability for employment of those who have made the plans to which I have given my imprimatur.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 8 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Sports (Young People)

2. **Mr. Skinner:** What assistance is to be given to young people to widen the activity base of *(a)* athletics, *(b)* tennis and *(c)* other sports. [17976]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): Before I answer the question, I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me and the House in paying tribute to the memory of Billy Bremner, who died on Saturday. Billy was one of the great characters of post-war football and an inspiring captain of both Scotland and Leeds United. He will be sorely missed.

The main initiative to promote young people's participation in sporting activities is the English Sports Council's national junior sport programme. It provides a framework within which schools, local authorities, governing bodies of sport, sports clubs and youth organisations can work together to provide quality sporting opportunities for four to 18-year-olds in a planned and co-ordinated way.

Mr. Skinner: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems about the past 18 years, among other things, is the fact that many school playing fields have been sold off? That has to stop. Secondly, when they closed the pits, they closed many of those centres of culture and sporting activities, the miners' welfares. That has to be stopped as well. Thirdly, there is the gap where youngsters leaving school find that there are no opportunities to carry on with athletics, unless they live in cities with athletics clubs.

We need a fresh start. My hon. Friend has got the job, and if he can deal with some of the things that I mentioned, plug the gap and get rid of the culture of the blazer, the bag and the twinset brigade, especially in tennis, he will be doing a decent job.

Mr. Banks: I thank my hon. Friend for his supplementary question, and for noting that I am here doing the job—and still doing the job, which is sometimes as great a surprise to me as it is to others.

My hon. Friend is right to say that we must have a coherent plan to stop the further sale of playing fields as their sale means losing a prime asset essential to the encouragement of grass roots sports. The facilities in former mining communities are worth looking at. It would be a shame to waste those facilities. It may be that we can join together in a plan that I have for discussing with companies, for example, the use of their sports facilities, which are grossly underused. We do not want to lose any sports facilities.

On my hon. Friend's last point, we want to provide opportunities for everyone to get involved in sport from the earliest age, at primary school. Sport for all means right the way through from primary school until they carry us out in a wooden box. We want to eliminate the chance factor. Facilities are distributed unevenly, which means that some youngsters do not get opportunities. By the time we have finished our period of office, which is so far into the future that even I cannot imagine it, we shall undoubtedly have addressed that imbalance.

Mr. Spring: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the pursuit of excellence must be at the heart of encouraging young people into greater sports participation? Why have the Government reneged on the previous Government's commitment to extending the sportsmark scheme to primary schools?

Mr. Banks: We are as concerned as the Opposition about the pursuit of excellence. We must recognise that it is necessary to encourage the involvement of the very youngest. That is what we shall do. If we do not encourage the youngest, we shall not get elite athletes winning medals for this country. On the previous Government's initiatives, where we feel that they were in the interests of primary schoolchildren, we shall do all that we can to encourage them.

Tourism

3. **Mr. Waterson:** What organisations representing English tourism he has met since 1 May. [17977]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): Since 1 May, my right hon. Friend and I have met 42 representative organisations. Additionally, we inaugurated the new tourism forum on 26 November, which has 57 members. I shall be completing a programme of visits to each of the 10 regional tourist boards very shortly.

Mr. Waterson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that tourism makes a massive contribution to the United Kingdom economy, bringing in more than £100 million in my constituency of Eastbourne alone? Does he also agree that it is now recognised by everyone that it was an appalling blunder not to include the word "tourism" in the name of his Department?

Mr. Clarke: The Government and the tourism industry are achieving such success that trivial points of that nature have long since ceased to be discussed. The new forum, which met on 26 November, was much more concerned about action—action for jobs, and action for a strategy. The previous Government did not achieve that in 18 years.

I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman—he published a booklet entitled "Tories for Tourism", but there were no Tories and not much about tourism—that the Government, working with the forum, will publish a plan for tourism early in the summer. I am sure that it will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Corbett: Did my hon. Friend hear Alistair Cooke's "Letter from America" yesterday? Will he

underwrite it with his view of the importance of the heritage to Britain's tourism? In particular, will he pay tribute to the Royal Shakespeare Company—both here and in Stratford-upon-Avon—as a vibrant and extremely important part of our tourism facilities?

Mr. Clarke: I did, indeed, hear yesterday's broadcast, and was delighted by the international focus given to the success of British tourism under the present Government. I pay tribute to the organisation that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Alistair Cooke made the point that British heritage was extremely important, and of course he was right. That is why my Department contributes about £1 billion to the arts, historical sites, museums, and so forth. Such things have appeal, but consistent with that is the adventurism that Alistair Cooke has demonstrated. Young people and others in Britain who are presenting new designs, new fashions, modern music and up-to-date architecture also present something that attracts tourism abroad and at home. I am sure that Alistair Cooke, with his broad vision, will welcome the commitment to our policies and the support that we enjoy.

Mr. Fearn: The Minister visited my constituency not too long ago when he visited the north-west, and from what I hear he did a good job. When he met the various tourist boards, did he talk about the minimum wage and whether it would apply on a regional basis? Many small hoteliers and people running boarding houses are very worried about the minimum wage. Many others are in favour of it, but the forum needs to discuss regionalism and how the minimum wage will work out. I am sure that the Minister has an answer.

Mr. Clarke: I very much enjoyed my visit to the hon. Gentleman's region, and in particular my visit to his constituency. The subject of the minimum wage was raised, and I was not surprised when once again it was given massive support. I was able to repeat the Government's position: we are committed to a national minimum wage. We appointed the independent Low Pay Commission, to which we were committed, and which includes Stephanie Monk from the tourism industry and Granada. We shall consider the report when it is presented, and my hon. Friend—if I may reciprocate his good nature—can be assured that not only the fears but the hopes of his constituents are safe in the hands of this Government.

Mrs. Betty Williams: What action are the Government taking to ensure full access for disabled people to every aspect of tourism?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. I pay tribute to everyone involved in "Tourism for All" for the marvellous work that they have done, not least at the breakfast meeting a few weeks ago. I also pay tribute to Mandy Todd of the consortium, who is very much involved in the Quarry Bank project in north-west England. She spoke at the forum on the need to involve disabled people in every aspect of tourism, and in the discussion on the new deal. Her efforts and those of her organisation at Quarry Bank are a wonderful example of best practice for access for disabled people and carers, which many people could emulate to their benefit.

Museums (Admission Charges)

4. **Mr. Loughton:** If he will make a statement on admission charges to the nation's museums. [17978]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): This morning I placed in the Library details of the progress of the review of admission charges, together with a consultation paper on the development of a code of good practice for museums and galleries. I am delighted to announce that the heritage lottery fund is to create a museums and galleries access fund, which will assist initiatives to extend access to our great collections. I shall make a further announcement when my Department's spending review is completed next summer.

Mr. Loughton: That is all very well, but as my grandmother would say, what has that to do with the price of fish? Does the Secretary of State agree with me and with the directors of our major museums, who believe in the principle that free admission to our museums is the cornerstone of democratic access to our cultural inheritance? If he does not agree, does that represent yet another people's U-turn by this Government of one principle in the interests of budgetary expediency? Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether the recent announcement by the British museum was made in the light of preferential treatment negotiated between his Department and the museum?

Mr. Smith: I look forward to discovering in detail the representations that the hon. Gentleman made on this subject to the Conservative Government over the past 18 years. We said before the election in our document, "Create the Future":

> "We would like to see institutions do all they can to balance the books while maximising access."

That has been our policy throughout, and remains so. It is up to each institution and its trustees to make decisions about how best to carry forward the process of maximising access. The Government's job is to make it as easy as possible for them to choose and pursue their own course. We intend to carry on doing that.

Mr. Sheldon: I welcome the British museum's decision not to introduce admission charges for the time being. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that what he has said today will provide the means for other museums to remain free of admission charges in the years to come?

Mr. Smith: I have said two things today. First, we are consulting the national galleries and museums on the development of a code of good practice, with a view to making that code a condition for the receipt of grant in aid in due course. Secondly, a heritage lottery access fund is being developed, and all museums will be able to apply to it, whether they are chargers or non-chargers, so as to broaden access for the citizen.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Accepting what the Secretary of State has just said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton), and notwithstanding his consultation paper, may I—as someone who felt impelled to vote against the Museum and Galleries Admission Charges Bill in the early 1970s—ask the Secretary of State to give a

commitment that all galleries and museums, at least in part, will be kept open and have free access, and that national lottery funding will be used, if necessary, to subsidise those museums and art galleries that would have difficulty doing so?

Mr. Smith: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman means by "in part". If he is referring to the fact that the science museum, which charges for entry, none the less allows 43 per cent. of its visitors to get in free, he makes a valid point. The overwhelming majority of museums are already doing that. We have made it clear both before and since the election that it is up to the trustees of each gallery to decide how best to maintain good access for the public. For some, that may be a wish to see free admission. For others, it may be free periods or free entry for certain groups but not for everyone. It is up to the museums to decide. The Government's job is to provide the framework within which they can pursue their chosen course.

Dr. Iddon: I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that museums play a key educational role, especially for young people. Our museums in Bolton design special projects in partnership with schools. Will my right hon. Friend consider that aspect when considering the question of access, which should preferably be free for educational purposes?

Mr. Smith: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. Part of the code of practice on which we are consulting flags up the importance of education and the access for schoolchildren, in particular, to this country's great national collections.

Mr. Maude: Is not the Secretary of State wriggling off a virtual commitment that he would ensure free access to all museums? What financial support has he offered to the trustees of the British museum that has enabled them to change their settled intention to introduce entrance charges? Can he give the House an unqualified assurance that the British museum has not been offered any support that is not available on identical terms to all other museums of national importance, irrespective of whether they charge for entrance?

Mr. Smith: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman two things. First, our commitment was set out clearly in black and white before the election. As it is clear that the right hon. Gentleman did not hear the first time, I will repeat it. We should like to see institutions do all that they can to balance the books while maximising access. What matters is maximising access in the best possible way for each institution or gallery. If the right hon. Gentleman talks to the directors and chairmen of galleries and museums, he will find that that is what they are anxious to do. Secondly, public expenditure survey allocations to individual museums and galleries will be announced within the next few days.

Athletics Training

5. **Mr. Bill Michie:** What plans he has to provide assistance for British athletes in respect of their training programmes. [17979]

Mr. Banks: We are committed to improving the quality of training for our athletes. In particular, the United Kingdom Sports Institute will provide our athletes with the finest training facilities possible and the English Sports Council's world class performance programme provides lottery support to our best athletes.

Mr. Michie: I welcome the statement and thank my hon. Friend. It is spreading the opportunities for athletes throughout the UK. The United Kingdom Sports Institute is a good idea. I am sure that it will be successful, and the icing on the cake to make sure that everyone knows that it will be successful is for its headquarters to finish up in Sheffield.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is always keen to push the welfare of his constituency and his city. It is, indeed, a fine city of sport. However, we shall have to wait just a little longer. There will be presentations on 16 December from the three short-listed bidders—Sheffield, Upper Heyford and the Central Consortium. Now that we have put some flesh on the bones of the old British Academy of Sport, I think that we shall be able to make progress with some speed. However, we must get the decision right—I have made that point before. We do not want to rush into it and make mistakes. We shall make the announcement fairly shortly after 16 December, and I can tell my hon. Friend that, as ever, Sheffield is in there with a very good chance.

Mrs. May: Is the Minister aware of the difficulties in recent months in getting funding for disabled athletes to train for the Paralympics in Sydney 2000? Those difficulties have occurred because of long delays in getting promised lottery funds distributed to the various disabled sports associations. For example, difficulties were suffered by the Windsor and Maidenhead sports association for the disabled, which is in my constituency and of which I am a member. Is the Minister aware of those difficulties? What is he doing to investigate them and to ensure that promised funds are distributed so that our disabled athletes can train properly in preparation for the Sydney 2000 Paralympics?

Mr. Banks: I am acutely aware of the problems. On several occasions in the House, I have paid tribute to our Paralympic team. We have some of the finest disabled athletes in the world and I want this country to glory in their achievements because they do wonders for this country and for their sports.

I have been talking to the English Sports Council. There have been some problems. I am satisfied that we have eliminated most of them, but I assure the hon. Lady that we shall not allow our paralympians to go to the games without full and adequate support. If the hon. Lady wants any additional information, or if she encounters any problems, she should please let me know, and I will do my best to eliminate them.

Mr. Alan Keen: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will give his full support to the two British teams in the World cup in France next year, and look out for the rights of supporters travelling from the United Kingdom to France. The taxi driver who drove me home from the BBC studios yesterday said that he and his friends were organising trips to Europe and that they were supporting Jamaica, so there will be citizens of this country travelling

from this country and supporting other sides as well. Will the Minister bear in mind that we must look after their rights, too?

Mr. Banks: We have a great deal of interest in the world cup next year, not only with Scotland and England, but also with Jamaica. Given the United Nations aspect of the premier league, it is fascinating to see that virtually every world cup competitor will have a British league player, which again gives us an abiding interest.

There are some problems associated with the allocation of tickets, and Ministers are considering those problems carefully. The one message that we want to send from the House today—I am sure that Conservative Members will join me in this—is that no one without a ticket should attempt to travel to the world cup finals in France next year.

Business Sponsorship of Sport

6. **Mr. Fraser:** What plans the Government have to change the regulations governing business sponsorship of sport. [17980]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government plan to end sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies and will work actively with sports, business people and others to find alternative forms of sponsorship.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Secretary of State agree that all British citizens should be given the same treatment? If so, does he agree that other sports which rely heavily on sponsorship from tobacco companies have not been given the same treatment as formula one?

Mr. Smith: All European citizens are being given equal treatment under the directive brilliantly negotiated by my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health last week. As the hon. Gentleman will know from having studied the detail carefully, all countries will have three years from the date of adoption in which to implement the directive in their national law. There will then be a two-year transitional period for all tobacco-sponsored events and activities, with a further three years allowed for events or activities organised at world level.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I welcome the very positive way in which my right hon. Friend has gone about this matter in his statement today—*[Interruption.]* Oh, yes, there is a very clear change: in 1994, when the Tories faced exactly the same decision, they ducked it under pressure from the tobacco industry.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Conservative Members have never accepted a ban even on tobacco advertising, let alone sponsorship, in this country. We had three objectives from the outset. The first was a complete phasing out of tobacco sponsorship. The second was protection of the interests of sports and the arts. The third was to make special provision for those sports that were particularly badly affected. We have secured all three of those objectives.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the Secretary of State accept that no one in this country, even on the Labour Benches, believes what he has just said? It is apparent that the interests of other major sports, such as cricket, darts and snooker, were completely ignored. It was special favours for special friends.

Mr. Smith: Perhaps that is why, immediately after the announcement of the outcome of the directive, Maurice Lindsay of the Rugby Football League said:

"I am sure that the other sports will be equally satisfied with last night's announcement. We are grateful to the Prime Minister for listening to us and responding so positively".

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should listen to Maurice Lindsay rather than to his own prejudices.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Secretary of State agree that sponsorship should be targeted at activities that are compatible with sustainable development and provide good role models, especially for young people? Does he further agree that formula one is the epitome of unsustainability and provides a thoroughly bad role model for young people, especially young men? Should not the fact that the celebration of travelling at high speed leads to deaths on the road among young people be borne in mind when thinking about sponsorship? Will not formula one and the Government's actions cause more deaths than, for example, the infinitesimal risk referred to last week in the statement on BSE?

Mr. Smith: Although I agreed with most of what the hon. Gentleman said in his pursuit of the interests of sustainability, I am afraid that he made a bad point. Many of the improvements in road safety, and especially car safety, have come from the engineering expertise put into formula one in this country.

National Lottery

7. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** What representations he has received from organisations asking for changes to the distribution arrangement for national lottery money; and if he will make a statement. [17981]

Mr. Chris Smith: We have received almost 600 responses to the White Paper, "The People's Lottery". Of the 354 commenting on the proposed changes to distribution, 328—93 per cent.—were positive. Nine out of 10 of those who responded backed our proposals. A copy of the analysis of the responses to the White Paper will be available in the Library shortly. The National Lottery Bill, which was introduced last week, will give effect to our proposals.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that there is a great deal of concern about the possible closure of village and community halls throughout the country? Six halls in my constituency are under threat. Will he advise us on how organisations which care for the elderly and the disabled and which arrange events for young people and other groups can obtain resources from the national lottery? If we are to save community life and provide neighbourhood schemes, it is important that some of the lottery money is used to help organisations in our communities. Will my right hon. Friend give us some advice on that matter?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Bill that we published last week includes a specific

provision for the development of fast-track procedures for small-scale community grants. That will help, for example, scout groups, women's institutes, village halls and sports clubs—precisely the sort of neighbourhood and community activities that my hon. Friend so ably described. Those activities deserve support from the lottery, and under our proposals they will get it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Judging by the number of times that the Government have pre-launched, launched and relaunched their initiatives for after-school clubs and homework centres using lottery money, it is clear that the Secretary of State has been very accommodating to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in allowing the lottery to become a back pocket to support any pet cause and help a Minister in difficulty.

How will the right hon. Gentleman make up the severe shortfall for the sports, arts, heritage and charity bodies, all of which are seeing their plans to extend access and participation in ruins now that they are £1 billion short of the amount that they were expecting just six months ago?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Lady is wrong. Over the seven-year period of the current franchise, the existing five distributors will receive £1.8 billion—which, in each case, is precisely what they were originally expecting to receive. For existing distributors, therefore, there is no shortfall. What is clear, however, is that the hon. Lady—like the entire Conservative party—is uninterested in the welfare of kids after school. She is uninterested in tackling social exclusion and in providing healthy living advice for people throughout the United Kingdom.

On 1 May, we put those proposals to the people and they endorsed them. In July, we offered our proposals for consultation and 93 per cent. of respondents supported what we were saying. We have the people's backing—which is sadly lacking for the points that the hon. Lady made.

Mr. Maude: I assume that the Secretary of State agrees with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said in his pre-Budget statement:

"A national child care strategy is . . . now the policy of this country's Government".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 777.]

Does he agree with the Chancellor that such a strategy should be funded, at least partly, by the national lottery? How does he reconcile that with the Prime Minister's solemn pledge, quoted in the lottery White Paper:

"We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities"?

Will the Secretary of State now apologise to the charities and communities throughout the country—to which the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) referred—that, since 14 October, have been robbed of the lottery money they were expecting for their cherished projects? Specifically, will he tell the House how he justifies that raid on lottery money when the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 specifically forbids it?

Mr. Smith: No one has been robbed of allocated money. If the right hon. Gentleman seriously examines the facts—as he is singularly unwont to do—he will discover that that is the case. In July 1996, the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley)—who is sitting two rows behind him—said about additionality:

"Lottery funds are not intended to substitute for funds which would have otherwise been provided by conventional public expenditure."

In their 18 years in office, the Conservatives proposed no conventional public expenditure on a national child care strategy. We are now providing funds for a strategy by ensuring that the lottery can be used for that purpose. That is what we told the electorate we would do, and—unlike the Conservative party—we believe in keeping our promises to the electorate.

Tourism

8. **Mr. Ennis:** What plans he has for encouraging the improvement of training and qualifications in the tourism industry. [17983]

14. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster:** What plans he has for encouraging the improvement of training and qualifications in the tourism industry. [17989]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department recognises the importance of a skilled, world-class work force in the industry and the Government's new deal initiative has training at its very heart. I was therefore delighted by the high level of interest and support shown at the tourism, hospitality and leisure new deal conference, which was hosted by my Department and the Secretary of State on 24 November.

Mr. Ennis: Is my hon. Friend aware that tourism is now the single biggest industry in Yorkshire and Humberside, with more than 140,000 employees? Given the industry's significance to Yorkshire and Humberside, did he have an opportunity at the recent new deal conference to assess its response to the Government's initiative?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend will be delighted to hear that there was an excellent and positive response, and that almost 50 tourism organisations have already indicated their willingness in principle to participate in the new deal scheme. Last Thursday and Friday, I was delighted to visit Yorkshire; I shall visit it again at the end of this week. I assure my hon. Friend that Yorkshire—with its skills and its genius—will continue to make the contribution that it is capable of making to the growth of real jobs not only in his region but in the rest of Britain.

Mr. Foster: In constituencies such as Hastings and Rye, tourism has often been regarded as a seasonal, low-paid employment sector. What plans does my hon. Friend have to create stability in that industry?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I have appointed a working group to report to the main forum on tourism on the very issue of the regeneration of seaside towns, including the resorts represented by my hon. Friend. We are encouraging a large number of initiatives, including the Norman Richardson house project, the London hotels training centre, the Springboard project and many others. My hon. Friend and the House can be assured that we regard youth employment, youth training and the creation of real jobs that lead to

well-motivated employees as essential to the future of tourism; without such incentive and encouragement, the industry will decline, as it would have done had the previous Administration remained in office.

Mr. Brady: I was interested that the Minister chose to link the new deal and the tourism industry. Does he accept that one of the shortcomings of such a link is that many people who work in tourism are seasonally employed and, therefore, may never be unemployed for the six-month period necessary to be party to the new deal? What is he planning to do to address that problem?

Mr. Clarke: I do not accept that. With proper planning, many such problems can be avoided. The hon. Gentleman referred to the industry and the prospects for the new deal. Perhaps I may remind him that 58 per cent. of those who were represented at our conference on the new deal said that they would make a contribution to it. May I also remind him that 86 per cent. of those involved in the British Hospitality Association said that they, too, would become involved?

The hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) will know that, on occasions, the Secretary of State can be diffident. To communicate to them the spirit of appreciation of the new deal and our approach to tourism, I remind them of the words of Ken Robinson, who writes for the "Tourism Society Journal", and who said of my right hon. Friend:

"After the initial performance, audience participation was encouraged and this critic, for one, has to report that the initiatives"—

on the new deal—

"were greatly praised by almost all present, the response was little short of a standing ovation."

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO (MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE)

The Minister was asked—

Millennium Experience

27. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** How many public relations consultants are currently contracted for the millennium experience. [18005]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): None.

Mr. Simpson: On behalf of many hon. Members present, may I say what a joy it is to see the Minister here this afternoon? I know that he is opposed to "excessive accountability", to repeat the words he used before the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, but perhaps he could give us some idea of how much public relations on the millennium experience is costing.

Mr. Mandelson: I have already said that no outside public relations firms are contracted to the New Millennium Experience Company. Of course it has members of staff who are working to promote that experience—as my hon. Friend would expect.

Mr. Timms: I wonder whether my hon. Friend is aware that the millennium dome is already a spectacular site from my constituency *[Interruption.]*—indeed it is—north of the river. Rather than listen to the consultants who are the pre-occupation of Conservative Members, will he consider asking school children in my constituency for ideas about the content of the exhibition in that dome, because they will be enthused and keen to contribute? I am sure that they would add a great deal of value to an exciting festival.

Mr. Mandelson: That is an excellent idea. The contents of the millennium experience, the dome, will attract people of all ages, although I suspect that playing surfball, the 21st century sport, will have an especial appeal to young people. In addition to forming a new millennium council to tap into a wide range of popular opinion about the experience, I intend to form a junior board or a junior council so that young people, who will enjoy the experience so much, will have an opportunity to plug right into the planning of the experience.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister think that the millennium experience's impact on the country's cultural life will last as long as did the outcome of the great exhibition and the post-war south bank developments, with which his distinguished grandfather was associated? If he takes the view that the benefits could be as long lasting, does he agree that public relations consultants are unnecessary as long as he holds his present job?

Mr. Mandelson: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. The millennium experience will be a great success, because it will be an opportunity to bring together the whole country. It will also give us a chance to pause and reflect on our society and our country as we enter the new century and the new millennium. He is also right to say that there will a considerable legacy from the investment we are making. It is important that we should remember the reclamation from waste and dereliction of a big slice of our capital city, the construction of the new millennium village community on the Greenwich peninsula and the tremendous transport infrastructure, all of which will be permanent legacies of our investment.

Mr. Dalyell: What access will be made available for Scotland and the north of England to the millennium experience?

Mr. Mandelson: I am glad my hon. Friend asks that question. One of the important conditions that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out when we agreed to go ahead with the Conservative party's excellent idea for the millennium experience was that there should be a national programme that would reach out to all parts of the country and to all the national regions within the United Kingdom. The ticketing and transport arrangements we develop will ensure that people can afford to come and that they will have the facilities to come to the millennium dome at Greenwich from every part of the country, wherever they live.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman started with five minutes of questions and it has now come down to four—we can look forward to its decreasing further. I am sure that everyone shares my relief that, in view of his dislike of what he calls "excessive accountability", he has come back at all. Does he not understand that his reluctance to

disclose any real information about progress at Greenwich—for example, the laughable information centre that contained no information and the information brochure that contained, at my best count, fewer than 900 words, most of which were slogans—undermines the credibility of the whole project? Does he not understand that people assume either that he has something to hide or that—more likely—he is hiding because he has nothing to say?

Mr. Mandelson: Given that the millennium experience and the construction of the dome was the Conservative Government's idea and began when the Conservatives were in power, I do not quite understand the right hon. Gentleman knocking and log rolling. When I took over ministerial responsibility in June this year, there was no content to speak of whatsoever.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Queen's Counsel

32. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** What plans he has to make the appointment of QCs more open. [18010]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has already made the system more open. This year he is consulting more people than ever before about the suitability of candidates. Applications for silk are invited in a notice published in national newspapers and professional journals. The policies, procedures and criteria that he applies to those appointments are published each year in a guide for applicants. I have today placed a copy of the guide in the Library and it will be included on the Lord Chancellor's Department's website when it is next updated.

Mr. Prentice: Does my hon. Friend understand my deep disappointment when, in October this year, the Lord Chancellor decided not to proceed with what I thought was settled Labour party policy, to bring in a judicial appointments commission? Is it not true that the Bench is a self-perpetuating oligarchy of public school and Oxbridge-educated white men and that, over the past few years, the number of applicants for silk from ethnic minorities has actually decreased? Should not there be some openness and transparency in this matter? It is not good enough for applications for silk to be decided secretly, in private, with a nod and a wink from the Lord Chancellor; we need more transparency.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend may have missed the first part of my answer. I said that my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor had significantly extended the number of people consulted on applications for silk. He has made clear his determination that more representatives from among women and ethnic minorities attain that position. People may be appointed only once they have applied and only on the basis of merit. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for any suggestions that he may have as to how we might encourage more people, particularly from ethnic minorities, to apply for positions.

Civil Justice Reforms

33. **Mr. Dismore:** If he will make a statement concerning the development of the fast-track plan as part of his civil justice reforms. [18011]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department issued a working paper on judicial case management in July. The responses of practitioners and others have been carefully considered and, in the light of the comments received, amendments are being made to the original proposals for the fast track. Those amended proposals will be put before the civil procedure rule committee in February. A research project on fast-track costs is due to be completed by the end of January and we plan to issue a consultation paper on the level of those costs after Easter.

Mr. Dismore: Is my hon. Friend aware of the concerns expressed by trade unions—which, as a personal injury legal practitioner for 19 years, I share—that the fixed-cost regime of the fast-track system may prove so inflexible that the present very efficient legal schemes will not be able to be continued? Last year those schemes helped 150,000 accident victims recover £330 million in damages at no cost to the taxpayer.

Bearing in mind the need for us to put forward realistic, workable, tried and tested alternatives to legal aid, will my hon. Friend consider deferring the introduction of the fixed-costs regime in the fast-track system until some time after the substantive rule changes have been in place,to allow the fast-track system to bed down, as Sir Peter Middleton recommended? That would enable us to establish the true costs of litigating under the fast-track system and thus ensure far better and wider access to justice

Mr. Hoon: I thank my hon. Friend for all the constructive and helpful advice that he has given both to me personally and to the Department. He has brought to bear his considerable practical experience of these matters, and we are still learning from him; I can assure him that his comments are being thoroughly taken into account. Perhaps I may describe the way in which the Department is proceeding.

We have invited the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies to undertake research to establish the work that is required in fast-track cases to begin the task of setting the level of fast-track costs for solicitors. I should emphasise that the research is overseen by a steering committee that includes representatives from the Law Society, the Legal Aid Board, the National Consumer Council, the Consumers Association and a number of academics. The steering committee is informed about all the interested parties, including the trade unions, and their concerns on how we take the matter forward.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that all hon. Members believe in the maxim that justice delayed can be justice denied, but can the Minister look again at personal injuries, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore)? Where people cannot obtain access to legal aid, they may be prevented from taking action under the civil system, so their cases will not be speeded up. We must remember that in personal injury cases the Government and the social security budget are often the first to be paid out of the settlement. The Government may be being penny wise and pound very foolish.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) asked a specific question about the

fast-track procedure in civil justice; the hon. Gentleman has introduced the subject of legal aid. It is important that both matters are considered together. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that justice delayed is justice denied. When considering the totality of our proposals, it is important that we ensure that there is a speedy justice system and that as many people as possible have proper access to it.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend agree with the view, expressed by many with experience in this area, that removal of the complexity, delay and expense that play such a large part in the civil justice system at the moment will go a long way to restoring public confidence in the civil justice system?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, and I agree that, too often, criticisms made of the existing system are used to attack the system that we propose. I am confident that, when we are able to bring about fundamental changes in the way in which the civil justice system works, those changes will have a very significant impact on costs and therefore the price paid by users of our legal system.

Conditional Fee System

34. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** What discussions he has had with the insurance industry concerning the introduction of conditional fee arrangements. [18012]

Mr. Hoon: Discussions with the insurance industry have taken place over a number of years on various matters, including conditional fees. Within the last month, my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and officials have held six meetings with insurers to discuss conditional fees. On 2 December, my right hon. and learned Friend had discussions with a delegation from the insurance industry, comprising seven insurers, underwriters and brokers and three officials of the Association of British Insurers. It was agreed that a working group of representatives of the industry and officials would be established, to develop a co-ordinated approach to the proposed reforms.

Mr. Robertson: Can the Minister confirm that a significant number of companies will be involved in taking on the arrangements, or are small companies especially likely to find it very difficult to get cover because of insurance companies' lack of interest in the scheme?

Mr. Hoon: One of the great strengths of the British insurance industry is the fact that it comprises very large companies and very small underwriters. One of the benefits that they bring to the insurance industry in the United Kingdom is their ability to tailor insurance policies for specific types of consumer. I expect that, in the case of legal insurance, there will be large companies that provide large-scale insurance for the bigger firms of solicitors and small-scale operators who will be very interested in establishing insurance cover for small high street solicitors.

Mr. Garnier: In the week that the Government are undermining disability living allowance, the independent living fund, family credit and single-parent benefits, will the Minister do something to protect the needy from his legal aid reforms? Without affordable insurance to back conditional fee arrangements, the poor will be denied access to justice and his reforms will bring him and the Government into even further disrepute. Can he list just five insurance companies that are prepared to back his reforms—and to do so in public?

Mr. Hoon: It is a bit rich for the hon. and learned Gentleman to protest about these matters; I do not recall ever hearing him protest about policies that were developed largely in the time when the Government he supported were in power. I am surprised that he was not protesting then, and I am still more surprised to hear him protest today. We are consulting widely with the insurance industry; I have told him the range of meetings that have taken place. Those discussions will continue, and we shall develop proposals accordingly.

Solicitors (Supervision)

35. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** What plans his Department has to review the supervision of solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [18013]

Mr. Hoon: The Department has no current plans to review the arrangements for handling complaints against solicitors. The Office for the Supervision of Solicitors was established by the Law Society in September 1996 in response to public concern that the Solicitors Complaints Bureau was not sufficiently responsive to the needs of lay clients. I agree with the legal services ombudsman's last annual report, published in June 1997, which said that it will take two to three years before the office can be properly judged by results.

Mr. Hughes: I hope that during the next two to three years the Minister will not simply wait and see what happens. He must be aware that there is huge dissatisfaction with the performance of many solicitors. A Consumers Association report revealed widespread incompetence. Many of us have constituents who complain, with justification, that either they are not dealt with properly or they get very poor remedies. Can the hon. Gentleman assure the House that in this Parliament the Government will seriously consider establishing an independent inspectorate of legal services so that we can end the policing of solicitors by solicitors, headed by another solicitor?

Mr. Hoon: I am well aware that there is huge dissatisfaction with the way in which the Solicitors Complaints Bureau operated. It was felt to be doing a poor job and, as a Back Bencher, I entirely accepted that criticism. It always seemed to me that the Solicitors Complaints Bureau was finding reasons for not investigating cases instead of investigating them, but when a completely new body has been set up in a completely new way, I think it right that it should have the chance to prove that it can deal satisfactorily with complaints against solicitors. The Department will review the body's performance; when it publishes its first annual report, as it is due to do shortly, we will investigate to ensure that it reflects reality.

Mr. Tipping: Does my hon. Friend accept that what is proposed is merely the son of the Solicitors Complaints

Bureau and that there is widespread discontent with the way the system operates? After he examines the annual report, will he take the time to talk to the Law Society and others to ensure that a scheme that really meets the needs of consumers is put in place?

Mr. Hoon: I am aware of the criticism; it has largely been levelled in the past against the SCB. There will be some differences, however. Under the new system, the adjudication and appeals committee will be replaced by two new standing committees. There will be a client relations committee, with a lay majority, and a professional regulation committee, with a professional majority. That should provide a different approach.

I have stated my profound dissatisfaction with the way the Solicitors Complaints Bureau operated; we want a significant improvement in the way the office operates.

Magistrates Courts (Lancashire)

36. **Mr. Pickthall:** If he will make a statement about the future of magistrates courts in Lancashire. [18014]

Mr. Hoon: The Lancashire magistrates courts committee continues to be responsible for the efficient and effective administration of the magistrates courts. The Department has no proposals in respect of magistrates courts in Lancashire.

Mr. Pickthall: Will my hon. Friend give me his thinking on two aspects? First, in any reconfiguration of the Lancashire courts, will he expect the court areas to be co-terminous with police areas? Secondly, what is his attitude to mini private finance initiative schemes for the refurbishment of existing buildings instead of the building of brand new ones?

Mr. Hoon: Coterminosity is a matter for the local magistrates courts committee, although I recently told the House that we would welcome any voluntary proposals to bring it about. We see real advantages in consistent boundaries for police authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and magistrates courts committees, and real benefits for the justice system in such consistency.

A number of PFI schemes have already attracted tremendous interest from the private sector. They will allow us to build the new magistrates courts that are desperately needed. I have every expectation that they will be successful.

Magistrates

37. **Helen Jones:** What steps he intends to take to ensure that each magistrates bench is representative of the community it serves. [18016]

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor directs his advisory committees to attract candidates for the lay magistracy from a broad spectrum of the community. To assist them, my right hon. and learned Friend has commissioned research into how best to undertake this task.

Helen Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. In Warrington, only 36 per cent. of members of the Bench come from the Warrington, North constituency; most of the others come from Warrington, South. Many of them live as far away as Shropshire and Crosby. The central areas of Warrington are represented by only two magistrates. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that he will look seriously at such places to ensure that the communities—which often suffer the worst aspects of crime—are actually represented on the Bench?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's concern about this matter. We shall continue to make considerable efforts to attract as wide a variety of applications as possible. Such efforts have already been made by the Cheshire advisory committee, from which I know my hon. Friend has received a letter asking her to make suggestions on how to improve the system and on how we can encourage her constituents to apply for these important positions. I should be delighted if she took away that letter and encouraged as many as possible of her constituents to apply.

Points of Order

3.34 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise the issue of the Prime Minister's refusal to answer important written questions of considerable public interest, about the discussions that he had with representatives of the British film industry before the July Budget. Those questions were asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat–Amory), answered on 24 November, and myself, answered on 28 November.

It is not disputed that a number of prominent figures in the film industry were significant financial supporters of the Labour party before the election—one thinks particularly of Lord Puttnam. The Budget contained a major packet of assistance by way of tax breaks to the British film industry. In the case of formula one, the principle was clearly established by Sir Patrick Neill that, where a major contributor to the Government party's funds had benefited by way of a particular policy, that financial contribution should, in order to preserve the appearance of propriety, be returned to the donor.

I do not allege that there is necessarily any impropriety in this case, but for the House to be satisfied that that is so, it is clearly essential for the Prime Minister to come clean and answer these questions. May we have your guidance on whether it is appropriate for any Minister—let alone the Prime Minister—to refuse to answer in that way?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. When you get a chance to look at this Opposition proposal, will you also examine precedents? It is important that, in all these cases, we know exactly what has gone on in previous years. Perhaps in your research you will come across the fact that the Tories received £440,000 from Asil Nadir. Suddenly, although he was under arrest, he escaped. I am not suggesting for a minute that the Prime Minister of the day said, "I think we had better let Asil Nadir get away to Cyprus, because if he ever gets to court, he will reveal all the skeletons in the Tories' cupboard."

You might also examine some other instances, Madam Speaker. For instance, the Tories received £10 million from Bernie Ecclestone, who, in my opinion, was acting on behalf of the tobacco companies; I do not think that it came out of his pocket. Somehow, the Tories—including the then Prime Minister and every member of his Cabinet—refused to support any ban on tobacco advertising. It just might be that there is a whole series of connections. Otherwise, it is just plain, downright hypocrisy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, I have had enough, thank you. I know exactly what I am doing on this question.

As the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who raised the point of order, knows—I am grateful to him for giving me an indication of what he wished to say—as Speaker, I cannot force any Minister to answer any question in any particular way. Perhaps he might wish to make a submission to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which is studying this matter. It might be helpful to the committee if he did that. Likewise, if the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is so keen to be helpful, he might wish to do the same.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I attempted to table an oral question to the Secretary of State for Defence, asking him on what date he expected to publish the strategic defence review. I was advised by the Clerk that there was a convention that, as my question gave no particular guide to my supplementary, I could not table it as an oral question. When I repeated my experience to very senior colleagues, I was told that they were unaware of any such convention. I should be grateful for your guidance, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps I could be helpful to the hon. Gentleman and more senior Members who are not aware of some of our guidelines, Standing Orders and procedures. I refer him to page 301 of the latest issue of "Erskine May"—it must be the latest edition, which was published at the end of last month. Paragraph 12 makes it clear that oral questions to departmental Ministers should

"indicate, within reasonably broad limits, a particular subject matter."

In other words, questions should not in effect be open questions. That follows the House's approval of reports from the Procedure Committee in 1991 and 1993. The Committee did not wish to see oral questions to departmental Ministers becoming as general as those to the Prime Minister. If the hon. Gentleman looks at "Erskine May", he will see it clearly laid out there.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware of the crisis in the agricultural industry, which has been greatly exacerbated by the Government's announcement about meat on the bone. Given that the only way in which that crisis can be dealt with is by funds being secured from Europe, and in view of the concern that has been expressed to me over the weekend by farmers in my constituency, have you had any indication from the Government that they intend to make a statement to the House—first, about the crisis itself, and secondly, about when the application for European funds might be made?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed by any Minister that the Government are seeking to make a statement on that issue.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that today you have received no request from the Paymaster General to make a statement on the interaction of his personal finances, including his interest in the £12 million offshore Orion trust, with his duties as a Treasury Minister preparing to remove the comparatively modest tax privileges of many of those with TESSAs and PEPs.

Is it not extraordinary and a gross discourtesy to the House that the hon. Gentleman is reported to have been consulting his expensive lawyers all morning, and that he is to issue a statement later, not through the House, but through the Treasury press office? As his own Back Benchers, including the hon. Member for Newport,

West (Mr. Flynn), are calling for his resignation to clear the air, would it not have been much better if he had come to the House and made a clean breast of it?

Madam Speaker: I have no indication of what is to be said in the statement, but I have no doubt that those on the Treasury Bench will have noted the comments—hardly a point of order—of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The House will have noted that the questions to the Minister without Portfolio started three minutes late, and that you allowed them to continue for three minutes after they were timed to close. Given that the Minister said before the Select Committee on the subject of secrecy concerning the dome:

"I would not call it secrecy, I would call it an inhibition",

and, on the lack of information from the Millennium company, that he did not want

"excessive accountability at the expense of them getting on with their work",

do you agree that five minutes for questions is becoming farcical? Would it not be a better idea if that time were extended, or if it were combined with questions to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport?

Madam Speaker: The allocation of time to Ministers is nothing whatever to do with me. That is arranged through the usual channels. Perhaps if it were left to me, it would be quite different, but it is not my responsibility, and I have no authority in those matters—alas.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As I am a new Member of Parliament, can you give me some guidance on a matter of operation within the House? The Minister without Portfolio does not come to the House to answer questions on his wider responsibilities relating to formula one, food safety and so on. Furthermore, he has introduced a blocking measure for all written questions, which effectively makes it impossible to ask questions or to obtain any information about his wider responsibilities, yet we see in the papers day after day, and today in *The Times*, that he is instructing Cabinet Ministers what to do, and even telling the Queen what to do.

Surely, as a matter of course, Members of Parliament have a duty to question Ministers and hold them to account, but it is proving impossible to hold the Minister without Portfolio to account for anything other than for five minutes on a very narrow aspect of his job. As a strong defender of the House, can you do something to help Members in that regard?

Madam Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I just gave. With reference to blocking measures, surely Members of Parliament have a good deal of ingenuity. They need ingenuity to get here in the first place. I should have thought that there was some way round the Order Paper and within the procedures of the House that the hon. Member and others could find.

BILL PRESENTED

Waste Minimisation

Angela Smith, supported by Ms Debra Shipley, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. David Drew, Ms Joan Walley, Mr. Barry Sheerman, Mr. David Chaytor and Ms Julia Drown, presented a Bill to enable certain local authorities to make arrangements to minimise the generation of waste in their area; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 December, and to be printed [Bill 97].

Orders of the Day

Government of Wales Bill

Order for Second Reading read.—[Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

Madam Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is an historic moment for Wales. In the Bill, the Government seek the agreement of the House to the principle that there should be a national assembly for Wales—a new institution that will both herald a new style of more inclusive politics that better fits the needs and the character of Wales, and open to public scrutiny and accountability the machinery of government in Wales.

This United Kingdom Parliament is sovereign. The provisions of the Bill do not challenge that sovereignty in any way—nor could they. What the Bill does is open up a new prospect: the ever expanding powers and responsibilities with which Parliament has endowed the Secretary of State for Wales should in future be exercised by a body that is as responsible as the House is to its own democratic mandate. The Bill therefore contains the Government's detailed legislative proposals to set up the national assembly for Wales, and to take action to reform the quango state and so bring effective democratic control closer to the people of Wales.

Since the House considered the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, the Government have issued the White Paper, "A Voice for Wales", which sets out our detailed proposals for the assembly. Those proposals were put before the voters of Wales and were endorsed. The Bill faithfully translates the White Paper pledges into legislation—therefore, nothing in the Bill should come as a surprise to any right hon. or hon. Member.

The Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Act set one test, and one test only. Although we challenged the official Opposition at the time to say in the House what other threshold they would set, they declined to do so. The majority of voters supported the proposals set out in the White Paper.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): How, in all fairness, can the Secretary of State claim that the proposals in the White Paper were endorsed by the referendum result? When given the opportunity to vote on and endorse those proposals, 75 per cent. of the Welsh electorate declined to do so. The vote in favour of the proposals was fractional, and was easily swamped by the many Welsh residents in constituencies such as mine and others throughout the west midlands and the rest of the country. The referendum provided no validation of the proposals. The only validation that the right hon. Gentleman can claim is that provided by the general election—which is a valid point.

Mr. Davies: I trust that, like me, the hon. Gentleman recognises the sovereignty of this Parliament. Parliament decided, through votes in this and the other place, to hold a referendum for Wales, and Parliament set down the rules for that referendum. When they voted on 18 September, the people of Wales passed the only test that was required of them: the majority of those who cast their votes in that referendum voted in favour of the proposition that there should be an assembly for Wales.

The hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has pursued his argument at length for some months, and I commend him on his consistency. However, I hope that he will now accept—and perhaps show the way to his right hon. and hon. Friends—that the referendum has been held. It did not produce a decisive decision, but the people of Wales gave a clear decision: they voted yes in the referendum. That is the mandate we sought, and that is the mandate on the basis of which we now proceed.

As I have said, the referendums Act set one test, and one test only. The majority of voters supported the proposals set out in the White Paper, and we shall now legislate on that basis. None the less, I recognise the closeness of the outcome—the point made by the hon. Gentleman. Since the referendum, we have striven to ensure that the detailed legislation for the assembly will provide a response to the concerns raised during the referendum campaign, as well as meet the aspirations of the majority who supported the creation of the assembly. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman seeks to intervene from a sedentary position. I did not notice him or the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) in Wales during the referendum campaign.

I acknowledge the fact that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) made the occasional television appearance, but the Conservative party was in a state of paralysis during the referendum campaign. The Conservative party knew that it had been rejected by the people on 1 May. It knew also that it was heading for a defeat in the referendum on 18 September, so it chose to opt out of the referendum campaign. If the hon. Gentleman had played a more constructive and more full-hearted role in the campaign, perhaps his comments now would have rather more credibility than they do.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): On a constructive note, may I tell my right hon. Friend that travelling from the north in my constituency to the south to Swansea or Cardiff, for example, is very difficult either by road, rail or air? If my right hon. Friend plans to make the assembly successful in its daily work, will he improve communications? Will he look particularly to the advantages of Hawarden airport being enlarged?

Mr. Davies: At this stage, I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman that the assembly will be at Ewloe. I recognise that he has consistently advanced the argument that he set out in his question. He has always drawn attention to the difficulty of communications between the north and the south.

The assembly will be fully empowered to discharge the transport responsibilities that I currently have. As the rail and air sectors are in private hands, it will be for the assembly, rather as the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), is currently doing, to meet the operators to ascertain how best we can develop voluntary arrangements. The Government

certainly recognise the difficulty of communications between the north and south, and it will be for the assembly to decide what priority it wishes to give to improving communications.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: Yes, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I am anxious to proceed.

Mr. Hughes: I commend the Secretary of State for the way that he worked for the referendum result, as I did, in my modest way. One of the things that troubled me and made me think that the result that the right hon. Gentleman and I wanted might not be achieved was that people in mid and north Wales felt that the assembly might be more remote than they would wish. It would be helpful if the Secretary of State could address the ways in which to ensure that the assembly is not seen as a south or south-east Wales-based institution, and is clearly seen instead to be an assembly for the whole of Wales, accessible to all and available for all to participate in the democratic process.

Mr. Davies: That is one of the matters that I want to take up later in my remarks. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not take up the matter now. The advisory committee that we shall be setting up will have a remit to examine the question. There will be a statutory requirement on the assembly to have a committee for the north, to ensure that the particular concerns of north Wales are taken into account.

There are many matters of detail before us, and I want to ensure that there is an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to give full consideration to the detail in the Bill. We have two days on Second Reading, and I hope that it will be possible to take some of our consideration in Committee on the Floor of the House and some in Standing Committee.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The Secretary of State began his speech by saying that we are dealing with a constitutional Bill. I presume he believes that it is a significant constitutional Bill. Why is he breaching the convention that the entire Committee stage is taken on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Davies: It is for the House to decide its own procedures. The question of precedent is not one at which I baulk. A precedent is merely something that we do for the first time. As far as I am concerned, this is the first time that a Government of Wales Bill has been introduced by the Government. If it means that we must change our procedures to get the proposed legislation through the House, that suits me.

I think that it would be convenient for the House if we were to have a reasoned debate. I am prepared to discuss with the right hon. Gentleman over the coming months how we should handle the Bill. It seems reasonable to have debates on the key clauses on the Floor of the House, with detailed debate in Standing Committee, so that right hon. and hon. Members who wish to explore the detail of the Bill can do so. With so few Conservative Members in the Chamber, however, there is scarcely any evidence of overwhelming demand on the part of the Conservative party to engage in a lengthy debate on these matters.

We have two days to discuss Second Reading. There will be plenty of time to debate the Bill both on the Floor and in Committee. I hope that the right hon. Member for Devizes will wake up to reality. The Bill is going to proceed. It is in the interests of the Opposition, of the Conservative party and of the Conservative party in Wales that he co-operates to ensure that the Bill is properly scrutinised.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is not the reality that it might have been possible to have all proceedings on the Floor if the Conservatives had not made minor, silly points to seek to drag out the discussions, but come forward with a reasonable timetable? Their response so far has shown that they are not ready to accept the result of the referendum.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend is right to make that point. It was clear from day one of the debate on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill that the Conservative party was determined to delay and frustrate, and to use every tactic to wreck it. That measure sought only to ask the people of Wales what they thought about the proposition. The attachment of the Conservatives to democracy was so passing that they did not even want that measure to pass.

Mr. Ancram: Is the right hon. Gentleman inviting the Conservative party to put forward a timetable for having all proceedings in Committee on the Floor?

Mr. Davies: No, I am not. The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is not what my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) was saying. I have made it clear that I want the Bill to receive proper consideration. I want the important clauses to be taken on the Floor and an opportunity for detailed examination in Standing Committee.

Mr. Ancram: *Indicated dissent.*

Mr. Davies: It is no good the right hon. Member for Devizes pouting and shaking his head. I am making it clear that that is what I want to do. If he doubts my good intentions, I suggest that he uses the time-honoured process of going through the usual channels. He will see then that I am sincere about wanting a reasonable debate on the Floor and in Standing Committee. I hope that he will come out of his shell, join the latter part of the 20th century and help us to prepare for the new democracy that we are about to create in Wales. I know that that is an unlikely prospect, but subject to that, the Government will table a motion at the end of Second Reading to achieve it.

The Bill fulfils the Government's manifesto commitment to introduce for Wales arrangements that respond to the needs of a modern society. Before the House are detailed proposals for a new model of an all-Wales elected government that will draw on best practices from Westminster and from local government. The proposals are integral to the Government's plans for wider constitutional change, including a Scottish Parliament, regional development agencies for England, the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into English law, and the examination of options for electoral reform.

The assembly will be a national assembly for all the people who live in Wales, in whatever part of Wales and whichever language they speak. It will be an assembly for

[Mr. Davies]

those who were born in Wales and for those who have chosen to live in Wales. The Bill makes specific provision for the way in which the assembly will involve local government, the voluntary sector and business. The assembly must be open for all interests to be properly and freely expressed and to allow people as individuals, as well as organisations, to have their voices heard.

The executive and administrative functions already exercised by the Welsh Office and the quangos spread across a range of matters that affect our everyday lives in Wales: decisions relating to how our children are taught in school, investing in new national health service facilities, protecting the environment, building factories and supporting job creation. The Welsh Office and the quangos will come under the control of a democratically elected body. Far from introducing another tier of government, the creation of the assembly will democratise an existing, powerful tier.

As I have said before, the Bill offers no surprises. It translates the principles of the White Paper into a clear and coherent set of legislative proposals. Part I sets out the arrangements for elections to the assembly and the proportional election system to be used. It also sets out the criteria that candidates in assembly elections need to meet, and the rules relating to their pay and allowances.

Sixty members will be elected to the assembly, 40 by the first-past-the-post system from existing parliamentary constituencies, and 20 from electoral regions under the additional member system, which, for the first time on mainland Britain, introduces a voting system based on proportional representation. Those arrangements will enable the total number of seats gained by a party more accurately to reflect the number of votes cast for it across Wales.

The reasoned amendment tabled by the official Opposition criticises the Bill for not catering for minorities. If there is one recognisable minority in Wales, it is of course the Conservative party, and it is precisely the Conservative party that stands to benefit from the additional member system that we propose. The reasoned amendment also talks of not securing Wales's place in the United Kingdom. There will be no reduction in the number of Welsh Members of Parliament as a result of the creation of the assembly, because the House of Commons will continue to pass primary legislation for Wales.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Will my right hon. Friend explain how we arrived at the figure 60? On what calculation was it based?

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): It is the number of seats in Swansea guildhall.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) mentions a novel formula that has not been incorporated in the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) will know, the figure 60 was arrived at by a policy commission of the Labour party, which examined the electoral arrangements for the assembly. There was consultation in the Labour party.

The 60 figure results from the fact that there are 40 parliamentary constituencies. At that time, we had five European constituencies. It was believed that a first-past-the-post system based on the existing parliamentary constituencies and an additional member system using the combination of five European constituencies, each with four members, would be the best way of achieving an assembly that was broadly proportional. That system has an additional advantage, in that it is compatible with the system that had already been arranged for the Scottish Parliament.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's interest, and I know that he wishes to suggest some novel and principled alternatives. Subject to the views of the Opposition—if they are minded to express them—I should have thought that the question of the electoral system would best be debated on the Floor of the House, so that all hon. Members, regardless of party and regardless of their views, have an opportunity to press their case.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Labour party originally proposed an assembly with 80 members. Subsequently, that number has been reduced by 25 per cent., following an agreement within the party. Can the Secretary of State enlighten us as to how that occurred?

Mr. Davies: It is a long and complicated story about internal Labour party politics.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Tell it.

Mr. Davies: I am happy to detain the House, but I fear, Madam Speaker, that you and others would berate me if I did.

The Labour party originally proposed an assembly with 80 members, two for each constituency: one would be a man and the other a woman. That proposition was ruled out by the Leeds industrial tribunal of a couple of years ago, which effectively prevented us from adopting the system. We then engaged in discussions, and it was decided at the same time—not necessarily in response to the urging of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) and his party, but with that urging in mind—to move towards a system that embraced an element of proportionality. It was during those discussions that we came up with the figure 60.

I ask the hon. Gentleman not to chide me. It was the leader of his party who, before the election, entered into an arrangement with the Labour party to support that electoral system, and we must accept that it is a reasonable basis on which to hold the first elections. Let me give the hon. Gentleman a reassurance; he will not welcome it particularly, but I shall give it to him anyway. I will resist any attempt to change the electoral system during the passage of the Bill, because I think that we have a system that commands broad support, and that we must now try it out.

Part II of the Bill covers the assembly's functions, providing for ministerial functions to be transferred to the assembly by Order in Council. It gives the assembly powers to reform Welsh quangos and the Welsh health authorities.

The Government's policy is that virtually all the functions of the Secretary of State for Wales should be transferred to the assembly. The assembly will obtain functions in one of two ways. Some functions will be conferred directly on the assembly by primary legislation,

such as clauses 28, 29 and 33 of the Bill. I expect future Bills, from the next Session onwards, to proceed in that way. However, an enormous range of functions is in extant legislation. Those functions are currently exercised by the Secretary of State for Wales, and will be transferred to the assembly by an Order in Council under clause 22.

The Government have already given a commitment in the House of Lords that a working draft of the transfer order will be made available in time for the Committee stage. I hope to publish such a draft in January, in good time for the debate on clause 22. It will be a working draft, and will be as comprehensive as we can make it at the time.

An Order in Council under clause 22 may not be submitted to Her Majesty unless it has been approved by affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament. The House will have the opportunity to agree the final proposals.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Clause 35 refers to the staff of the Welsh Assembly and provides for them to be members of the home civil service. To whom will those civil servants owe their loyalty? It will be to the Crown, but will it be to the Crown via the assembly, via the head of the home civil service, via a Minister in Westminster or via this Parliament? I can foresee problems, so the matter requires careful consideration.

Mr. Davies: We discussed that matter in some detail when we prepared the White Paper, in which the arguments are set out. There have been discussions in the Welsh Office and with the civil service unions. Day-to-day reporting responsibilities for the civil service will remain with the permanent secretary or with whichever member of the civil service carries that responsibility in the future. The day-to-day direction of political strategy that civil servants should follow will be set in future by the assembly, and not by the Secretary of State as it is at the moment.

It is my intention to transfer functions to the assembly under clause 22 as quickly as possible. However, the power to transfer ministerial functions will continue to be available. I was pressed on that point in previous debates by the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). I draw his attention to the provision in the Bill that will allow for the subsequent transfer of ministerial functions to the assembly. Further significant functions over and above those which I now exercise could be transferred to the assembly at a future date, subject to agreement by both Houses of Parliament. As I have said before, devolution is not an event, but a process.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Secretary of State confirming, that if there is a need or a wish to transfer functions such as the police, which are now with the Home Office, to the assembly, it will be necessary first to transfer them to the Secretary of State and then from the Secretary of State to the assembly? If so, how does that fit in with the list of functions in schedule 2, which does not seem to leave room for that transfer to take place? Can schedule 2 be amended by any of the orders that he has in mind under clauses 22 and 23?

Mr. Davies: The order under clause 22 is not intended to be comprehensive, nor is it final. The right hon. Gentleman's understanding is correct. If, at some future date, a future Government decided to transfer law and order functions to the Secretary of State for Wales, knowing that they would then be transferred to the assembly, they could do so using the mechanism in clause 22. The initial transfer order merely transfers the functions that currently rest with the Secretary of State, but it does not mean that there is no possibility of a future transfer.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Does my right hon. Friend intend to transfer all the existing functions of his office at one and the same time to the Welsh Assembly, or is he contemplating a phased transfer?

Mr. Davies: Some functions will be retained by the Secretary of State, but they are few and they are specified in the Bill. I am sure that that is not a matter of disagreement between my right hon. Friend and myself. However, in the transfer order, which will probably be presented in March 1999, I intend to transfer at that point the overwhelming majority of the powers that currently reside with me. There may be a need for some tidying up afterwards, but the policy is that there should be a transfer.

I have already taken action to roll back the frontiers of the quango state in Wales. The Bill provides me with the power to take more immediate steps to amalgamate the three development agencies and to merge Tai Cymru with the Welsh Office. It further provides that the assembly will have radical powers to make changes to most public bodies in Wales, including health authorities. Those powers will provide for abolition, where appropriate. The emphasis is that, in the longer term, it must be for the assembly to decide the delivery mechanisms for the functions for which it will take responsibility, including whether to continue with current arrangements, make changes, initiate mergers or take on some or all the functions itself. That is what devolution is all about.

For most other public bodies—with a few exceptions that were explained in the White Paper—the assembly will have the power to transfer their functions to local authorities, to other public bodies or to the assembly itself. In addition, all public bodies will be subject to democratic oversight by the assembly, and they will be accountable to it for their performance and, of course, all appointments that are made by me at the moment to such bodies, and those appointments about which I am currently consulted, will transfer to the assembly.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): What about a body such as the Curriculum Assessment Authority for Wales, the Awdurdod Cwricwlwm, Cymwysterau ac Asesu? The assembly may wish to bring together the functions of curriculum assessment and development and examinations, because those functions are closely linked. Examinations are the responsibility of the Welsh Joint Education Committee, which is a local government body. Would it be possible to bring about such useful integration, to provide a more efficient system?

Mr. Davies: I shall need to check to give the hon. Gentleman a precise answer, because he mentions a body which, as he knows, has its origins outwith the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State. I shall write to him with a detailed answer before the Bill goes to Committee. I do not want to speculate on an answer at this stage.

[Mr. Davies]

Part III of the Bill deals with assembly procedures. It requires the Secretary of State to appoint a commission to draw up the assembly's standing orders, and it specifies a number of principles such as openness, accountability and regulation of members' interests, which the standing orders must reflect. It also provides for the role of the assembly's leadership and committees. Standing orders will need to provide for the equal treatment of the English and Welsh languages, for equal opportunities, openness, accountability and integrity.

The Bill also requires the assembly to set up both standard and fast-track procedures for approving and making secondary legislation. Where appropriate, the standard procedures must include preparation of a regulatory appraisal and consultation, including with business interests, on any significant compliance costs.

The Bill provides that the assembly must establish an executive committee and various subject committees, with memberships reflecting the balance of the parties elected to the assembly, to cover the range of matters that are set out in schedule 2. For example, they include economic development, transportation, the Welsh language, regional committees and so on as prescribed by the standing orders. The standing orders will set out the detail on the operation of committees, sub-committees and delegation powers.

I announced last week that I am establishing a national assembly advisory group to assist me in preparing guidance for the Standing Orders Commission. I hope to be able to make an announcement later this week about the membership of that group, which will contain representatives of all political parties. I acknowledge the ready co-operation of the Conservative representative who has agreed to serve on the advisory group.

Mr. Ancram: I am slightly puzzled by that, because, in the setting up of such advisory groups, the normal procedure, as followed by the Secretary of State for Scotland, is to write to the shadow spokesman and ask for a nomination. I still await a letter.

Mr. Davies: The problem is that, when I write to my shadow spokesman, I never get a reply. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman must be patient. He has asked a question, and I shall give him an answer. I have consulted widely with Conservative party representatives in Wales.

Mr. Ancram: In Wales?

Mr. Davies: I know that the right hon. Gentleman has been to Wales once, but he does not know everything about Wales. He should contain himself. I have consulted widely with the Conservative party in Wales and, later this week, when I unveil the advisory group, he will acknowledge that the Conservative member on the group has impeccable credentials. I have no doubt that, when I announce the name later this week, the right hon. Gentleman will be the first to endorse him.

The advisory group will debate and seek views on the key principles concerning the assembly's working arrangements. It will consult widely, and I hope that a wide range of views will be expressed and that consensus will be developed on the best working arrangements for the assembly. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Devizes is still chuntering away. Perhaps I could clarify the point. Is he now saying that, if I had written to him, he would have responded and offered names of people representing the Conservative party who would have sat on the group?

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman might perhaps have consulted his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland, who, having announced publicly that he would do so, wrote to me some three weeks ago asking for a nomination for his equivalent advisory body. I have nominated for that body a very senior Conservative party member, who will play a constructive role in it. I would have expected the same courtesy from the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Davies: It is a matter not of courtesy, but of practice. The Secretary of State for Scotland has decided to consult in his way. I have consulted widely with Conservative party interests in Wales and I assure the right hon. Gentleman that, later this week, he will accept the fact—I have no doubt about this, because he is not a churlish individual—that the individual who represents the Conservative party interest on the advisory group has wide experience and is a fitting representative of the Conservative party.

As I have said, the advisory group will consult widely, and I have no doubt that a consensus will be developed. Importantly, however, I do not want the Bill to be too prescriptive about whether the assembly should adopt a "Cabinet" or "local government" style of internal working. That must be allowed to evolve, and it must be a matter ultimately for the assembly itself. The arrangements will therefore provide for maximum flexibility, subject to the safeguard that at least two thirds of assembly members must vote in favour of any change to the standing orders.

Part IV covers the financing and auditing arrangements for the assembly. It creates the post of auditor general for Wales, to monitor and to report on the assembly's expenditure.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Will the Secretary of State perhaps assure the House that, in view of what he has said, the Bill as drafted would not prevent the assembly from moving to a Cabinet system if it wished?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman's understanding is correct, but, more than that, if the advisory group were to propose a balance of arrangements as between the Cabinet and local government styles, that would essentially be a matter for the group. I would want to consider its views carefully before the representations went to the statutory commission, which would ultimately create the standing orders, so that could happen before the first sitting of the assembly, but that is a matter for consultation and for those of us who are listening. I know that the Conservative party is pressing hard on the matter, and I want to see the representations that it makes through its excellent representative on the advisory group.

When established, the assembly will become responsible for the £7 billion annual budget that is currently controlled by the holder of my office. Those

moneys are allocated to Wales, principally under the block and formula rules. As the explanatory and financial memorandum makes clear, annual changes to the Welsh block will continue to be determined by the population-based formula. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is again trying to intervene from a sedentary position. The explanatory and financial memorandum makes the position absolutely clear—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) has any comments to make, he should make them at the Dispatch Box, so that they can be recorded. I do not like comments that may be pertinent and relevant being made from a sedentary position.

Mr. Davies: I am happy to allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene if he wishes.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Is he aware of any Act of Parliament in which the explanatory and financial memorandum appears as part of that Act and can be considered by a court to be part of the law of the land?

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting his point clearly, so that we can understand it. He wants the Barnett formula arrangements to be included in the Bill. He is nodding, so at least we agree on the question. The Barnett formula is not currently enshrined in legislation. It is a practice that has been adhered to by both the last Labour Government—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should let me develop the point. I might be able to help him.

That practice was initiated by the last Labour Government, continued without question by successive Conservative Governments from 1979 to this year, and it is this Government's policy to retain it. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that a question mark hangs over the continuation of the Barnett formula? If so, perhaps he should say that it is Conservative party policy to do away with the Barnett formula, if we in Wales have the temerity to have our own local democracy. *[Interruption.]* I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to pursue the matter.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Essex should listen carefully to this point, as it is one that concerns him. My right hon. Friend is today publishing a statement of principles about the operation of the block budget for the assembly and the Scottish Parliament. Copies will be placed in the Library, so that hon. Members can clearly see the principles to which the assembly will be working.

Part V covers the Community law, human rights and international obligations of the assembly. This part of the Bill also requires the assembly to make formal arrangements for its relationship with local government and the voluntary sector. It also provides for amendments to existing Acts which the Bill makes necessary.

The White Paper said that the assembly would work in partnership with local government and would promote and foster it. Those commitments are reflected in the Bill and ensure that local authorities, among other interests, will be afforded every opportunity to make a positive contribution to the way in which the assembly operates, for the benefit of Wales. The partnership will be formalised in the creation of a statutory partnership council, with equal numbers of members from the assembly and from local government.

For the voluntary sector, the Bill requires the assembly to enter into a formal scheme to cater for voluntary interests. The Government expect that a scheme to reflect the compact that my Department is currently discussing with the voluntary sector in Wales, and which we hope to conclude next year, will be specified—and the assembly's scheme will also specify how it will consult voluntary organisations and how it will support their work. There is already real co-operation of that nature between the Welsh Office and local authorities. It will be important that we are able to take forward, for example, the important initiative on tackling social exclusion that was launched by the Prime Minister this morning.

Once the assembly is established, the Secretary of State for Wales will have a continuing role to represent Wales in the Cabinet, to liaise with the assembly and to develop the important non-statutory concordats that will be the foundation for the relationship between Government Departments and the assembly. In addition, the concordats will set out the role of the assembly in the policy discussions that settle the United Kingdom line for European negotiations on matters in which it has an interest, and, beyond that, its participation in relevant meetings of officials or politicians in Europe, including the Council of Ministers.

The same arrangements will apply to both the Scottish Parliament and the assembly, and will ensure that the distinctive voices of Wales and Scotland can be heard more clearly in Europe.

The assembly First Secretary or the appropriate assembly secretary will be able, with the agreement of the lead UK Minister, to take part in the UK delegation at relevant meetings, and will be able to speak on behalf of the delegation according to the previously agreed UK line. It will be for the assembly to decide whether it wishes to operate an office in Brussels to support its work.

Mr. Rowlands: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for assisting the House. What statutory functions, and therefore what budget, will the Secretary of State have after the transfer of functions to the assembly?

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend might find the answer odd. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State will have the statutory functions that I currently exercise but which are not transferred to the assembly. That is the important point, but I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives a clearer, written answer.

Responsibility for allocation of the £7 billion block grant will belong to the Secretary of State. It will be for the Secretary of State to determine what very small part of the grant remains for running the residual office of the Secretary of State, with the bulk of the grant being transferred to the assembly.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I was intrigued by the phrase "non-statutory concordats". Will my right hon. Friend explain whether those concordats will be subject to the jurisdiction of the courts, should one party to a concordat disagree with the other about its application?

Mr. Davies: No, I do not envisage that the concordats will be subject to the courts. They will be agreements

[Mr. Davies]

that are entered into by the assembly and by the various Departments. I shall give my right hon. Friend an example, to clarify the matter. The Agriculture Council meets on a fairly regular basis, and, obviously—because agriculture is such an important function—the assembly will want to have a concordat ensuring more regular consultation and the assembly's involvement at a very high level.

The assembly will not have responsibility—the right hon. Member for Devizes will be disappointed to learn—for foreign affairs. Therefore, the concordat between the assembly and the Foreign Office will be based on a different set of principles, allowing different sets of arrangements to apply between the assembly and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the assembly and the Foreign Office.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): On the same point, will the representative directly from Wales to Europe have some autonomous decision-making authority in making financial arrangements between Europe, and perhaps regions of Europe, and Wales?

Mr. Davies: I do not invite another intervention, but I am not sure that I understood the hon. Gentleman's question. The arrangements by which the representative from the assembly will take part in the discussions at a European level will be subject to the concordats that will be worked out by the assembly and the relevant Whitehall Department. Any discretion given to an individual representative—whether an assembly secretary or another representative—will be a matter for the assembly to decide. That is the purpose of the arrangements. If assembly members wish to give autonomy on certain matters to representatives to work within the United Kingdom's Council delegation, it will be a matter for them.

Part VI of the Bill begins the process of reforming the most significant Welsh quangos. Tai Cymru is to be abolished, and—under the provisions, for the first time—there will be an economic development agency with a true all-Wales strategic remit. The new agency will build on the best elements of practice and achievement of the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales. I pay tribute to those organisations' considerable achievements, which include: the WDA's outstanding record in attracting inward investment to Wales; the DBRW's expertise in rural areas, which will remain a priority; and the Land Authority for Wales's commercial expertise in the acquisition and assembly of land and sites, which has made an important contribution to the regeneration effort throughout Wales. The new body will draw on the strengths of those three constituent parts.

Part VII contains general provisions relating to the Bill; and the 14 schedules to the Bill deal with points of detail.

I am pleased to say that—in line with the recommendations in the report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons—copies of the notes on clauses have been placed in the Library and in the Vote Office. I very much hope that hon. Members find that the notes are helpful in informing their preparation for and participation in this debate, particularly by clearly stating the intention behind each clause.

I anticipate tabling Government amendments at the appropriate time, to cover one or two issues that still need to be addressed relating to sustainable development, the precise arrangements for forestry, the role of the ombudsman, the keeping of public records and, of course, human rights.

The explanatory and financial memorandum provides for up to £17 million to meet the start-up costs for the assembly. I am sure that most right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that I am consulting on the most suitable location. The White Paper projected the annual running costs of the Assembly to be between £15 million and £20 million—in addition to those of the Welsh Office. That remains the estimate.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Some of my constituents are involved in this matter, because they are employed at the headquarters of the Forestry Commission in Edinburgh. What is likely to be the nature of those amendments, and what changes does the Secretary of State envisage in the proposals relating to forestry in Wales, Scotland and England?

Mr. Davies: Those matters are currently the subject of discussions. I can assure my hon. Friend that there is not likely to be any diminution in the employment prospects of people working for the Forestry Commission in his constituency. We must ensure that the advantages that come from the Forestry Commission retaining an overall strategic role for forestry in the United Kingdom are compatible with our aim that it should be answerable for operations in Scotland and Wales to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Dafis: I have a constituency point, similar to that raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) because the national headquarters of the Forestry Commission—I use the word "national" rather than "regional"—are based at Aberystwyth. It is extraordinarily important that we have an all-Wales strategy for forestry with the organisational backing for it within Wales.

Mr. Davies: As I have said, we shall table Government amendments to deal with that point, and I have no doubt that there will be an opportunity at the appropriate time for a fuller debate on the matter, when the hon. Gentleman can put his constituency case.

I should like to deal briefly with the Opposition amendment. I know that the right hon. Member for Devizes and his colleagues are having some difficulty in coming to terms with their role as the Opposition, but they have plenty of time and eventually they will get the hang of it. I should like to offer them some friendly advice, which I hope is constructive. First, they need to settle on a policy, preferably one with which the Conservative party in Wales agrees. If they are in any doubt about the wisdom of accepting a new policy, I suggest that they ask Lord Wyn Roberts, the senior Welsh member of the Conservative party. He has accepted the referéndum result and, like everyone else in Wales, now just wants to get on and build a successful assembly.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues should try to draft an amendment that can stand more than a passing examination. Their reasoned amendment is an insult to Parliament. At its heart, it calls for a statutory

assurance in relation to the supremacy of Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman is called the constitutional spokesperson for the Conservative party, but the idea of a statutory assurance in relation to the supremacy of Parliament is constitutional nonsense. Parliament is supreme, and any statutory assurance to that effect by this or any other Parliament can be set aside by any future Parliament. It is not possible in any circumstances to give the type of assurance that the right hon. Gentleman is seeking.

Mr. Ancram: Would the right hon. Gentleman like to take advice, because he has obviously not done his homework for the debate, about section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which is still extant?

Mr. Davies: I am happy to take advice and to read the section to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but will he answer this central question? How is it possible for— *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to engage in debate, he should do me the courtesy of listening to my question. How is it possible for Parliament to place in a piece of legislation a statutory assurance that the supremacy of Parliament will be recognised and, at the same time, prevent any subsequent Parliament from setting aside that provision? Will the right hon. Gentleman answer that question?

Mr. Ancram: I shall help the right hon. Gentleman. Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 states that

"the supreme authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom shall remain unaffected and undiminished over all persons, matters, and things"

in Northern Ireland. That assertion was put into the Act when it was passed and it is still extant in it. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about constitutional precedent, that of 70 years is surely a pretty good precedent on which to rely.

Mr. Davies: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will answer this question: what is to stop this Parliament repealing section 75 of that Act? The answer is, nothing at all, which is precisely my point. Given that we have an unwritten constitution and that everyone recognises the supremacy of Parliament, his proposition that there should be a statutory assurance in relation to the supremacy of Parliament is absolutely meaningless.

Thirdly, members of the Conservative party should not pretend to speak for the interests of those whom they do not represent. The Conservative party was kicked out of Wales on 1 May, and I should have thought that a little humility on its part would not go amiss. The people have shown that they want democratic reform, and the Conservative party should come to terms with that and not continue to live in the past. The Government will work with anybody of good will who is prepared to be constructive. Constitutional change must be based on the broadest consensus.

I hope that, even at this late stage, it is not too late and that Conservative Members can drag themselves back to reality and accept the will of the people. I invite them now to withdraw the amendment: it has no basis in politics or logic. They should give the people what they want and the Bill what it deserves—an unopposed Second Reading.

I said at the outset that this was an historic event for Wales, and so it is. The Bill paves the way for a new era of democratic government and effective accountability for Wales. The Government have delivered on their commitment to the people, and I commend the Bill to the House.

4.36 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House, deploring the failure of Her Majesty's Government to respond to and allay the legitimate fears of the Welsh people expressed in the referendum vote of 18th September and in particular the omission from the Government of Wales Bill of any statutory assurances in relation to the supremacy of the Westminster Parliament, to the protection of geographic and cultural minorities, to the proper resourcing of Wales to reflect need, and to the safeguarding of the position of Wales within the United Kingdom and its voice within Europe, declines to give a Second Reading to the Government of Wales Bill."

The Secretary of State—I suppose with tongue in cheek—ended by talking about consensus being part of the proposals on devolution. Everything that we have heard today suggests that his interpretation of the word "consensus" is that everyone else agrees with him. If he believes that that is consensus, he will have to think again.

The right hon. Gentleman told us that he would appoint a Conservative representative to the committee that he is setting up to advise on the Standing Orders. That is the most arrogant and patronising attitude ever heard in the House. It reminds me—I say this with measured intent—of the sort of commissars we used to see on the other side of the iron curtain, who chose not only their own ministers, but their tame opposition. He is not selecting a representative of the Conservative party; he is selecting someone who he believes will be more amenable to his way of thinking than someone proposed by the Conservative party would be.

Mr. Ron Davies: As the right hon. Gentleman has obviously taken umbrage, may I invite him to cast back his mind to a telephone conversation that he and I had in October this year? I had similar conversations with the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), as representatives of their parties.

I invited all three Members to come to the Welsh Office to discuss a range of matters relating to how we conducted Welsh business during this Session of Parliament. Will the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) confirm his response at that time: "Until there is a Bill before us, I have nothing to discuss"?

Mr. Ancram: I confirm that I said that. I wanted an agenda of what was to be discussed, and the Secretary of State said that there was no agenda. That does not excuse his making nominations from other parties by his own hand. I find that an extraordinary way to proceed. I make it clear that whomever the right hon. Gentleman has chosen to represent the Conservative party on his committee represents only himself; he does not represent the Conservatives in Wales. He cannot represent the Conservatives in Wales because he has not been authorised by the Conservative party in Wales.

[Mr. Ancram]

Given the right hon. Gentleman's views about hereditary peerages and their unrepresentative nature, I presume that he has not selected a member of the hereditary peerage to represent the Conservatives on the advisory committee. If he has, I suspect that he will have many words to eat. It is not the first time that this has happened, and I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman takes lessons in courtesy, statesmanship and how to be a Secretary of State from the Secretary of State for Scotland, with whom I may have political disagreements, but who, when he talks about consensus, has the courtesy and wit to try to achieve it rather than destroy it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): The right hon. Gentleman turned it down.

Mr. Ancram: We have never been invited by the Secretary of State to nominate someone to the advisory committee. The Secretary of State tells us today that, despite the fact that no invitation has been extended, he has made a decision himself. The Secretary of State for Scotland issued such an invitation and I made a senior appointment; I was intending to make a senior and useful appointment to the same position in Wales, but the Secretary of State for Wales has ridden roughshod over the normal parliamentary procedures and courtesies. If he is looking for consensus, that is not the way to achieve it.

Mr. Dalyell: Whom are we talking about? Some of us are in the dark.

Mr. Ancram: The Secretary of State has announced what I can describe only as a shadowy figure to be his, not my, Conservative nomination for his advisory committee. If he wishes to have an authoritative representative of the Conservative party on the committee, he has not got one, because he has not gone through the appropriate channels.

Mr. Ron Davies: In the spirit of inclusivity, let me ask the right hon. Gentleman another question. If I extend to him another invitation to discuss with me in the Welsh Office the way in which we should conduct Welsh Office business, will he accept the invitation this time, unlike last time?

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman gave my answer for me—he spoke of when there was a Bill before us. There is now a Bill before us and I said that, if he invited me when there was a Bill before us, I would come and talk to him. I have been waiting for that invitation; I have also been waiting for invitations to make nominations to the advisory committee. The right hon. Gentleman's behaviour is totally incompatible with the democratic nature of the House.

We are being asked to give a Second Reading to a Bill whose purpose is to set up a Welsh Assembly. We are being asked quite a lot; in effect, we are being asked to endorse proposals which, in their White Paper form, struck anything but a resounding chord of assent in the hearts and minds of the Welsh people at the referendum on 18 September. We are being asked to go where three of every four Welsh electors feared to tread.

For all the Secretary of State's well-known capacity for hyperbole, which has been on show again this afternoon, nobody can deny that the outcome of the referendum was uncertain and unsatisfactory. Some 25 per cent. voted yes; 25 per cent.—only 7,000 fewer out of 1 million—voted no; and just under 50 per cent. did not bother to vote. Geographically, Wales was split almost straight down the middle, and Cardiff voted no.

The Secretary of State, clearly not a man of vaunting expectations, described the tiny majority of 0.6 per cent. as a striking victory and a firm indication of support for the proposals. How he can possibly regard one in four as genuinely democratic evidence of support is hard to see, but the right hon. Gentleman has strangely eccentric views on voting percentages. He never tires of describing the 20 per cent. support for the Conservatives in Wales last May as the wiping out of the Welsh Tories; whereas he describes the 25 per cent. vote for his assembly as a triumph. There must be some extraordinary magical quotient in the 5 per cent. in between. Today, he tells us that, at 20 per cent., the Conservatives are a minority; whereas a 25 per cent. vote for the Assembly is a satisfactory majority. It is curiouser and curiouser.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that on 1 May this year he secured 25,710 votes out of an electorate of 80,383, which means that 69 per cent. of the people of Devizes did not vote for him? I do not deny him his right to sit in the House, but if he wishes to do so, he can take the Chiltern Hundreds today.

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman checks the figures I think that he will find that my percentage of the vote was about the same as that achieved by the Labour Government in securing their victory with a large majority, but he will not find me questioning the validity of that election result.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the referendum has been held and that silly mathematical arguments do no service to the people of Wales? We have a Bill which will set the pattern of the governance of Wales for the foreseeable future, and the sooner we bend our minds to putting the right structures in place to serve the people of Wales, the better we shall be doing our jobs as politicians. We really must forget about silly mathematical arguments that are of no use; the right hon. Gentleman is doing no service to the people of Wales by carrying on in this fashion.

Mr. Ancram: The percentages were first raised by the Secretary of State. I am merely responding to the debate, as I should. I accept that a simple majority may have been achieved—[HON. MEMBERS: "It was achieved."] A simple majority of 7,000 out of 1 million was achieved, but it cannot be claimed that it reflected the settled will of the Welsh people in favour of an assembly. It demonstrated clearly the uncertainties and fears in the minds of the Welsh electorate. Those fears were recognised by the Prime Minister on the morning after the referendum, when he referred to the narrowness of the margin and the need to take account of it and to allay the fears of the people of Wales.

We might have been forgiven for thinking that we should see changes in the proposals to take account of those fears. If we did think that, we underestimated the

bull-headed obstinacy of the Secretary of State, who has charged on regardless. To him, 25 per cent. is a clear, if not decisive, indication of support, and 0.6 per cent., if not decisive, is certainly a clear majority.

Mr. Wigley: Has the Conservative party drawn up a list, which it may present at the Committee or Report stage of the Bill, of the changes that it wants to see in order to make the Bill acceptable to the people of Wales along the lines that the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting?

Mr. Ancram: Such lists normally appear as amendments on amendment papers. If the right hon. Gentleman contains himself he will see the amendments that we shall be introducing, about which I shall say a word or two later.

We have to accept that the Bill is before us, and we even have to accept the political reality that the Government can push it through, but that does not mean that we can or should endorse it in its present form. We believe that it is seriously flawed, that it addresses none of the fears expressed in the referendum vote, that it undermines the United Kingdom and Wales's position in it, that it leaves Wales's financial and European interests severely exposed, and that it entrenches permanent minorities within Wales. Without assurances on those matters—none has come from the Secretary of State today—we should oppose the Second Reading; hence our reasoned amendment.

I shall set out more fully our concerns over the Bill and the dangers that we perceive, both in terms of what it includes and what it does not include, but, before doing so, I shall make a couple of general points. We do not like the principle of what is being proposed now, any more than we did in the summer.

We still believe that the Bill signals the start of a legislative process that, along with its Scottish counterpart, will loosen the bonds that hold together the United Kingdom; it will create new tensions and animosities between the component parts of the United Kingdom, including England, which, unattended, could break the United Kingdom apart. While this Bill does not raise the English dimension as directly as the Scottish Bill, it nevertheless sets out a clear direction away from that spirit of common purpose and unity that lies at the heart of our Union.

Mr. Öpik: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: No, I shall not give way at the moment, as I wish to finish this passage.

Conservative Members still believe in the Union and in the value of the United Kingdom—this unique amalgam of nations, cultures and traditions, which has proved, and can continue to prove, a significant force for good, both at home and beyond.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: The right hon. Gentleman is in a purple patch now.

Mr. Ancram: We know the hon. Gentleman's position on the United Kingdom; it is not ours.

We will continue to fight for the Union. When it is threatened, we will respond. When it is undermined, we will seek to shore it up. However, we do not fear reform as long as it is fully thought through and consistent with the maintenance of the United Kingdom. Indeed, it is worth remembering that Conservative Governments began the process of administrative devolution to Wales and set up the Welsh Grand Committee and the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs.

We still question the need for the Bill, and we question even more the motives behind it. When it is considered alongside last week's White Paper on regional development agencies and the accompanying ministerial comments, it becomes clear that the Government regard the Bill as the first step in the regionalisation of the United Kingdom—we know that England is next in the firing line—and all in the cause of helping to create a Europe of regions. Fragmenting the United Kingdom and weakening the sovereignty of this Parliament is, and must be, a central part of that agenda. Why else would the Government radically change a constitutional structure in the United Kingdom which, by and large, works well?

I warn the House that the Bill moves us significantly closer to the Europe of regions and away from the Europe of nations. In so doing, it is inimical not only to Conservative Members but to the vast majority of people in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Those concerns will guide our response to the Bill. We shall approach it with the best interests of Wales and the United Kingdom at heart because, unlike some people, we do not believe those two aims to be mutually exclusive. We shall press the Government to address the real concerns of the Welsh people and we shall do what we can to mitigate the flaws.

We shall not seek to filibuster or unnecessarily to table amendments. If the Government are determined to proceed to an assembly, we shall want it to work in a way that is least damaging to the Union and most constructive for all the people of Wales. We will campaign hard for the true voice of Welsh Conservatism to be heard strongly within it and within consultations held in the lead-up to it. Our position in that regard has long been clear.

I am appalled at the proposal that the Bill not be taken in its entirety on the Floor of the House. I believe that it is a Bill of first-class constitutional importance. It would be an insult to all that the Government have promised to the supporters of devolution in Wales if it were not taken in its entirety on the Floor of the House. It should not in any respect go to a Standing Committee.

In the words of that great socialist, Herbert Morrison, speaking in the Procedure Committee on 18 September 1945,

"you cannot play about with the British Constitution in a Committee upstairs, to put it colloquially."

If I may put it equally colloquially, it is not good enough to claim that a two-day Second Reading debate allows all hon. Members to have their say on the detail of the legislation. Apart from its being in questionable order for them to do so during a debate on the principle, it is impractical and unreal. The devil is in the detail of the Bill, and that detail has implications for Wales and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ron Davies *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: As the Secretary of State is about to intervene, I want to ask him a question. How do the

[Mr. Ancram]

proposals square with his press release of 27 November, the day of the Bill's publication, which stated that, during its parliamentary progress,

"it is, of course, also open to any MP to put forward changes to the Bill, and to have these explored in detail through open debate"?

Perhaps he can explain how that can possibly happen in a Committee upstairs—or were those words simply for effect?

Mr. Davies: No. Any hon. Member may speak on Second Reading. Any hon. Member may table amendments or new clauses on Report, if there is a Report stage. Third Reading provides a further opportunity. Any hon. Member who wishes to do so may speak on Second Reading and attempt to get a place on the Standing Committee. That includes Conservative Members, but I suspect that not many of them are dying to serve on the Standing Committee. That is my answer to the question.

I have a question for the right hon. Gentleman. I do not necessarily want to negotiate on this matter across the Floor of the House, but as he has now acknowledged that the Government have the right to get this legislation, and has accepted the fact that it is his role to act constructively in seeking to improve the legislation where appropriate, will he give an undertaking that, if the Government were not minded to have the Bill considered in Committee upstairs, he would agree with the Government, through the usual channels, to have an agreed timetable to take the matter entirely on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Ancram: Obviously, I would want to see the proposed timetable.

Mr. Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself, I am answering the question.

The right hon. Gentleman has made me an offer, and I should have thought that it was more consistent with his statement that it was open to any hon. Member

"to put forward changes to the Bill"

to discuss it on the Floor of the House. If enough time were given to allow any hon. Member who wanted to propose a change to have it dealt with on the Floor of the House, I should wish to consider that. I shall not negotiate with the right hon. Gentleman at the Dispatch Box—he would not expect me to—but I am saying that he is in serious danger of creating a dangerous precedent, which he and others might well come to regret.

Many countries require substantially weighted majorities to amend their constitution in referendums or in their legislature. For better or worse, we have relied on the scrutiny of the whole House of Commons to create a sufficient safeguard where constitutional reform is at issue. That scrutiny is to be jettisoned and the bulk of this comprehensive, if confused, piece of legislation will be relegated to a Committee upstairs instead.

It cannot be for fear of time wasting—I have dealt with that—or for reasons of urgency, given the lackadaisical timetable which, despite 18 years in the preparation, has brought us the Bill some seven months after the election and nearly three months after the referendum. Indeed, there are still amendments to come.

Surely there cannot be anything more serious than the fundamental reform of the constitution of Wales and the United Kingdom, requiring priority time on the Floor of the House. *[Interruption.]* I heard what the Secretary of State said, but if he does not change his mind I shall take it as an example of the arrogant contempt with which the Government in general, and the right hon. Gentleman in particular, treat the House of Commons.

Mr. Ron Davies: Is the right hon. Gentleman accusing me of it?

Mr. Ancram: Yes, I do accuse him of it. It lies four square with his patronising approach to those in the Labour party who have genuine worries about the detail of the proposals, and it tallies with his dismissive refusal to have any truck with the genuine concerns of the people of Wales about the Bill. It is a dangerous undermining of our constitutional procedures, and it cannot be justified by protestations of administrative convenience or modernised procedures. It may well make the Secretary of State's job easier, but all the procedures of the House should be not for the convenience of Government but for the good of our country and our constitution.

The Bill requires the fullest and most careful scrutiny. It is not a measure for today, which can be changed tomorrow if it does not work. Constitutional reform is not like that, and nor should it be. It is for the long term, and there is an imperative for the House to try to get it right. That description is not applicable to the Bill.

The Bill is a dog's breakfast, and is the more dangerous for it. In many ways, it is almost schizophrenic. A Bill that is designed to pass the powers of secondary legislation to the assembly leaves a staggering 45 separate order-making powers in the hands of the Secretary of State and a further 20 determinations or directions to be made by Welsh or Treasury Ministers.

In five instances, the Secretary of State's staff may be required to consult before acting, but, given the current interpretation by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of the word "consultation", that hardly gives any of us much comfort. The Bill as it stands is devolution subject to direction and veto: neither one thing nor the other. I shall discuss that in due course.

The Bill contains significant areas for potential conflict between Westminster and the assembly, and between the Assembly and the Secretary of State. We shall be told, and have been told again today, that those areas of conflict are more imagined than real, because there will be a new consensus style of politics, which will prevent them arising—just as, I suppose, there is in the Secretary of State's dealings with Cardiff county council about Cardiff city hall as the home for the assembly.

Long-term constitutional reform cannot be founded on wishful thinking or on best-case scenarios. Where new structures, new procedures and new relationships are being erected in a constitution, they must be tested against the hypothesis of the potential storm instead of the potential calm, against the times of disagreement instead of agreement, against, indeed, the worst-case scenario. Almost anything can be made to work in the best of all possible worlds, but that is not the world we live in or are likely to, as I suspect the Secretary of State is discovering daily the hard way.

We intend in both Houses to test the propositions in the Bill against reality, not aspiration. If devolution is to happen, it must be robust enough to withstand the economic and political storms that will inevitably occur. I believe that statement to be in line with the question that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) asked me earlier.

On reading the Bill, I was relieved to find that old habits of socialists are alive and kicking, at least in the Welsh Office. The assembly—shades of some of those wonderful old communist regimes—will have at its head a First Secretary. That is a phrase to be conjured with, and takes me back a bit. The First Secretary will preside over not a Cabinet, but an executive or praesidium. I suppose that we will be told next that the assembly, if it can be found a home, will be called the grand hall of the people—in which required reading for members will be a little book called "The Thoughts of Chairman Ron". I suspect that it will be a small book—

Mr. Dalyell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give up these silly points, and bear in mind the fact that the first First Secretary was Rab Butler?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful for the history lesson—the hon. Gentleman's history predates mine. We could all poke a bit of fun if the matter were not so very serious. Indeed, the drafting of the Bill leaves little room for levity. It is one of the most confused pieces of legislation that I have had the misfortune to study—and there is some pretty stiff competition.

The Bill gives the impression that it does not know what it is trying to achieve. It remains unclear whether the Assembly will be just a talking shop or a body with real teeth. It remains unclear whether the Secretary of State will be reduced to a messenger or elevated to the role of Governor General. There is evidence for both propositions. It is also unclear how the government of Wales will continue in an efficient, decisive and accountable manner.

Just about the only really clear provision is that the members of the assembly will determine their own salaries and allowances. There is also a clear provision, as the Secretary of State has reminded us, to the effect that one third of the members will be elected by a closed list system—not even the open list system which the Home Secretary is studying in relation to the European elections. The system is designed to give maximum power and patronage to party leaders. We believe that both provisions are insidious and could be corrupting, and we shall oppose them.

Let us look at the contradictions. Some parts of the Bill provide for an assembly that is able only to advise, discuss and consult—that wonderful word again—yet other parts confer on it seemingly sweeping powers without the need for further legislation. For instance, clause 32 is meant to give the assembly a real role in drawing up relevant primary legislation for Westminster, and requires the Secretary of State to undertake consultation with the assembly on the Government's legislative programme. But then come the words:

"as appears to him to be appropriate".

It goes on, amazingly, to remove the requirement to consult the assembly if the Secretary of State

"considers there are considerations relating to the Bill which make it inappropriate for him to do so".

The whole thing is left to the subjective or political judgment of the Secretary of State: so much for the assembly.

In almost the same breath, we are told that, under clauses 28 and 29, the assembly can centralise power by assuming to itself the powers of, say, health authorities. For example, it could abolish the North Wales health authority and run it from Cardiff or Swansea: so much for devolution. Without reference to anyone or anything, the assembly could disband the Welsh tourist board, the Welsh Language Board or even the Welsh Development Agency and assume their roles itself. If the House is sceptical about that, hon. Members have only to look at clause 39, under which the assembly may do anything that is "calculated"—another weasel word—to facilitate the exercise of any of its functions. How is that for a blank cheque?

We do not even know for certain yet what functions will be transferred to the assembly from the Secretary of State or any other Minister of the Crown. We hear speeches from the Secretary of State and his Ministers about what is to be transferred, but there is nothing in the Bill about it except for a schedule of areas within which transfers of functions may be made by Order in Council, as the Secretary of State considers appropriate—those words again. A draft of the order is not even required until just before the elections to the assembly take place—another blank cheque.

The Secretary of State told us that he will provide us with a working draft in January. At last, we thought, he is beginning to see that there is some purpose in giving the House information during the passage of the legislation, but he went on to say blandly that it will not be the final draft—many other things could appear in later drafts, he said. Once again, we are being asked to sign a blank cheque. This is hardly a sensible way in which to make fundamental constitutional reforms.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): The right hon. Gentleman is in danger of missing the point. Making the Bill too prescriptive in terms of the powers to be accorded to the assembly runs counter to the very principle behind it, which is to provide democratic accountability to match the administrative devolution that has gone on apace in Wales for the past 18 years.

Mr. Ancram: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has read the Bill. I am not complaining about the democratic institution of a Welsh Assembly deciding these matters; I am complaining about the Secretary of State deciding them under the 45 order-making powers that he retains under the Bill. He will not tell us what those orders will contain.

The contrast between these approaches is quite breathtaking. I had hoped that it was the result of sloppy drafting which can yet be put right—we shall see. If the assembly's role is ambiguous, the Secretary of State's is much more so. If his current functions and budget are transferred, as he said today they would be, he will have little that is positive left to do, and even less authority to do it with. It is hard to see how his position could for long continue to command a place in the Cabinet. However, other clauses giving a very different impression soon appear.

Under clauses 45, 49 and 50, far from decentralising decision making over its own affairs to the assembly, the Secretary of State reserves to himself the right to decide

[Mr. Ancram]

its original Standing Orders. He then requires an awesome two-thirds majority in the assembly to change them thereafter. That is a draconian threshold, which puts the 25 per cent. yes vote in the referendum in perspective.

There is more. Nothing in the Bill dispels the fear aroused by the White Paper that the concerns of Wales will hereafter be voiced less in the European Council of Ministers, and only at the whim and invitation of the Secretary of State. That would certainly fail the worst scenario test, and the people of Wales should know about it before it is too late.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) asked a significant question earlier, and got no response to it—not because the Secretary of State did not know the answer, although he gave a fair impression of being badly briefed, but because he knew that the answer was no. He knew, too, that if he gave that answer it would not please the hon. Gentleman or the House.

What is more, the Secretary of State will have powers under clause 107 to overrule the assembly

"in any way he thinks necessary"

to fulfil commitments to the European Union. If ever there was a recipe for conflict and resentment, this is it. Add to that the 17 orders subject to affirmative procedure, the 25 orders subject to negative procedure and a few other powers thrown in, and the picture of a Secretary of State with a whip but without a role becomes clearer. His potential as a pivot for conflict, resentment and the encouragement of nationalism is self-evident, and it makes a mockery of the claimed stability of the proposals. Then there is the right hon. Gentleman's control over money—I shall return to it in a moment.

What is certain is that these ambiguities and confusions will result in less clarity and accountability, and more bureaucracy and delay—the latter being feared by the chairman and director of the Welsh CBI, Elizabeth Haywood, who informed the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs last week:

"there is no economic imperative for establishing a Welsh Assembly."

I welcomed the right hon. Gentleman's recognition of that fear when he launched his Bill. He must know that uncertainty is the greatest enemy of business confidence, and that the Bill is riddled with it. Entrepreneurs and investors need a system of government that they know and trust. The Bill, in all its bureaucratic muddled glory, can hardly claim to provide it.

It is from what is not in the Bill that the greatest fears arise; and it is in its failures that we find the greatest cause for concern and opposition. For a start, it fails to offer any statutory protection for minorities. The referendum showed that the Government had succeeded in splitting Wales down the middle: the north fears permanent domination by the south; the east fears bias towards the west; English and Welsh speakers fear losing out to each other. There is nothing in the Bill to safeguard the interests of minorities; without such a safeguard, the seeds of dangerous tensions could be sown.

Setting up a series of regional committees is meant as a sop to north Wales—on examination, it turns out to be a meaningless gesture. The assembly will decide how many regions there will be and will then draw up their boundaries. The regions will be only advisory in any case, and the assembly could cheerfully ignore them. They offer no statutory protection whatever.

More astonishingly, the Bill gives no assurances on finance for a Welsh Assembly, or any sign that resources will be provided to meet need. Clause 80 states only that the Secretary of State

"shall from time to time make payments to the Assembly out of money provided by Parliament of such amounts as he may determine".

In other words, it is at his whim and discretion. If ever there was an area where it is in Wales's interests to see legislative assurance, it is here. If ever there was a candidate for the worst-case scenario test, it must be this. That is all that is said—beyond what is in clause 80, the Bill is silent. The financial future of Wales will be subject only to the discretion of the Secretary of State, who will, at the same time, have lost his clout with the Treasury. If ever there was an area of uncertainty, this must be it.

It is no good the Secretary of State protesting that the much-vaunted Barnett formula is in the financial memorandum. He knows as well as I do that such a memorandum has no force in statute. It protects precisely nothing. What are the Government's longer-term intentions? What effect will the current fundamental spending review have on the formula? What bankable assurances can the right hon. Gentleman give the people of Wales that, financially, they are not being sold a pig in a very expensive poke? In short, can he offer anything more than the fragile and potentially transient good will of Secretaries of State in the future?

I turn finally to the failure of the Bill to reassure on the vital question of the United Kingdom and Wales's place within it. None of us can know the outcome of the legislation in this regard, but we are entitled to fear it. I fear a Bill which, in clause 22, proposes that further powers be transferred from Whitehall to an assembly simply by Order in Council. I fear even more a provision that establishes that this is a one-way street and a ratchet that cannot be reversed, and which can only further distance Wales from the United Kingdom and further loosen the bonds of the Union.

I must tell the Secretary of State that even in the negotiations on the framework document on Northern Ireland, the dangers of the one-way ratchet were recognised. Paragraph 44 of the White Paper on Scotland—we have not yet seen the Bill—suggests that there will be provision for transferring further matters to and from a reserved list. Here we have a one-way ratchet, and that is something at which the House should look carefully.

To add to the confusion, clauses 43 and 44 propose that the House will no longer receive statements about secondary legislation from the assembly, although it will still be required to pass—at least for the moment—the primary legislation under which the assembly will operate. I say in all seriousness that that creates an open door for nationalist ambitions, and raises doubts about the ultimate sovereignty of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Significantly, that is not mentioned in the Bill, although it was the focus of loud reassurance during the referendum campaign. It is not surprising that the absence from the Bill of such a measure creates suspicion, uncertainty and fear.

All that the Secretary of State has to do to allay these fears, the phrase used by the Prime Minister in Downing street, is to declare unequivocally to the House—or, better

still, to table an amendment—that the supreme authority of this Parliament shall remain unaffected and undiminished over all persons, all matters and all things in Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: Where has that been done before?

Mr. Ancram: I will tell the Secretary of State: in the only case where there has been devolution of power of this kind within the United Kingdom. I will gladly give way to the Secretary of State if he wishes to make the statement for which I ask, and I look to him to place those words in the Bill.

Mr. Davies: I have given the right hon. Gentleman a clear answer—that provision is meaningless. Will he answer my question? What is to stop this Parliament, if it wishes, repealing that measure?

Mr. Ancram: The supremacy of this Parliament means that it can do what it wishes. If the Secretary of State refers to Northern Ireland, he will see that assurances were given by the inclusion of such a provision in the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Why is he frightened of putting that phrase into the Bill by an amendment, which would merely replicate what is in the Government of Ireland Act 1920? That is a good precedent.

Mr. Davies: I am not afraid of anything. I am trying to explain to the right hon. Gentleman that I am resisting putting a meaningless provision in the Bill. He has acknowledged that there is nothing to stop any future Parliament repealing any measure passed by this or any other Parliament. Why does he not accept that a central pillar of the British constitution is that this Parliament is sovereign? Nothing that this Parliament does can bind any future Parliament. That needs no legislation.

Mr. Ancram: The Secretary of State is wriggling. If he really felt that, he would have no compunction about putting such a phrase in the Bill. He is not prepared to do it because he is frightened of a confrontation with the nationalists. He fought the referendum on the basis that, while he was telling one half of Wales that devolution would strengthen the Union, he allowed the leader of Plaid Cymru, the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), to go around Wales talking about how it would lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom and to an independent Wales. He does not want to break up that happy friendship. Perhaps, in due course, we will help him to concentrate more closely on the matter.

We do not like the Bill. We believe it to be dangerously flawed. If it receives a Second Reading, we will seek constructively to amend it and we will look to the Government to show that they are prepared to listen to the very real fears of many people in Wales about what is being done to them in the name of devolution. The way in which the Secretary of State responds to the suggestions will be watched closely by people in Wales. I have to say that the intransigent behaviour he has shown so far does not offer much encouragement.

Above all, we will seek the reassurances that I have outlined and the responses that will fill those glaring gaps that I have outlined again, which are the cause of great concern in substantial parts of Wales. So far, the Government have ignored the legitimate fears of the Welsh people and have done nothing to allay them. The Prime Minister's words in Downing street have turned out to be worth not the breath used to deliver them; they ring hollow today.

We will not ignore those genuinely held fears. The Bill fails to assert the supremacy of this Parliament and fails to protect cultural and geographic minorities. It fails to ensure proper resourcing for Wales to reflect need, and fails to safeguard the position of Wales within the United Kingdom or its voice within Europe.

We live in hope—vain, I fear—that, even now, before the debate is concluded, the Secretary of State will climb down from his high horse and that these assurances will be forthcoming and the relevant changes will be promised. If they are not—looking at him, I fear that they will not—we will have no option, on behalf of those anxious and worried people in Wales, but to urge the House to decline to give the Bill a Second Reading tomorrow night.

5.15 pm

Sir Raymond Powell (Ogmore): I am very pleased to be called to speak in this historic debate. The Principality has waited 18 long years for a debate on devolution for Wales. I should like to put on record the work undertaken back in the 1970s by the likes of Emrys Jones, the secretary of the Welsh Labour party; my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General; Michael Foot; and the noble Lord Callaghan, who devoted their time as part of a Labour Government to trying to get devolution on the statute book as long ago as 1978.

The then Government produced the Wales Act 1978, which was rejected by 80 per cent. of the electorate, against the 20 per cent who were in favour. We worked for a yes vote in 1978 and at least we can console ourselves that our work forms the basis of the present proposals in the Government of Wales Bill; not all the present proposals, I hasten to add, especially not those dealing with proportional representation. I objected to those proposals when the White Paper was published and, as a result, subsequently voted no in the referendum.

In the spirit of co-operation and as a result of the call for unity, I hope that, if amendments are tabled, they will be given due consideration and not rejected on the basis that they might alter the spirit of the Bill. I mention that in relation to all the views expressed since 18 September. As a democrat, I accept the decision that was taken, and I appreciate that the majority was in favour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) has suggested that we should not go into the facts and figures, as it would be a waste of time. I do not share his opinion. A small majority voted for the proposals and, until such time as we examine in greater depth and detail the decision taken by the electorate of Wales, we might not be able to get the unity which we need and for which we are calling.

Mr. Rogers: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Raymond Powell: In a moment.

The results of the vote need close examination. I shall quote figures published by the House of Commons Library. In the general election on 1 May, 75 per cent. of the electors in Wales voted overwhelmingly for Labour candidates to be returned to Parliament. Four and a half

[Sir Raymond Powell]

months later, on 18 September, only 50 per cent. of the electors voted on the Government's proposals on devolution. Out of 2,224,000, only 1,112,000—that is, only 50.1 per cent. of the electors—voted at all. Of the half of the electorate who voted, 559,419 voted yes—50.3 per cent. of those who voted—and 49.7 per cent.—552,698 electors—voted no. That gave the Government's proposals a majority of 6,721 yes votes, out of 1,112,000 who voted—just 6 per cent. of the total.

Therefore, we should all accept the need to aim for close co-operation. Judging from the major differences that have already erupted on the question of where the assembly will be housed, it does not seem that unanimity is being established even in these early days.

Mr. Rogers: So that my hon. Friend does not misunderstand me further, I was objecting to the Conservatives' continual carping about the validity of the referendum. We can discuss the figures and their implications privately, but if we want to do a service to the people of Wales, the sooner we get down to considering the detail in the Bill, the better we shall be serving them. I accept, as my hon. Friend says with his great experience, that we need to bring about a reconciliation, but we certainly ain't going to get it from the Conservatives.

Sir Raymond Powell: With all due respect to my hon. Friend, let me remind him that I am emphasising the need to examine the figures, and analyse who voted and who supported the Government's proposals. If we want co-operation, that does not just mean co-operation between members of different political parties or between Members of Parliament speaking in the House.

Many people outside can express their views only by reference to Members of Parliament. We are introducing legislation on behalf of the 25 per cent. who voted no, and the 50 per cent. who did not vote at all. We must consult those people and ensure that we take them with us; otherwise, we shall not do justice to the assembly that I dreamed of in the 1970s and which I worked to establish in 1978, unlike a number of other hon. Members, including some on the Front Bench, who were not with us.

I remind the House, and especially Labour Members, that one of the most prominent opponents of the Wales Act 1978 when it was put to a referendum is now a Commissioner in Europe. Four years after opposing the proposals that a Labour Government had introduced, he was elected leader of the Labour party. That shows the degree of tolerance that existed in the Labour party.

Everyone would be wise to reflect on the attitudes adopted by the then Labour Government when the Wales Act 1978 was debated. They recognised the rights of Members of Parliament to express their views and continually to amend the Bill. There was no suppression of opinions, and no threat of expulsion from the party. None of the no voters was hounded—quite the opposite. We made the main protagonist a leader four years later, and 18 years later we made one no voter at that time the Secretary of State for Wales, so comrades, friends and Members of the House, let us have a little wara teg from now on, and a little tolerance for hon. Members who express different opinions from the Front Bench, Government or Opposition.

If we are to have a Welsh Assembly such as I and others have dreamed of since the 1970s, and if only as a mark of respect for the hard work that the late Emrys Jones put into devolution in Wales, we should have a great deal more tolerance on all sides.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I welcome the close attention that the hon. Gentleman is giving to the narrowness of the referendum result, and the high proportion of people who did not vote. Will he address the point stressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—the fact that, the day after the referendum, the Prime Minister emphasised that he recognised the concerns shown by the Welsh people, as demonstrated by the low majority for the proposals, yet there is nothing in the Bill to show that those concerns have been taken into account?

Sir Raymond Powell: I tend to share the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). We have gone through the figures and acknowledged the importance of analysing them in great depth and detail. I am a democrat, but I was disappointed by the size of the majority, as I wanted the proposals to be accepted by a larger majority in Wales, similar to the majority enjoyed in Scotland, so that we could go forward knowing that we had the support of a larger number of people.

I want devolution to be a process of which we can be proud. I want an assembly of which we can be proud, and one that embraces true democracy. I do not want what some are suggesting—one of the largest-ever quangos.

I am concerned about the numbers of the assembly. In reply to the spokesman for the Liberals, who spoke of a membership of 80, the Secretary of State said that he was opposed to that, and that he was not eager to accept any alteration. My views were expressed to the commission in the Labour party in Wales. I favour 40 men and 40 women to represent 40 constituency seats. Eighty members would be a fair number; we have had county councils in Wales with far more members than 80.

In suggesting that a man and a woman should represent each of the 40 parliamentary seats, I hoped that there would be no need for PR, and it would be a tremendous step forward in the establishment of equal rights and opportunities for women in Wales. I still fail to understand why that suggestion was rejected, and why women in Wales did not give it greater support.

Some people in Wales, including those who would stand for the assembly, have suggested that there will not be enough members to cover the committees and cope with the assembly's likely work load. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Government will consider seriously expanding the assembly's numerical strength to 80 members and allowing a man and a woman to represent each seat. There is no need to take the matter to Europe as women and men would have equal rights—the proposal does not involve short lists for women only—and we should have 40 men and 40 women representing 40 parliamentary seats and being accountable to their parliamentary constituencies. There is no better parliamentary framework in a democracy than that.

At present, it is suggested that 20 members should be appointed on the basis of proportional representation: a faceless body would appoint 20 people from a list. I see the leader of Plaid Cymru, the right hon. Member for

Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), nodding. I am concerned that PR is not the correct system for electing assembly members, but I have another fear. I have fought Welsh National party candidates in the parliamentary seat of Ogmore not only for the 18 years that I have been a Member of Parliament, but for 15 years before that. I recall the stand taken by the Welsh nationalists from the time when I was a sub-agent in Carmarthen and Gwynfor Evans was elected.

I cannot understand why this Government want to have a brotherly association with the Welsh nationalists and the Liberal Democrats, when we have a majority in this place that secures our independence. I have fought candidates from both those parties in elections, as well as those from the Green party, the Independent Labour party and many others.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. His comments about proportional representation have some interest in the context of the opening remarks by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who placed great emphasis on the need to protect minorities. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be appropriate for the Opposition to welcome that element of the proposals that will certainly preserve a minority in Wales: the Conservative party? If the assembly is to be all-embracing, it must represent all shades of opinion in Wales.

Sir Raymond Powell: I agree—of course we want the minority parties to have a place on the assembly. However, those parties must do what the Labour party has done over the years. The Labour party was in a minority position for years—if one reads the history of this place, one will see that the Liberals were in the majority for a long time. The minority parties should earn their places with the electorate—they should not just expect their members to be elected under a system that is far from democratic. Under the PR system, people may be elected using lists that are controlled by the powers that be.

I am concerned about the transfer of powers from the Secretary of State for Wales to the assembly. The transfer of powers proposed by the Wales Act 1978 is nothing compared with the current proposals. I am beginning to wonder—as one of the elder statesmen in this place and as one who might be looking forward to retiring at the end of this Parliament—what sort of Parliament we shall leave to our successors, especially those from Wales. What will be left for elected Members of Parliament to do? Is this move designed to encourage Welsh Members to stand for election to the Welsh Assembly? Perhaps it is. If Welsh Members will have no work to do in the House of Commons, they might seek a seat in the assembly.

We should have enjoyed devolution in Wales and in this country for 18 years. I regret that the electorate refused to accept it at that time. I am very pleased that a majority of voters are now in favour of an elected assembly for Wales, and I hope that it will be possible to establish that elected assembly as soon as possible.

I have received a letter from the secretary of the Cardiff city Labour group—I think that most Welsh MPs have received a copy of it—explaining in detail the reasons why that group rejected the proposal to house the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff city hall. I was a councillor in Ogwr borough, and I can understand why the group took that decision. It had every right to reject the proposal, which would have cost ratepayers £7.3 million to secure the premises. That reason must be put on the record, although argument may continue as to whether the decision is right or wrong. Nevertheless, the group has ensured that Members of Parliament are informed by sending letters detailing its discussions on the matter. I was very pleased to receive that letter, which reveals the facts of the case.

5.36 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I listened to the authentic voice of the elder statesman of the Labour party, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell), with considerable interest. Given his comments during the referendum campaign, I was particularly interested to hear the hon. Gentleman express the hope that the assembly would come into being as rapidly as possible and would be a fitting tribute to the late Emrys Jones. If that is the case—I clearly accept the hon. Gentleman's comments—there is at least some coming together on the principles, if not on the details, of the proposals before us today.

I make it clear from the outset that Plaid Cymru supports the Bill and accepts it for what it is—although it falls well short of the ideal that we envisaged. However, we recognise that the Government have a mandate for the Bill as a result of both the general election and the Welsh referendum. In May this year, every Member of Parliament in Wales was elected on the basis of a party programme that supported at least this degree of national democracy for Wales. The only party that stood against any such development was the Tory party, which failed to win one seat in the general election. It ill behoves the Tories, speaking from their English bunkers, to tell Wales now that we cannot have any form of national democracy for our country.

Mr. Rogers: We live in what is probably the finest democracy in the world, and I must confess that it is very sad to hear such trite remarks about developing a democracy. I contend that devolution and other forms of government have nothing to do with democracy. The Bill has nothing particularly to do with democracy—otherwise I would ask my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how on earth he comes to be sitting behind the Minister now. I cannot see how the Bill is an extension of democracy when it negates our existence in this place.

Mr. Wigley: I listened with considerable interest to the arguments advanced by the Labour party throughout the campaign for a yes vote. They were largely based on extending democracy in Wales and getting democratic answerability for a tier of government, much of which was made up of quangos or was within the Welsh Office and not open to adequate scrutiny and answerability.

I accept that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) may have taken a slightly different view from that held by the main stream of the Labour party on this matter, but I have set out the basis on which the proposals were made and the basis on which a majority of those who voted in Wales voted yes so as to secure a better system of democracy for our country.

I pay tribute to the work of the Secretary of State and his fellow Ministers in the Welsh Office in the campaign to secure a yes vote. I pay tribute also to the work of Professor Kevin Morgan and his colleagues in the "Yes for Wales" campaign.

[Mr. Wigley]

As for the referendum, it was a close result. Less than one hour before the outcome was known, the no campaigners appeared on television saying that, if they won by only a handful of votes, that would be enough to kill the Bill.

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman will remember that at about that time of night, when he thought that he was going to lose the referendum by a small number of votes, he said—he was recorded on television—to me, "I hope that we can have a replay next week."

Mr. Wigley: I did indeed say that we would fight, fight and fight again to secure what we wanted. We acknowledged the validity, as did many of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues who appeared on television on the evening of the referendum, that, if the no campaigners won by a handful of votes, that would be enough to kill the Bill.

What is sauce for the backward-looking, scaremongering, no-voting neanderthals is also sauce for the forward-looking, yes-voting alliance, which believes in democracy and in Wales. Let us recall that the turnout in Wales, at 51 per cent., was not all that much lower than the 59 per cent. achieved in Scotland. The swing in Wales from 1979 was greater than that in Scotland.

It is worth reminding the House of the post-referendum mood in Wales. Even among those who voted no there was some satisfaction at the outcome. Some of the no voters told me that, when they saw the joy on the faces of the young people of Wales at the yes vote, they were glad that the referendum had gone that way. That was a fact and that has been said. It has been said on television by a former Conservative Member in a face-to-face interview. No doubt we shall hear more about that when the debate moves to the other place in due course.

There are former Conservative Members as well as Labour doubters who now say that we must not be drawn into re-fighting the referendum. What is needed is a coming together to get the best national assembly that we can possibly secure for Wales. I appeal to Tories in England to take such a positive and constructive approach. Wrecking the Bill and giving Wales an inadequate assembly would be a great disservice to my country.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that there is great concern, that when dealing with an issue of such fundamental constitutional importance as the Bill that is before us, any mandate from the people should be large and healthy? The fact that the referendum did not get a large and healthy mandate concerned the Prime Minister when he said the day after the referendum that the Government would address the concerns that had been shown by the smallness of the mandate. However, the Bill does not address those concerns. Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Mr. Wigley: If in other circumstances it had been determined that a mandate must be above a certain threshold proportion of the electorate, Bill Clinton would not have become President of the United States, Margaret Thatcher would not have been Prime Minister and most local authorities would not have had a mandate. Many such authorities have greater power than will the proposed assembly.

As for misgivings in Wales, I accept that they existed. When the Bill is considered in Committee, such concerns will have to be addressed in some detail. There will have to be exploration of the role of regional committees and other similar provisions in the Bill, but that is not an argument against giving the Bill a Second Reading and building an assembly that can bring the people of Wales together, which I believe is possible.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is there not greater concern about the vote going in such a way that Offa's dyke could have been said to have moved westward than about the narrowness of the vote? The boundaries of Wales seem to have changed. East Wales, with exceptions, voted against and west Wales, with exceptions, voted for.

Mr. Wigley: That is an interesting point, given the fact that arguments in Wales are often presented as being polarised as between north and south. Recently, there has been an east-west divide—and not only terms of the way in which people voted in the referendum. We have seen the divide manifest itself in income per head, unemployment and many other factors. There may well have been a correlation. The highest yes votes were in the areas of greatest deprivation in Wales, both down the western side and in the old coalfield valleys, running through as far as parts of Gwent.

I shall now consider the historic context in which the debate takes place. Wales as a nation was united, incorporated and annexed into England by the Act of Union of 1536. However, Wales as a nation refused to disappear. Through our language and culture, our literature in both languages, our religious institutions and social and political values, Wales retained its national identity.

Over the past 100 years, many attempts have been made to give Wales at least some form of national democracy to ensure that our political values, manifested in the last century through the Liberal party and for a large part of the 20th century through the Labour party—I believe that Plaid Cymru is also an inheritor—are converted into practical reality in Wales.

From the 1880s onwards, there have been numerous movements to give Wales some form of national elected democracy. The Cymru Fydd movement spearheaded the campaign a century ago. I remind the Tories that in 1886 Joseph Chamberlain advocated home rule—home rule all round, including Wales.

In 1891, there was D. A. Thomas's National Institution Bill, which proposed an elected assembly for Wales. It is worth quoting the words of Tom Ellis, the former Member for Meirionnydd, and later a Liberal Chief Whip. At Newtown, in 1888, he said:

> "Without a national assembly—at once the symbol of unity and the instrument of self government—Wales's position as a nation cannot be assured, and her work as a nation cannot be done."

One hundred years later, it is in the context of that work, which still needs to be done, that we welcome the Bill.

Many Bills to establish Parliaments or assemblies for Wales have been presented to the House this century. There was the E. T. John home rule Bill of 1914, and the

S. O. Davies Bill of 1954. There was the new focus on the issue following Gwynfor Evans's historic by-election victory at Carmarthen in 1966, which led to the Kilbrandon report of 1973, advocating Parliaments for Wales and Scotland.

The Labour Government of 1974 to 1979 brought forward, first, a Scotland and Wales Bill. In 1977, there was the Wales Bill that became the Wales Act 1978. The 1979 referendum shot that down. That failure left Wales vulnerable to the ravages of the Thatcher era. What a price we had to pay for that 1979 debacle. Now is the time to ensure that never again is Wales left defenceless to have imposed upon it, against its political will, a right-wing fundamentalist programme that is diametrically opposite to our social values, undermines our communities and drives Wales to the very bottom of the prosperity league in Britain.

At the very least, our own national assembly will articulate the values that we hold as a people: it will be a bulwark against imposed dogma of the Thatcherite kind. When I say "as a people", I mean all the people of Wales. We regard all the people who live in Wales as citizens of Wales and all are equal irrespective of race, creed, colour or language. Plaid Cymru is a national party, but our nationalism is a civic nationalism. It is an inclusive philosophy, and we welcome the inclusive nature of the Bill.

We want a national assembly in which all aspects of Welsh life are properly represented, including the ethnic minorities and disabled people, all the regions of Wales, both rural and industrial, and all parties including the Conservative party. In particular, we want a proper gender balance at the assembly.

Mr. Dalyell: I have always understood the right hon. Gentleman's argument for independence, but will he confirm that, had the Wales Act 1978 come into force, it would in no way have defended Wales against Mrs. Thatcher?

Mr. Wigley: We would, of course, have preferred the assembly envisaged in 1978 to have had the full law-making powers that Scotland would have got, and which it is now getting in its Parliament. However, I believe that the will of the people of Wales, articulated through the vehicle of an assembly, would have had considerable force with the way in which policies were implemented in Wales. It could not have been ignored. It would have been worth having, although it would not have given a guarantee. To that extent, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is right. I shall deal with that point in the context of our proposals later.

Plaid Cymru recently adopted a formula to try to achieve a gender balance in the assembly. I hope that other parties will do likewise. I am concerned that the 40 plus 20 formula will not provide adequately balanced representation, but we can no doubt tackle that in Committee.

There are four reasons for a national assembly: first, to secure better answerability for the Welsh Office, which has grown to cover most domestic portfolios; secondly, to provide better answerability for the quangos and, preferably, better democratic control or integration into a direct democracy system—they have grown out of all recognition in the past 20 years in Wales; thirdly, to provide Wales with a stronger profile in Europe; fourthly, to provide a stronger strategic approach, on an all-Wales level, in line with Welsh political values.

I spoke earlier of the need to protect Wales and to advance our social policies to fulfil Wales's aspirations for a fair, egalitarian community. We do not believe that that can be achieved without law-making powers. That was the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow. Scotland is to have those powers; Wales is not.

If a Tory Government come to power in London in five or 10 years' time, the Scots will be able to protect their education system, health service, housing policies and agriculture by virtue of having their own legislation. Wales will not; to that extent, the hon. Member for Linlithgow is right. Wales will be at the mercy of the Tories in London in a way that Scotland will not. It is imperative that our national assembly has full law-making powers at least over those matters.

It is ridiculous that, with our own national assembly, if we needed to amend the Welsh Language Act 1993 or the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, which deal with Wales alone, we would still have to come to Westminster. Such amendments should be provided through our national assembly. The Secretary of State has said before—he repeated it this afternoon—that devolution is not a one-off event, but a process. I welcome that statement. I hope that the Bill can be seen as strengthening that movement and that there will be provisions in it to reflect that aspiration, so that at least some primary legislative powers can be transferred to the Welsh Assembly in due course. Had such law-making power been in the White Paper at the time of the referendum, I believe that the vote would have been a substantially greater yes.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): On what the Secretary of State said earlier, does the right hon. Gentleman accept the supremacy and sovereignty of this Westminster Parliament, even with the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Wigley: I accept what the leadership of the Conservative party said before the general election and what the leadership of the Labour party has said: that, if the peoples of Wales and Scotland determined through referendums that they wanted assemblies, Parliament would deliver them and that the Conservative party would not scrap an elected Welsh national assembly or Scottish Parliament without a subsequent referendum. That is a de facto recognition of the right of the people of Scotland—of the claim of right, as it is defined in Scotland—and of the people of Wales to take those decisions.

I am not a great devotee of 19th-century sovereignty. I believe that sovereignty does not exist only in one place. It comes from the people upwards, and should be aggregated at different levels for different functions. That is why I have no difficulty in recognising that some decisions must be taken at European level and that some sovereignty should be transferred for that purpose, as was done by the Thatcher Government. However, where sovereignty can be exercised at an all-Wales level, it should be.

Technically, it is a tradition here at Westminster that sovereignty comes from the institution, but as a democrat I believe that sovereignty—or any rights or legitimacy

[Mr. Wigley]

that we have—comes from the people. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) hopes to speak tomorrow on developing proposals for a fast track to present our legislation to Westminster.

Another dimension of the Bill relates to links between Wales and the European Union. The Secretary of State gave a commitment when the White Paper was published—I was glad to hear him repeat it this afternoon—that our national assembly in Wales will have as full and equal a right as the Scottish Parliament in getting a voice in the European Union. Paragraph 3.46 of the White Paper states:

"Wales needs a strong voice in Europe."

The Bill does not appear to achieve that, but perhaps it will be achieved outside the framework of legislation. If so, we welcome it.

The White Paper also states:

"The Assembly will take over the Welsh Office's responsibilities for administering the European Strategic Funds".

The Bill does not appear to provide that. Perhaps the Minister could clarify that in his reply.

We want the Ministers, or Secretaries as they will be known, of our national assembly included as of right in the UK delegation to the Council of Ministers when issues within the assembly's competence—such as agriculture, which is in our minds because of the current crisis—appear on the agenda.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Does the right hon. Gentleman suggest that a member of the assembly should sit in the Council of Agriculture Ministers?

Mr. Wigley: Yes. From the assurances given in a Scottish context, I believe that the Scottish Agriculture Minister would be entitled to sit side by side with the UK Agriculture Minister in the Council of Ministers. Given the assurance that Wales will be treated equally with Scotland in that matter, I expect the Secretary of the Welsh Assembly with responsibility for agriculture to be part of the delegation when agricultural matters that have an impact on Wales arise in the Council of Ministers in Brussels. That is the spirit in which I took the statements made in the House today and on previous occasions. That is important for Welsh farmers.

Mr. Dalyell: The right hon. Gentleman's statement is news to us. As far as I know, there has been no assurance that Ministers responsible to an assembly in Edinburgh could speak in the Council of Ministers for the whole of the UK. Is he sure that such assurances have been given?

Mr. Wigley: I did not use that term. I did not say that the representative of the Welsh Assembly or Scottish Parliament could speak on the behalf of the whole UK, but that he could be part of the UK delegation, side by side with the UK Minister. There is a difference between what the hon. Gentleman said and what I said. I am sure that he recognises that. It is an important right that there should be a direct link from the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly to the team in Brussels when vital matters that are their responsibility are discussed.

Mr. Jenkin: We all understand the right hon. Gentleman's aspiration that Wales should one day have an independent voice in the Council of Ministers. Realistically, with the UK being the signatory to the treaty and being entitled only to one representative at the Council of Ministers to exercise 10 votes—or no votes—Welsh or Scottish representatives would attend as flunkeys with the permission, or at the invitation, of the UK Minister, or not at all. The idea that the Welsh or Scottish representative could attend as a peer or equal of the UK Minister leads the Welsh people up the garden path.

Mr. Wigley: At the Council of Ministers, a policy advocated at European level may be equally acceptable and relevant to England, Scotland and Wales or be acceptable to one part and not the others. If an agricultural policy is acceptable, say, in East Anglia but not in Wales, it is right and proper that we should have someone there to articulate that, even within the UK team. I would much rather we had a full seat in the Council of Ministers, but it is better for us to have someone there who can at least prod the United Kingdom Minister and say, "Hey, we have these requirements," than for us to have no one at all. To that extent at least, I see this as a step forward.

Mr. Rowlands: Clauses 105 and 106 explicitly state that all Community obligations are binding on the assembly, although the assembly may disagree with those obligations profoundly. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept clauses 105 and 106?

Mr. Wigley: Of course I do—and, as the hon. Gentleman no doubt accepts, the Community obligations are equally binding on the House.

We believe that the assembly should have the right to an appointee in the new United Kingdom permanent representation office in Brussels—UKREP, as it is called—and the right to determine priorities for European funding allocated to Wales. The White Paper said that that needed to be spelt out more clearly during the Bill's passage and I hope that assurances will be given in the winding-up speech. The White Paper also said, in paragraph 3.53, that the Bill would

"provide for members of the assembly to represent Wales on the Committee of the Regions."

I do not see exactly where the Bill deals with that but, if I have missed the reference, it will doubtless be pointed out to me.

Time is passing, so I shall deal only briefly with a number of other issues. One relates to the statutory committees proposed in part III. We do not consider a local government-type committee system appropriate or adequate for our national assembly: it would be too slow and too cumbersome, it would avoid ministerial responsibility and it would be open to abuse. The assembly's Secretaries must be given the power of ministerial responsibility. It is fine for them to be accountable to a subject committee, but we believe that the so-called executive committee must operate as a Cabinet and take responsibility along those lines. If that does not happen, there is a real danger that the assembly will degenerate into a talking shop. We shall return to the issue in Committee, and I welcome what the Secretary of State said about the facility offered in the Bill for progress in that direction.

May we have confirmation that clause 73 gives powers for the establishment of committees fully analogous to our Select Committees, and that the authority of those

committees to call people to appear before them will be equal to that of Select Committees so that they can do a similar job? As for clause 75, might it be possible for Welsh MEPs, when appropriate, to attend assembly committees—although, obviously, not to vote? At the very least, could they be part of the partnership council that is proposed in clause 110?

How will quangos such as the revamped Welsh Development Agency be answerable, and will the same pattern apply to all quangos? May we also have clarification of the intention of clause 22, relating to exactly what powers can be transferred from London Ministers to the assembly? I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said earlier, but I have some difficulty in regard to schedule 2. It maps out the areas that are open to transfer, but it does not deal with matters such as disability policy and the police. Unless there is a facility for amending the schedule by order, I do not think that it will be possible for it to be applied to matters that are not currently covered by it.

Schedule 2 contains interesting anomalies. It includes culture, but does not include heritage; it includes industry, but does not include trade; it includes training, but does not include employment; it includes water, but does not include natural resources. I hope that, either tonight or tomorrow, we can hear some explanation of how the mechanism will work.

I am sorry that the assembly will be entirely dependent on the Secretary of State for both grants and loans. The denial of any tax-varying or independent borrowing power takes a fundamental responsibility from the assembly, which will have less financial autonomy than a parish council.

We in Plaid Cymru believe that all the taxes raised in Wales or on behalf of Wales should be channelled through a Welsh treasury department, but that clearly goes beyond what the Government have in mind. We need some assurance, in the Bill or outside it, about the Government's intentions in regard to the Barnett formula. We need to know that in future Wales will have a more generous deal than that formula has provided in recent years. [*Laughter.*] Conservative Members laugh. It may well be that they do not want Wales to have a better deal, but they will know that independent studies undertaken in Cardiff university have shown that Wales is missing out under the Barnett formula. Other areas may not be missing out, but Wales is.

I shall deal briefly with the unnecessarily vexed question of the assembly's location. We had expected it to be located in city hall, Cardiff—a dignified building worthy of a national assembly and convenient for the Welsh Office civil service. For a Labour-controlled council in our capital city deliberately to frustrate a Labour Secretary of State prompts the question whether Cardiff really wants the assembly at all. If it does not, let there be no doubt that plenty of other places in Wales do: Caernarfon, Wrexham and Aberystwyth would give their right hands for it. I am particularly impressed by the positive moves made by Swansea council, but if the assembly meets outside Cardiff there should be no doubt of the far-reaching implication of such a move. It would, in practice, create a new administrative capital for Wales, which would in due course require the relocation of the Welsh Office and other Government offices.

It would be nonsense to have a European-type farce of civil servants serving committees having their papers moved in packing cases between Brussels and Strasbourg. Those services need to be in one location. The assembly should either be located in Cathays park, where it can be serviced conveniently—city hall is our preferred option—or leave Cardiff altogether. I am amazed at the narrow, selfish, blinkered view of Cardiff council, which is a disgrace to Wales.

I remind Cardiff's civic leaders of an old Welsh proverb:

"A fo ben, bid bont",

which means, "He who wishes to be the leader must also be the facilitator." If Cardiff wishes to enjoy the benefits of being the capital city of Wales, it must take its responsibilities towards Wales seriously. If it does not, so be it: plenty of other places are willing not only to house the assembly, but to serve Wales as her administrative capital.

I wish the Bill a speedy passage, albeit—I hope—in a strengthened form. We as a party will play a constructive role in considering it and as elected members of the assembly in due course. Our objective is to achieve the strongest and most effective national assembly for our country. We hope that that will lead to Wales taking an ever increasing responsibility for her own life and playing an ever greater role in the emerging united Europe. The assembly, however, will ultimately be judged according to the benefit that it brings to the ordinary people of Wales—the practical day-to-day benefit. It is our duty to create a national assembly for Wales that is worthy of their support.

6.7 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I am delighted to follow the constructive good wishes expressed by the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on behalf of his party. I expect similar good wishes from the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) on behalf of his party, joining the coalition of view that narrowly won in the referendum in September. It is sad that that group was not only not joined, but actively opposed—and remains actively opposed—by the Conservative party, whose spokesman this evening, in respect of Wales, offered a hymn of praise in favour of the status quo: no more, no less. The Conservative party is ready to oppose every innovation until it becomes a tradition, as it did in respect of the Welsh Office and the Welsh Development Agency.

This is an historic Bill, and an historic time. I welcome the proposals, and do so with a certain humility, as I was one of those who opposed—for other reasons—the proposals advanced in the 1970s, when I might have been designated a Cymru-sceptic. I have, to some extent, changed sides with my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell).

I accept that the charge will inevitably come over a period. This is the start of the process, and ultimately we will have to move to a quasi-federal system through devolution in England as well as in Wales and Scotland.

I want to make three points, the first of which stands on its own. The key decision on whether to have an assembly has now been taken by the yes vote in the referendum. It was taken by the people of Wales in a free vote. We respect that vote, as we would have done had it

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

narrowly gone the other way. Had there been a slim majority against the Government's proposals, the Bill would not have come before the House. Such an opportunity arises once in a generation. One vote is enough. I concede that the narrowness of the majority imposes certain constraints on the Government, but I commend the Secretary of State's approach. He has accepted that there are constraints on his proposal.

The arguments and hesitations prior to the referendum must now be put in the context of the yes vote. I am wholly disappointed by the negative response of the Conservative party in Parliament. It has an "attitude problem" with the assembly. The proper response would have been to accept the decision taken by the people in September, and to try to improve the Bill at the edges in conformity with Conservative principles.

I was particularly irritated at Welsh Question Time last Wednesday by the narrow and cheap points made by Conservative Members. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) talked about the taxpayers of Wales being expected

"to pay ever-increasing amounts to prop up"

the Secretary of State's incompetence. The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) referred to the assembly as

"a job-destroying and expensive bureaucracy"—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 337-42.]

and the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said that 75 per cent. of the Welsh electorate had voted against the proposal. We could make the same cheap points about the elected dictatorship in 1983, 1987 and 1992, when the Conservative party was elected with 42 per cent. or 43 per cent. of a 70 per cent. turnout, which is just under a third of the total electorate. That did not prevent the Conservative party from introducing the poll tax and other measures at that time.

The people of Wales had the opportunity in the referendum to express their view. They voted in favour of an assembly, and we should take the Bill further in the context of that positive vote. I am irritated by the patronising, insulting and shallow view of the Conservative party in Parliament. It is only fair to add that I do not find such a patronising and shallow response from members of the Conservative party to whom I speak in Wales. Indeed, there has been quite a substantial sea change.

Over the weekend, I talked to a senior Conservative in Wales, who told me that he and his colleagues are actively preparing for the elections. That is a different, a positive, approach, and a recognition of the result of the referendum and the fact that we are now operating in a new context.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that to oppose the creation of an assembly in principle while preparing to fight the election, given that it will happen, albeit wrongly in our view, is a consistent approach to take?

Mr. Anderson: The principle of having or not having an assembly was decided not by us, but by the people in the referendum. Once that major step has been taken, everything else is detail, and we can have a proper debate on the detail in Committee.

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman suggested that the Government have been placed under certain constraints by the narrowness of the referendum result. How are those constraints expressed in the Bill?

Mr. Anderson: I can give the hon. Gentleman a catalogue of examples. Had we been triumphalist and said that the majority that we won on 1 May entitled us to write the Bill as we liked, it is conceivable that we would not have adopted a system of proportional representation, which may bring the Conservative party back to life in Wales, given that it was chased out of Wales at the last election. That is one of the greatest acts of political generosity by a party that believes that a moribund corpse of the Conservative party in Wales is bad for democracy. The Conservative party had 20 per cent. of the votes in the election, but has no seats in Wales. We are trying to help because we are democrats: we are not being triumphalist.

Another example of my right hon. Friend's inclusive approach is the establishment of a commission, the chairman of which—I shall choose my words carefully—has never been known as a Labour supporter. I support that inclusive approach. One of the great advantages of Wales is its diversity. The Bill ensures that there is a statutory obligation to have a committee for north Wales and other committees throughout Wales. I could go on, but I shall not, because time is short. I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider objectively the way in which my right hon. Friend has most commendably responded.

Secondly, the assembly could be a mechanism for binding the people of Wales together, and a focus for Welsh identity. Reference has been made to the identity of Wales within the European Union. May I add a smaller footnote: hon. Members may not know that the Welsh Assembly will be able to become a full member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, because it will have legislative powers. I have taken legal advice, and I am told that the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will, if they so wish, be members of that association, which will be another interesting way of boosting and endorsing Welsh identity.

I fully appreciate the spirit of the Government's approach: it is not triumphalist, but objectively based on democracy and consistent with our Welsh traditions.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman was pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) to give examples of the restraints that have been imposed on the Secretary of State and which he has accepted, because of the narrowness of the referendum result. The first example he gave was the Secretary of State's adoption of a system of proportional representation instead of the first-past-the-post system, but that proposal was in the White Paper. The second example was the membership of the commission appointed by the Secretary of State to advise on Standing Orders, but that is also in the White Paper, which says that it will include:

"representatives of each of the main political parties in Wales".

The Secretary of State has not given one breath of a concession in recognition of the fact that the majority in the referendum was minute.

Mr. Anderson: First, I should have said that we should look at the advisory committee. Secondly, the issue of location has been opened for discussion by the Secretary of State through the consultative document that was issued on Thursday. The system of proportional representation may with one leap bring back from the dead the Conservative party in Wales. I shall give some of my reasons for supporting that proposal. I sent a memorandum to Labour's commission on precisely the lines that were accepted.

To have more than 60 members would give rise to a negative reaction in Wales, because it would be said that there were too many legislators. We need a system of voting that is known to the electorate: hence the use of Westminster seats and the current European seats. The Westminster base will provide a link with constituencies. Perhaps most important is the fact that the number of assembly members coincides exactly with the number of seats in Swansea guildhall.

Mr. Ron Davies: Perhaps I could clarify the genuine point that was debated between my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). In the White Paper we proposed a statutory commission. Of course, that cannot be created until after Royal Assent, which will be in July next year. To ensure a proper process of consultation between now and Royal Assent, I have created the advisory committee, which will be representative of all interests in Wales. It is not in the White Paper: it is an innovation and a genuine attempt to find a broader base on which to construct the working arrangements and the standing orders. It is in addition to the consultation that the Welsh Office is undertaking with all interests in Wales. We are consulting the Welsh Local Government Association, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, the CBI, the Institute of Welsh Affairs and the Green Alliance. The genuine process of consultation goes far beyond anything that was envisaged in the White Paper.

Mr. Anderson: I am pleased to have that clarification from my right hon. Friend. The proof of the pudding will be in the working out of the proposals. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is waving a piece of paper.

Mr. Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the consultation process was going on before the general election and for some time before the publication of the Bill? It is more constructive to comment inclusively rather than to engage in the destructive criticism that tends to come from the official Opposition.

Mr. Anderson: I am convinced that Moses Ron did not bring the tablets of stone down from Plynlimon, send them to the House and then leave them. The process is inclusive and it is wholly consistent with the spirit of diversity in Wales. Thus Hiraeth is not longing for Wales but for one's own locality. People who go to parties in Wales are never asked, as they would be in England, "What do you do?" as if one's identity is in one's job. People are asked where they come from, because the essence of our identity is the local area from which we come. That is a far more human response.

It is not only in structures but in policies that we look for something different in the assembly. Who can doubt that, if the assembly had been in existence for some years, we would not now have a system of communications in Wales that makes it difficult to move from north to south? I am sure that members of the assembly when they meet in different locations will see at first hand the problems that are encountered in moving from one part of Wales to the other. Thus transport priorities will be different.

There is another policy that I hope that the assembly will change. I hope that its members will set their minds against the centralisation that was a feature of Conservative government in the 1980s and beyond and which allowed such a concentration of resources in Cardiff and the south-east. We were under the satrapy of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). At one time the Cardiff Bay development corporation received £52.5 million a year in grant aid but less than half that amount went to the Welsh Development Agency for the rest of its area.

There are enormous distortions of expenditure. For example, on 21 November in a written answer, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) was informed that over the past three years there was £376.4 million publicly funded capital expenditure in Cardiff. That is a distortion, and it arose because decisions were taken by a Secretary of State who was not seriously accountable to Wales. Such distortion will not occur in future, because people from different parts of Wales will be in favour of a far greater balance of development.

Thirdly, the location of the assembly can also fulfil the same need for diversity in Wales. In setting up the assembly we do not want to substitute one form of centralisation for another. We must be wholly in tune with subsidiarity. For the Conservative party, European subsidiarity stopped at London. We shall ensure that it does not even stop at Cardiff but extends to other parts of Wales.

I make no comment on the reasons for Cardiff council deciding not to proceed with the offer of the city hall. Happily, as a Swansea boy, I have no responsibility for Cardiff city council. However, its decision opens the debate—hence the consultative document. Decentralisation would have enormous practical and symbolic importance. It is not necessary to have the assembly in the capital city. It is certainly no longer necessary because of technical advances. I naturally make the case for Swansea guildhall, which by some happy chance has 60 seats in its council chamber. That number was in the memorandum that I sent some months ago to the Welsh Labour party, although I did not think at that time that the assembly would not be in Cardiff.

Swansea guildhall, in conjunction with Mold, Aberystwyth and Cardiff, is by far the most cost-effective option. I look forward to the Secretary of State saying to the people of Wales, "Look, we said that the cost would be £17 million, but we have managed to save a great deal of money, and the savings from that cost-effective option will be used for education and health."

I remind my right hon. Friend of the letter from Swansea's chief executive to him on 2 December which effectively states that we in Swansea will not be beaten on cost. It states:

"At the present time the advice of our respective Estate advisers is that the leaseback to the Council would be £60,000 p. a. resulting in a net rental cost for the Assembly of £340,000 p. a."

[Mr. Anderson]

The chief executive repeats the key point when she states:

"we would be happy to negotiate other arrangements, either freehold or leasehold, for the Assembly's tenure of the Guildhall."

The letter goes on to say that they

"have set out to match the vision of their forefathers who, amongst many other achievements, bequeathed us the magnificent Guildhall building . . . Having tested such a wide range of local opinion, we have come to the view that in financial terms we should seek no more from you than the net rental figure set out above. In other words, the broader economic and democratic benefits of locating the National Assembly in Swansea would be full justification for absorption of any consequential costs to the Council".

I will not set out the importance administrative, historical, cultural and economic case for Swansea.

For Cardiff, it would not matter all that much if the assembly were to be sited in Swansea. For Swansea and the rest of the west Wales councils that have supported its location there, it would be earnest proof of the Welsh Office's intention to decentralise. I believe that the Secretary of State accepts that there has been an enormous distortion of investment in south-east Wales. To locate the assembly in Swansea would be a counter-magnet, something that, in terms of public investment and public symbolism, would move the focus a little further west—to the boundary of, dare I call it, Welsh Wales and English Wales and to the region that actually voted for the assembly.

Over the weekend, I gained some idea of the enthusiasm in Swansea for the project. On Friday, I was at the prize giving of the Swansea Institute of Higher Education at Swansea's guildhall. When the acting principal mentioned that the guildhall could be the site of the assembly, there was an enormous roar of approval. On Saturday afternoon, I was with young Labour in the streets of Swansea collecting signatures. Generally, there was an enormously warm response to the idea.

I can therefore truly say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that there would be a whole-hearted and enthusiastic welcome from Swansea if the assembly were to be sited there, with committee meetings elsewhere in Wales. It would be against the prevailing trend of putting everything in south-east Wales, and it would be an enormous and welcome millennium project for the city and for south-west Wales.

6.31 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill. I gladly follow the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who, with enthusiasm for his city, shows that there would be a warm welcome if the assembly were located there. They are welcoming people in Swansea, and I understand why he said what he did. Only time will tell whether his party will sort out the problems of the assembly's location. Cardiff has strong claims, but the argument cannot go on for ever.

The assembly is an historic milestone. The referendum vote was historic, and I congratulate the Secretary of State for Wales, his team and the "Yes for Wales" team on delivering that vote. We all contributed to it in a spirit of co-operation, and we are pleased about that.

The Conservatives would like a re-run of the referendum. They want to turn the clock back, but even in the town of Presteigne in my constituency, which is just 500 yd from the Herefordshire border, when an enterprising person put up on his shop window a list for people to sign saying, "We wish to see a re-run of the referendum," only 12 people did so. If only 12 people signed a list in Presteigne, what hope have the Conservatives in the rest of Wales?

Conservative Members have said various things about the validity of the referendum, but only 43 per cent. of the electorate turned out to elect the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) in the by-election the other day, and only just over 50 per cent. of the Conservative party's membership elected its present leader—the first time that the party's membership has been involved in a party leader election. I remind Conservative Members of a person who used to sit on the Liberal Benches—a certain Winston Churchill—who returned to Conservative ranks and said that one vote was enough. That is what history tells us.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I shall try for the third time to make the point that hon. Members in other parties are avoiding: there is a difference between an ordinary vote and a vote on a major constitutional issue. We keep hearing this fudge that concessions are being made to acknowledge the smallness of the majority, but no one has made any concession acknowledging that point.

Mr. Livsey: I did not notice the hon. Gentleman making determined efforts to put a clause into the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill to create a threshold, so ensuring that the principle that he is advancing now was part of the referendum. As he failed to do that, his argument falls flat on its face.

Like many Welshmen, I have worked outside my country. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, I worked in Scotland. A pamphlet was produced at that time, which said in the introduction:

"Our standpoint is certainly Tory.

We are convinced that a measure of devolution to Scotland of power over her domestic affairs is essential. In every meaningful sense except the exercise of control over her internal affairs, Scotland is a country: to apply the current jargon of 'region' is inaccurate."

It went on to say other things that basically favoured devolution. At the end, the pamphlet stated that one of its authors was a certain "Michael Ancram".

I remember that well, because I was the Liberal party candidate in Scotland contesting the Perth seat. Views have changed over the years—the Conservative party's constitutional spokesman now opposes the creation of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. During the referendum campaign, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) told the Scots that the Scottish Parliament had too much power, but when he was in Wales, he told us that the Welsh Assembly needed more. There was a counterpoint to that argument.

In discussing the Bill and in debating it in Committee, we have a great opportunity to get it right for Wales. I make no apologies for making remarks that may be slightly critical of certain aspects, but they are made in the spirit of co-operation and to achieve an assembly that is fair, democratic, just, free and united. I am sure that the forebears in my party, including Lloyd George and Gladstone, and Tom Ellis, leader of Cymru Fydd, whom the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) mentioned, were all in favour of a Welsh Parliament.

During this century, we have seen the creation of the Welsh Office, the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales and the gradual strengthening of government in Wales. Now is the time to give Wales true democracy. We want to unite English and Welsh speakers, rural and urban Wales, and poor and middle-income families in Wales—there are not many really rich people in Wales. We want to unite women, craftspeople, educators, farmers, miners, entrepreneurs, teenagers and all other sections of society.

Over the years, it has been the Conservatives' tactic to divide and rule. That has been their stock in trade, but references to fear—and they are contained in the reasoned amendment—do not work any more on the people of Wales because, at the referendum, diversity was proved to be our strength. During the referendum campaign, the people of Wales came of age, because they co-operated with each other and did not listen to the campaign of fear that was directed at them.

I should like to make a general point. The way things are set at the moment, in 1999, we shall have Welsh Assembly, county council and European Parliament elections. I ask the Secretary of State to consider the possibility of delaying the county council elections for one year, to the year 2000. It has been done before, in 1973-74. It might be a better and more constructive way to proceed, so that there is a proper concentration in 1999 on the assembly elections and then a proper concentration in 2000 on the county council elections. Clause 3 relates to community councils.

Clause 4 relates to the electoral systems. The Liberal Democrats welcome the introduction of proportional representation for elections to the Welsh Assembly. We note that 40 seats will be under the first-past-the-post system and 20 under the additional member system. I agree with some of the Opposition's comments about open lists. That possibility should be examined in Committee, as open lists have a considerable amount going for them.

Mr. Ron Davies: The debate on open lists was raised in the context of the European elections. There was an argument that electors had the opportunity to cast only one vote, so there was some criticism that they would be coerced into voting for the party rather than having the opportunity to vote for a preferred candidate within the list. I understand that argument as it relates to the European elections.

However, with the assembly elections, people will not be coerced into voting only once, because they will have two votes. They will be able to vote for their preferred candidate under the first-past-the-post system, so it is not unreasonable—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) wants to play a constructive part in the debate, he should enter into the spirit. I am trying to explain an important point. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to raise questions about how parties select candidates, I shall be happy to debate that with him later.

I can tell the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) that, with the elections for the assembly, it is not unreasonable to expect electors who will be able to vote for the candidate of their choice then to vote for the party of their choice, because that is the basis on which the additional members for the wider constituency will be calculated.

Mr. Livsey: I understand where the Secretary of State is coming from, but it is possible to have various members on an open list from different wings of a political party, on which the electorate might like to pronounce. It gives them more freedom of action when they vote under the additional member system. We must investigate various aspects of that in Committee.

Has the Secretary of State considered getting the Electoral Reform Society to examine the system of proportional representation for the Welsh Assembly? It might have some constructive comments to make.

When referring to my former colleague Alex Carlile, who represented Montgomery, the Secretary of State said that, if the outcome of the first assembly election was not as proportional as was thought to be fair, there might be a possibility of altering the system. There is also the possibility that the right hon. Gentleman might not be the Secretary of State for Wales; he might have moved onwards and upwards by that time. Another occupant of his office might take a contrary view. There is a case for trying to get it right first time. We shall be testing the Secretary of State in Committee, in a democratic and constructive way, on some of these matters.

Like the right hon. Member for Caernarfon, we regret the fact that the Bill provides for only secondary legislation, and that there are no tax-raising powers. We would like law-making and tax-raising powers in a Senedd, which would have more power. I am sure that we shall discuss that in Committee. We need to ensure that the assembly is truly geographically inclusive. I should like it to sit in Llandrindod Wells, in my constituency. It is very well placed—some say that it is equally inaccessible for everyone in Wales. Perhaps that is a virtue, in some respects.

During the past three months, there has been an increasing divide between the rural and the urban areas not just in Britain generally, but in Wales. That is surprising, because Wales is close to a rural life. The current crisis in the beef industry is compounded by ignorance among decision makers. I do not refer to the Secretary of State, who had a long tenure in agriculture and has a significant rural area in his constituency. However, others have taken an urban stance on problems in the agricultural industry. There is no market for beef at the moment, but I will not go into that.

I expect the Welsh Assembly to be better informed in making decisions about agriculture. I expect its members to be pretty close to rural roots. That must be reflected in the assembly's agriculture committee, which must have a real power to influence. Outside the south Wales mining valleys—and even they have an element of agriculture—and outside parts of north-east Wales, Wales is a very rural country. In that respect, it is not dissimilar to Ireland, which wields great power on agricultural issues in the European Union. Wales, through its assembly, could also have a significant influence on agricultural and rural policies.

If there is a Cabinet system—and my party is coming round to that view—there should be a Minister exclusively responsible for agriculture, as well as one exclusively responsible for rural affairs. Agriculture is very important

[Mr. Livsey]

to the rural economy, with up to 25 per cent. of the Welsh population—especially in my area of mid-Wales—involved in agriculture. It is a significant part of the Welsh economy.

Mr. Jenkin: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's musings about beef policy. Is it his understanding that an order to ban beef on the bone would be executed by the Welsh Assembly in respect of Wales and by the Scottish Parliament in respect of Scotland, and that such an order would apply in England only if executed by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—that suggests chaos on such an issue—or that the order would be a United Kingdom ban executed through this Parliament by the Minister of Agriculture?

Mr. Livsey: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have noted that it was the Minister of Agriculture who made the announcement the other day. He has the power, under primary legislation, to make such orders. I do not foresee the Welsh Assembly, which will have only secondary legislation powers, being able to do something like that.

The Bill refers to reform of the health service, especially health authorities, in Wales. It refers to the possibility of creating one health authority for Wales. I welcome that, because I believe that health administration in Wales is too complex and too bureaucratic. I should like there to be one health authority in Wales, and some thought to be given to how powers are given to that health authority and to strengthening trusts—based on communities—across Wales.

I should like trusts to be coterminous with local authorities. In Northern Ireland, for example, there is strong co-operation between social services and health departments—they are essentially united—providing not only cost savings but more effective care for the elderly and children, and other aspects of care.

In the Welsh Grand Committee, I mentioned the need for the Welsh Assembly to have more powers on transport, and particularly to have more influence over rail policy. Liberal Democrats think that we cannot implement an integrated transport policy in Wales without having real influence over rail policy. We shall have to make progress on that matter. Wales certainly has a third-world road communications system, which is a legacy of 18 years of conservatism. I hope that the assembly will soon start to put that legacy right.

On the assembly's procedure, clause 49 provides that the Secretary of State will have power to modify standing orders and even to alter standing orders proposed by the commission. Liberal Democrats welcome the establishment of a commission—which I am sure will be composed of people of authority and wisdom—but we think that the Secretary of State's power to alter the commission's decisions will give him perhaps a little too much power. Surely the commission's word is final. It certainly should be in a matter of constitutional reform.

Mr. Ron Davies: That is a fair point; and it is a matter of judgment. My view was that the Secretary of State is answerable to the House, and that the commission is answerable to no one other than the Secretary of State. It therefore seemed that the most appropriate thing to do was to ensure that the commission took a view reflecting the advisory committee's recommendations—which would have to be put in the public domain—and that the Secretary of State would have to explain any deviation from those recommendations. That would place responsibility on the shoulders of the person who is ultimately democratically answerable.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the provision is there only as a fail-safe mechanism, and that, if the Secretary of State were to depart from the commission's recommendations, he would do so only on the basis of providing a very good public explanation of what the commission was proposing and why he was deviating from it.

Mr. Livsey: I welcome the Secretary of State's comments. Although I regard him as a reasonable man, perhaps a future holder of his office will not take the same view. We shall have to examine the matter.

Mr. Dalyell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for intruding on his speech, but he said just a moment ago that the road system in Wales was like that in a third-world country. I do not know whether that is true—

Mr. Wigley: It is.

Mr. Dalyell: If it is true and it is to be put right, may an outsider ask where the money will come from? It is all part of the same kitty of resources.

Mr. Livsey: That is a fair question. The Scottish Office, for example—I am very familiar with the hon. Gentleman's country of Scotland—has spent a lot of money on the A9 from Perth to Inverness. It would be wonderful if we had such a road—not a great big motorway or dual carriageway, but going fairly straight—right up through the spine of Wales. I could take him through my constituency, and he would be quite dizzy by the end of his journey; and that trip would be only in my constituency. From my constituency, I can travel to Scotland—on the road system in England—more quickly than I can reach Anglesey. We do not have that infrastructure in Wales.

Liberal Democrats hope that the commission will have a good political mix, perhaps reflecting the general election results.

Clause 53 provides that the assembly will establish committees on the basis of party balance. Does that mean that a member from a party other than the ruling party will have no chance of becoming a committee chairman? Perhaps the House will explore that matter in Committee.

Clause 58 does not specify the number of members on the assembly's executive committee. We shall have to sharpen up that point in Committee. In some circumstances, we could end up with perhaps only three or four members on the executive committee. I am sure that that is not the Secretary of State's intention, and that no hon. Member wants an arrangement that is too cosy.

Mr. Ron Davies: The hon. Gentleman mentioned clause 53 and queried whether committee chairmen will

be from various parties. I draw his attention to clause 53(2)(b)—I realise that this is the Second Reading debate, and I shall not often intervene in such detail—which clearly provides that committee members

"shall . . . be elected so as to secure that, as far as is practicable, the balance of the parties in the Assembly is reflected in the membership of the committee."

Mr. Livsey: I do not want to go into too much detail in a Second Reading debate, but we can debate the matter further in Committee. Several points might emerge in that debate.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Livsey: I give way for the last time, because I have spoken for too long.

Mr. Syms: The hon. Gentleman said that he believes that the Secretary of State is a reasonable man. Did the Secretary of State consult him on appointing the Liberal Democrat member of the advisory committee? If so, in what way?

Mr. Livsey: We certainly discussed the matter—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] We were invited to the Welsh Office, as were members of Plaid Cymru, and we discussed the matter. The Conservative party did not take up the offer—which is unfortunate, but a statement of fact.

Liberal Democrats believe that regional committees must be strong throughout the length and breadth of Wales, perhaps to counteract too much power in the south-east. I am sure that all hon. Members wish power to be distributed fairly across Wales. I am sure that we shall get that right.

The block grant will be decided in the House. Many issues in the Bill—such as loans and the Secretary of State making payments to the assembly—have already been mentioned in this debate. The Barnett formula has also been mentioned. Liberal Democrats think it vital that the Barnett formula remains. There are also strong reasons why it should be reinforced. As Welsh Members know, in the past dozen years, gross domestic product in Wales has dropped by 10 per cent., and we need compensation through the Barnett formula for that drop. We shall need firmer commitments on that.

Quangos in Wales need to be sorted out, and I sincerely hope that some of them will be abolished in the next couple of years. I also hope that the assembly will have a big input into how quangos are run. We must test the Government's resolve in that respect. As a mid-Wales Member, the loss of the Development Board for Rural Wales I regret. We hope that we shall be given sufficient powers in the proposed powerhouse for mid-Wales to compensate for the loss of that body, but it will have to do an extremely good job to equal what the DBRW has done in the past 18 years.

We must look at the way in which the national parks are run. I shall refrain from discussing the current situation in my own national park, which is not exactly satisfactory. The national parks should be run according to a more democratic system, and the members governing them should be elected from candidates drawn from residents within each national park. That would create more local support for the parks.

The concordat on Europe is extremely important. Wales will have its place in Europe as one of its regions. The current review of structural funds and the loss of objective 5b status should be discussed and resolved in the Welsh Assembly, but I understand that that decision is subject to a timetable and will be reached by 1999.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the people of Wales, including those who voted no at the referendum, have accepted that there will be an assembly and, like me, they care about and are proud of their inheritance and our heritage. We believe that it is our duty in this House to create an assembly of which we in Wales can all be proud. If we achieve that, we shall leave for the next generation something worth while, which they can get their teeth into in the 21st century.

7.1 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) was sitting in front of me earlier and he suggested that if I spoke I should declare an interest as I have expressed the intention to stand for the Welsh Assembly. I am not sure whether I will be the only Labour Member to do so. Some Opposition Members may do likewise, but obviously Conservative Members cannot declare such an interest, although some ex-Conservative Members, seeking re-entry into politics, may do so. I believe that some have expressed that intention.

I should like to question the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who has again temporarily left the Chamber, about his mathematics. He complained that the Secretary of State for Wales had laughed at the abysmal performance of the Tories in Wales, who got less than 20 per cent. of the vote at the general election. He asked what was so terrible about getting 20 per cent. of the vote when the Government registered only 25 per cent. support for the Welsh Assembly in the referendum. Of course, he made the fundamental mistake of not comparing like with like. The yes vote for the assembly, at 50.3 per cent., was more than two and half times greater than the Conservatives' 20 per cent. in the general election.

If the right hon. Gentleman wants to use as a comparison the 25 per cent. of the electorate who voted yes at the referendum, and we allow for the turnout at the election, the Conservative share of the electorate is something like 14 per cent. Again, that is not far off half the yes vote recorded at the referendum. The right hon. Gentleman needs to be more careful in his use of figures.

The right hon. Gentleman's speech in response to the Secretary of State was short on the historical context for the debate. He did not seem to realise that this is an extremely historic measure because it is the sixth time that the House has attempted to deal with the status of the Celtic fringe countries of the British Isles. I say it is the sixth attempt because I am leaving out the unsuccessful government of Wales and Scotland Bills of the late 1970s.

Given that it is extremely likely that this Bill, based on the support registered at the referendum, will become an Act, we are talking about six Acts that have dealt with Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The two original Acts of Union for Wales were agreed in the middle of the

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

16th century. We then had the Scottish Act of Union in 1707; followed by the Irish Act of Union in 1801; and then the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The right hon. Member for Devizes was extremely complimentary about its preamble. The final piece of legislation, the Government of Wales Bill, is one of a mere six measures over 450 years designed to deal with matters of such historical importance. That demonstrates to all of us that we are participating in an historic debate.

I am sure that many previous Secretaries of State for Wales and other politicians representing Welsh constituencies would be rightly jealous of the fact that the current Secretary of State for Wales is in a position to introduce the Bill with the backing of the referendum.

There is now every likelihood that the Bill will pass into law and that there will be a Welsh Assembly, sitting, I should like to think, in Cardiff city hall. In fact, an emergency meeting of Cardiff county council's Labour group started five minutes ago and, who knows, it may decide to reverse its earlier decision on the matter. If we had a video conference link, of which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is so fond, between the Palace of Westminster and Cardiff county council's headquarters at Atlantic wharf, we would know what the Labour group was thinking, just as the group would know what we were thinking.

In 18 months' time, there may be a Welsh Assembly meeting for the first time. The last time that happened was for two weeks in 1404—quite unlike the situation in Scotland and Ireland—when there were incipient Welsh Parliaments during Owain Glyndwr's rebellion against English rule. They met once at Machynlleth and once at Dolgellau, although the historical record about that second meeting is vague. The representatives at the Machynlleth Parliament were chosen by rather more democratic means than the procedures governing the House at the time. At least two representatives were chosen from every Welsh commote, as the parishes were then called.

It is clear, therefore, that today's debate concerns events of major historical significance. The right hon. Member for Devizes, however, made daft alleged jokes about great halls of people and, by doing so, sold his party and Wales short. His performance as Opposition spokesman also sold the House short.

The right hon. Gentleman completely forgot the context of the democratic devolution which we have gradually built up in Wales in the past 75 years since the original Welsh Board of Health and the Welsh Board of Education were set up in Cardiff in the 1920s. That development was followed by the institution, 33 years ago, of the office of Secretary of State for Wales. That office has been held by more Conservative Members than Labour Members because of the political current in this country during that time. Certainly in the past 18 years of Conservative rule there was no lack of volunteers for that position, even when the Government ran out of Welsh ones. The same can be said of the period between 1970 and 1974, when the Conservatives first had the opportunity to fill that office.

The right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said that it is 111 years since the first public calls were made by recognised Welsh public bodies or major political parties for an elected council for Wales. The demand has existed for many years and it has been met by various strategies to provide administrative devolution, without accompanying democratic devolution. The English regions will find out, however, that administrative devolution inevitably leads to demands for democratic devolution, because mere administrative devolution is considered to be too bureaucratic.

Some people, including the right hon. Member for Devizes, have made the criticisms that the arrangements are a dog's dinner, that they leave too many questions unanswered, that they are too reliant on good will, that they do not cater for the storms and that they will work only during periods of calm. To be honest, all methods of democratic government rely on a degree of good will and mutual understanding.

This country's reliance until now on the supremacy of Parliament, rather than on a written constitution, has meant an even greater than usual reliance on good will; but, by and large, that good will has not failed us throughout the history of Parliament. It is good will which has carried us forward, not the demand for written, clear constitutional definitions of what is federal, non-federal or quasi-federal. We have relied on an element of British common sense to carry us through any disputes, whereas other countries such as the USA and Germany have relied on written constitutions that contain specific provisions requiring 75 per cent. or two-thirds agreement to make changes.

Mr. Swayne: Can the hon. Gentleman comment on the inevitability of an element among those who support the assembly and who will be members of it setting out to maximise disputes between the assembly and Westminster, precisely because they want the assembly to become a parliament for an independent Wales? Will he reflect on the fact that the arrangements, if they are to survive, will have to work when there is a lack of good will, as well as when there is an abundance of it?

Mr. Morgan: I certainly do not deny that there will be periods of stress in the relationship between any devolved parliament and the supreme central Parliament. Looking ahead over the next quarter century, I would never deny the likelihood of a few punch-ups and hot arguments between Westminster and a devolved parliament, but what does the hon. Gentleman think happens in other countries with devolved parliaments? What does he think happens in Germany in respect of decisions about what the länder governments should and should not be allowed to do?

What is at issue is whether that is an argument against democratic devolution. In the debate so far, Opposition Members have tried to stir up the idea that democratic devolution will be unworkable because of the likelihood of such disputes, but a crisis such as the hon. Gentleman describes is far more likely to occur if we do not have democratic devolution.

Now that we have had the referendum, it is not right that the House should be detained overlong by anything that is predicated on our putting into operation anything other than a form of Welsh devolution, with its first sitting in mid-1999. The sooner the official Opposition—although the Conservatives are hardly the official Opposition in Wales—get used to the idea that there is going to be a Welsh Assembly, the better.

The Conservatives are starting to think about methods of selecting candidates and how to participate in the assembly. Once they have secured reasonable representation, proportionate to their usual level of support in Wales—let us hope they have a good year and exceed the 20 per cent. mark—they will find themselves taking part in a democratic assembly. They might occasionally find themselves enjoying it, rather than enduring it through gritted teeth, as seems to be their feeling today.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): We do not hope that.

Mr. Morgan: Sorry—in making my predictions about the level of support that the Conservatives will achieve, I am speaking as an ex-academic political scientist and psephologist.

Britain is unusual in having no written constitution; when doing things such as this, we edge our way forward from administrative devolution to democratic devolution. Democratic devolution came to Northern Ireland—indeed, that is the only previous example, although it does not provide a model that one can quote with any commendation, as it was withdrawn after 50 years in 1972 because of the unusual religious circumstances and community divisions in Northern Ireland.

People have said that we must remember the yes-no divide within Wales. We can all see that the referendum result was close, but we can also see that it showed a sort of historic line down the middle of Wales—an east-west divide stretching roughly from Great Ormes Head at Llandudno down to Nash Point or Port Talbot. West of that line, the vote was mostly yes; east of the line, the vote was mostly no, but the significant point is that there were large numbers of no voters in the yes areas and large numbers of yes voters in the no areas.

One has to express surprise at the level of the yes vote in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards). All credit is due to him for the fact—staggering to those involved in the yes campaign—that 10,000 people voted yes within the Monmouthshire local authority area. That showed that there was still a large yes vote even in what is often referred to as the most anglicised area of Wales, or even as an area which has never really accepted that it is part of Wales—Monmouthshire having been declared part of Wales only during the 1960s. The divide was not a sharp one—the majorities fell east and west of the line I described, but there was more of a spectrum, with the percentage of yes voters gradually increasing the further westward one looked. There is no great danger of Wales being divided; none the less, the Welsh Assembly must make every effort to act as a bridge between yes-voting and no-voting areas.

In the absence of true democratic institutions in the past in Wales, and given our geography—the reverse of Scotland's, where the mountains are on the outside and the people live in the middle, whereas in Wales the mountains are in the middle and the population live around the outside—centrifugal forces are strong in Wales. The Welsh Assembly will, for the first time, provide a focus—a collecting point—for Welsh public opinion in one coherent whole. Therefore, for the first time, the Welsh people will be able to express themselves democratically, rather than being divided by the forces of geography—the position of the mountains and the distribution of the population on the plains and in the river valleys of the Severn and the Wye.

Our geography also helps to explain the difference between the level of support for devolution in Scotland and in Wales. Given that 80 per cent. of the Scottish population lives in the central area, the centripetal forces are extremely strong, so it was easy for the yes campaign there to secure a high proportion of the vote, whereas it was difficult for us in Wales.

Our difficulty was increased by the fact that the word "Welsh" carries two meanings, whereas the word "Scottish" does not. When we talk about a Scottish Parliament, everyone is clear about what we mean; but when they hear the words "Welsh Assembly", many people—especially in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth—think that that means a Welsh-speaking assembly. The word "Welsh" has a meaning in the sense of language as well as in the sense of nationality and that gives rise to a somewhat bifocal view of Welsh identity. In the more anglicised areas, people are immediately suspicious of the word "Welsh", in case it means the Welsh language being rammed down their throats—an expression which is quite common in parts of Cardiff and Newport and is heard even more often further east, in the Wye valley and in north-east Wales.

I am therefore pleased to see that the wording of the Bill has been changed from "Welsh Assembly" to "National Assembly for Wales", which gets around that bifocal view of the word "Welsh". Non-Welsh speakers suspect that something is about to be imposed on them if they agree to something Welsh, because they think the word refers to the language, not the nationality. I am pleased that, in making adaptations as we have progressed from the White Paper to the referendum campaign and on to the Bill itself, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken such concerns on board.

Since the publication of the Bill and, more recently, the consultation paper, there has been controversy about where the assembly should be located. Cardiff councillors and Members representing Cardiff are not the most popular people among supporters of the assembly. People are suggesting that the population of Cardiff is less than whole-hearted, or is complacent, about Cardiff being the capital of Wales. Swansea people seem to be keen as mustard, but the people in Cardiff do not seem to care too much whether the assembly is located there or not. A peculiar situation has arisen and I am hoping that it may be resolved at the conclusion of tonight's meeting, or perhaps at another emergency group meeting on Wednesday. It is a pity that it has come to this.

The consultation paper has unleashed commercial and political forces. Now that the deal between the Labour group of Cardiff county council and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has broken down—not irrevocably, we hope—and my right hon. Friend has issued the consultation paper on the Welsh Assembly's location, forces have been unleashed. Those forces could be described as the PFI and the PFO. The private finance initiative involves property developers who want the Welsh Assembly as part of their property development because they think that it will boost its value. PFO stands for parochialism fever outbreak. The combination of PFI and PFO is unhealthy and can get out of hand.

[Mr. Morgan]

There are property developers in Cardiff who see enormous value in having the Welsh Assembly in an urban regeneration area. At least three, if not four, schemes in Cardiff bay are being unveiled and pushed. It was put to me very simply: the developers look at the White Paper, or the Bill, and say that the assembly's running costs will be halfway between £15 million and £20 million—let us call it £17 million.

If the assembly is located in the middle of an urban regeneration PFI comprehensive redevelopment scheme, the property developers will say that that figure, multiplied by 10, will give the spending power emanating from the assembly—£170 million. They say that that £170 million guaranteed spend from the assembly in its first 10 years will fill the restaurants, taxis, hotels and houses. They therefore promise to invest £170 million in the surrounding property if they are allowed to build the assembly. Some of them are implying that they will even build the Welsh Assembly for half price or less for the honour of having it in the centre of their PFI comprehensive redevelopment scheme.

All those factors show that it will be a difficult race for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ride. He will have to hold on to the reins carefully because those forces have been unleashed. None of that would have happened if the negotiations over Cardiff city hall had not broken down—that is a tragedy.

Cardiff city hall was built to ambitious standards in 1903. It was built as part of the campaign to have Cardiff declared not the capital city of Wales, but its first city. Cardiff was not a city at the time and part of the campaign was for it to be declared a city—much later, it was to become a capital city. It was because it wanted to be a city that it thought that it should have a city hall to match its ambitions, which is why it has an enormous clock tower, known in Wales as the equivalent of Big Ben. In many ways, it is the Welsh Big Ben, but Big Ben has more of a claim to be called Welsh than does Cardiff's clock tower.

I am told that Big Ben is named after Sir Benjamin Hall, a Gwent ironmaster, who stood 6 ft 4 in, weighed about 20 stone and was known as Big Ben. He was the Commissioner of Works of the Palace of Westminster. I am told that the clock tower of Cardiff city hall is a straight steal from the clock tower of Caracas cathedral, so Big Ben is actually Welsh, and Cardiff city's clock tower is Venezuelan. However, all that does not matter as, in the hearts and minds of the people of Wales, the clock tower shape with which we are all familiar—and with which we will be even more familiar after next year's European summit—is our equivalent of Big Ben.

It would be odd to invest so much in raising the image of Cardiff's city hall by having the European summit there in the middle of June next year, only to find that the Welsh Assembly is not to be located there. We can imagine some strange conversations between the Prime Minister, Chancellor Kohl, President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin. They would say, "This is a lovely building, but tell us, Prime Minister, why aren't you putting the Welsh Assembly here? Have you got better buildings than this to put the Welsh Assembly in?" The Prime Minister would say, "Well, we had better offers, but perhaps not better buildings."

It will be a shame if Cardiff city hall becomes one of the best-known buildings in the western world, but is not used for the assembly. For the three or four days that it is in the limelight during the European summit next June, its shape will become familiar. If it does not become the home of the Welsh Assembly after all the investment in raising its recognition factor throughout the world, the assembly will be the weaker. The guildhall in Swansea is a superb building of its era, but it is nothing like Cardiff city hall. Through its good fortune in hosting the Euro-summit next year, Cardiff city hall will achieve a special world recognition factor, something which Wales lacks.

If anyone wants proof of Wales's low recognition factor, he has only to turn to the sports pages of *The Observer* yesterday. It contained a wonderful example of how Wales is perceived as less important than Scotland and Ireland. Yesterday, I leafed through the sports pages in a desperate attempt to find anything that did not relate to England drawing with New Zealand on Saturday. Eventually, I found something about the sale of fishing rights, which is a huge issue at the moment. The article said that one could buy fishing rights on stretches of the Tay and the Tweed for, say, £3,000 per yard or whatever, but one did not have to cross the border in order to buy excellent trout and salmon fishing rights, as one could buy a lovely stretch on the Conwy.

That is a classic example of the perception that one does not have to cross the border to go to Wales, but one does in order to reach Scotland. When the Welsh Assembly is set up, I think that that problem will largely disappear. It will give us a probably never-to-be-repeated opportunity to increase Wales's international recognition factor close to that already achieved by Scotland and Ireland.

The same will be true of the status of whichever city is chosen for the location of the Welsh Assembly. The question is not whether it will be Cardiff or Swansea, but whether any city in Wales can achieve the status—or something close to the status—that Edinburgh and Dublin already enjoy. I do not know that any city in Wales will ever reach the status of Edinburgh and Dublin, but we know that that is the competition. It would be nice to think that the location of the Welsh Assembly, whichever city my right hon. Friend eventually chooses, has a fighting chance over the next few decades to achieve the international recognition and status that cities such as Edinburgh and Dublin—with which one naturally tends to compare Cardiff, Swansea and Llandrindod Wells—already have. I do not believe that it is possible to achieve that for any city other than Cardiff.

Cardiff has a good opportunity and a good start because of the European summit and the rugby cup final that will be held in June 1999, but those are only temporary boosts—one is for three days, the other for three weeks; we hope that the Assembly will last for 300 years. I do not think that that opportunity arises anywhere else but in Cardiff, which is why I make a plea, as I did at this morning's press conference in Cardiff along with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan), for Cardiff to be chosen. My plea also goes out to the Labour group on Cardiff county council and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when he finally comes to make his decision.

I have heard the remarks about new technology and the fact that one should not be a luddite and should remember what can be achieved with microwave links around Wales and video conferences. I do not deny that, although such technology will probably always pass over my head as I am not of the techno whiz-kid generation. However, there are dangers in saying that it does not matter where the assembly is located, as one can use video conferences, e-mails, websites and the latest gizmos from the computer world. That may be fine for the under-30s. I accept that most democracies are terribly old-fashioned because they insist on conducting their business face to face in Chambers such as ours. Perhaps we are worse in some ways, or more conservative, than most, because we do not even have electronic voting, whereas most legislatures do.

However, we are in danger of missing the point. The fundamental point of a parliamentary assembly or democratic body is that it is the place where people go to petition for redress of grievances. It must have the ability to legislate—it does not matter how modest the legislative powers in the Bill are. It must also have the ability to debate.

Above all, a parliamentary assembly must be able to show the people whom it represents that it is worth their while to petition it for redress of their grievances. To do so, it must locate itself in a place that people look up to with respect and affection. People must be able to say, "That is the seat of power. That is where we shall go with our petition, with our deputation, our delegation, even the riot that we want to have outside the building." People may want to riot outside the place, but they want to know that the key people are inside the place.

Let us take the farmers—

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morgan: In a minute.

The farmers who are in a great ferment—almost rebellion—in parts of Wales as a result of the beef crisis would want to know where they should go to have a riot outside or a meeting inside, or both, because that is what parliamentary assemblies are for. People must have the feeling that they can go there and cajole, threaten and make their feelings known as strongly as possible and argue that something must be done to stop what is going wrong at the moment, which is destroying their livelihood.

A Parliament must fulfil that function. I do not believe that it is possible to video conference a riot or meetings in a way that could defuse tensions. We need to be able to say to people, "Yes, we will try to put that right. We know how strongly you feel because we have seen how strongly you feel in meetings or because we have seen you through the windows and said to one another, 'Oh my God, I can see 5,000 farmers out there, rioting.'"

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose—*

Mr. Morgan: That is what Parliaments are for, in a way—to defuse tensions. People should think, "That is the seat of power. If we go there, we can get something done that will stop us all going down the Swanee and all being bankrupt in a few years' time."

Mr. Swayne: To which Parliament should those who want their grievances redressed come? Should they riot outside this Parliament or outside the assembly? Should they bring their grievances for redress to the hon. Gentleman, as their Member of Parliament, or to their assemblyman? The Bill does not make that clear.

Mr. Morgan: That is an evolving issue. If they are mostly Welsh beef farmers and if they are as broke as most of them claim to be, they will be unable to afford to come to London, so they will tend to visit Cardiff. Instead of stopping Irish lorries, they will want to have a big punch-up, in the figurative sense, at the assembly. They will say, "You must damn well do something about the crisis in our industry or next year there will be no beef industry left." That is a good classical example for us to think about. Where would they go in future?

The House might find itself almost in competition with the assembly, saying to people, "Come and have a riot in London because we can redress your grievances better than if you go to the assembly," but I believe that people will take their own decisions depending on what they consider to be the true seat of power on each issue.

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morgan: I shall give way first to the hon. Gentleman. Later, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd).

Mr. Evans: Is not the hon. Gentleman missing the point? Surely the issue is not whether Welsh farmers should riot in Cardiff or in London. If the Government were listening to the farmers of Wales, they would not need to riot anywhere.

Mr. Morgan: Dear, dear, dear. I give way to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy.

Mr. Llwyd: May I, on behalf of Welsh farmers, assure everyone that they have not have been rioting? Rioting is a very serious legal issue. The crisis is extremely deep. Let us please not take it lightly. The hon. Gentleman made some strange remarks earlier, and I found them downright offensive.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman has mistaken my remarks. I am using the example of the farmers to show what a parliamentary assembly is for. I am surprised if, given his party, the hon. Gentleman does not think that an assembly will be the focus for people to express their dissent, and if he does not understand that the fundamental first function of a parliamentary assembly or a Parliament is to be the place where people go to petition for the redress of grievances. Yes, legislation will be passed, yes, there will be debate, but the assembly must also be the place to take a deputation or delegation and a crisis, which may boil over.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy may object to my use of the word "riot". I have used it as a colourful expression to help hon. Members to understand what a parliamentary assembly is for and to try to predict what would have happened if the beef crisis had happened after June 1999. I am saying to him that it is likely that, instead of focusing on the ports of Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke, the beef farmers would be more likely to petition in front of city hall at Cardiff, the guildhall in Swansea or a brand new building.

[Mr. Morgan]

I hope that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy will accept that I intended no disrespect for the strength of farmers' feelings. I have respect for the strength of feelings of an industry in crisis—a crisis which dates back 10 years to the start of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy problem in the mid-1980s and has now come to the boil because we cannot export and we are importing. Obviously, farmers feel extremely strongly about that. That matter must be placed in the context of the Bill. We should ask what effect the Bill would have had on that crisis if it had taken place two years hence.

I make a plea to the Secretary of State. If a scheme evolves that represents an attractive financial option—similar to the claim that Swansea guildhall can be rented to the Secretary of State for Wales for the purposes of the assembly and that money will be left over—and if that is done via the private finance initiative, as these days it almost certainly will be, we must be sure that the fledgling Welsh democracy, sitting for the first time in June 1999, is not in hock to the property development consortium that provides the building.

If the building is provided by private finance, it must be provided free of encumbrances on the conveyance, if I may use old-fashioned lawyer's language, which I am sure that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy understands. It must not be capable of restricting the actions of the new Welsh democracy.

The new Welsh democracy will be taking a few walks before it learns to run. It is a fledgling, and we are not used to it. Unlike the Scots, who had a Parliament until 1707, we had one for only a week or two. It will be difficult to get Welsh democracy off the ground quickly and running. Any suggestion that the new fledgling Welsh democracy is constrained by its landlord, and that it must not offend the landlord if it is financed with private finance, would be damaging to the thing that I believe we all want. Perhaps even Conservative Members, in their heart of hearts, realise that Welsh democracy is coming. Indeed, the Conservative party, with proportional representation, may find it a lifeline to rescue it from its moribund state.

That is my final plea. I hope that the Secretary of State or other Ministers can give us an assurance that if the private finance initiative is used to finance the building, it will not restrict what the Welsh assembly can do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. There is an element of Parkinson's law creeping into the debate. Many hon. Members are still trying to catch my eye; if speeches continue at the present length, many will fail to do so.

7.37 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Unlike many of the contributors to the debate, I find this a sad day because, as a Conservative and a Unionist, I believe that it is the start, not the end, of many years of argument.

The Bill, as drafted, falls between two stools. Although it will undermine the Union, upset the constitutional balance and pose a challenge that will cause a reaction among my constituents in Poole, it will not satisfy the strong feelings among many of those in Wales who would wish the assembly to be developed into a full Parliament, with all that that entails.

In any constitutional change, the key rule is to have a settlement so that what hon. Members decided in the Chamber sticks for many years. As the Bill stands, that will not happen. The Secretary of State said earlier that this is not an event but a process. We see in clause 22 a transfer mechanism for other powers. That is likely to increase the arguments between those of us who want to defend the Union and those in the assembly who want to promote and expand its powers. I see that as the likely future of politics for a number of years.

Listening to the speeches today it struck me that hon. Members see all sorts of possibilities for the assembly, usually involving large pots of money to spend on their favourite projects. It has been pointed out as well that, under the proposals, there will be only the same total pot of money. There will have to be a great deal of disappointment—

Mr. Öpik: Would the hon. Gentleman accept that, with judicious paring back of quangos, it is possible to release quite large quantities of money? If we replace quango appointees with elected assembly members, we shall not have to give them a large additional income for the same work.

Mr. Syms: That is a good point. There is some scope for saving small sums of money from the quangos but, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) told us, the running costs of the assembly will be £17 million a year. He spoke of property developers, he spoke of 10 times average running costs—I could not help thinking that there must be other decent purposes in the Principality to which the money could be devoted. Already in the debate, Members have mentioned, for instance, a spine road through Wales and assistance to farmers. I wonder whether that is the best use of resources, although I accept that it is possible to reorder priorities.

As the assembly will not have tax-raising powers and will control the budget currently controlled by the Secretary of State, it will in effect encroach on local government. By far the largest element in the Welsh Office budget is local government expenditure. There will be a tremendous temptation for the assembly to top-slice expenditure and to choose its own priorities.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that the Welsh Local Government Association whole-heartedly supports the assembly?

Mr. Syms: Yes, and I suspect that the association, controlled as it is by the Labour party, would.

The problem that I have described will give rise to conflict between the assembly and local authorities. It will, after all, be the only place to which they can go for money. A further problem is that anyone elected to the assembly will try to find a way of being seen to make a difference. Overall, therefore, I do not believe that the proposals will be helpful.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) rightly said that the proposals must be tested against the worst-case scenario. Of course, good

unionists hope that people will work together and that the United Kingdom will remain an integral entity—but it will not always be easy. Conflicts will always arise with elected authorities. Indeed, there were conflicts between local and national government when my party was in power. One sees the same problem in the dynamics between Europe and this Parliament. Those in the assembly—which I suspect will be in Cardiff—will have every incentive to posture and argue for their particular authorities: it would be most unusual if they did not. Anyone elected to such an assembly always wants to secure to himself the maximum amount of power and authority.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State's role, if he is still in position at the time, will be difficult. Even if his party members dominate the assembly, there will be tensions. There are already tensions in the Welsh Labour group over Cardiff, for example. A certain amount of tension can be creative, but too much of it is dangerous to any democratic process. The legislation carries the implied assumption that there may be parties of the same political colour at Westminster and in Cardiff. That is not necessarily so in the long term; there could be a Labour-controlled assembly but a Conservative Government.

Mr. Ron Davies: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman with care because he is trying to make a rational case. He will not be surprised to hear me say that I do not necessarily agree with it. He is talking about tensions in the system. Is he aware of the sort of tensions there were while the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was Secretary of State? Not one local authority in Wales was in political agreement with him; the overwhelming majority of Welsh Members of Parliament were completely opposed to what he was doing; he was reorganising Welsh local government; and—crucially—he returned £110 million of the Welsh block to the Treasury because he wanted to fulfil a political agenda that had nothing to do with Wales. Does the hon. Gentleman understand the tensions that that can cause?

Mr. Syms: I do. In a former life, I served on Wiltshire county council. In the course of certain negotiations, we once attended a meeting in Cardiff with Welsh local authorities to discuss pay increases. I had the distinct feeling that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was not the most popular person in the Principality.

There are pluses and minuses in any union. Some places contribute to the Exchequer, others take money out of it—people accept that. The same tensions may come to be felt in some parts of England if this Government stay in power for a long time.

Given the electoral success of the Secretary of State's party in Wales, one is forced to wonder about the scale of those tensions if you stick to your manifesto promises in the Principality. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) pointed out, the election result certainly supplied you with a mandate to set up an assembly for Wales, but I am not so sure that the referendum result gives you the mandate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is addressing the Chair.

Mr. Syms: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Clearly, the no vote in the referendum got two and a half times as much support as the Conservatives got at the general election. That means that many Labour and liberal Democrat supporters—not to mention an overwhelming majority of Conservatives—must have voted no. With such a narrow vote, it is obvious that the Welsh people were in two minds. So, although I congratulate you on your victory—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Syms: I do apologise.

I believe that devolution will be bad for Wales. The CBI has said that there is no economic imperative for an assembly. We have heard that the Secretary of State is to have reserve powers.

Before finishing, I want to mention the electoral arrangements. I support first past the post as the simplest and most accountable available system. True, it may benefit my party, but I do not believe that the system proposed for the assembly will do it justice: 40 members elected under first past the post, 20 by the alternative member system. That will mean two categories of assembly member. Will they have equal status? We just do not know. The alternative member system will operate as a closed party list system. Some may be elected in by-elections—those for the single-member constituencies—but those on the list will probably be filled by appointees. Immediately, there will be two different categories.

Mr. Ron Davies: I am sorry to intervene, but the hon. Gentleman is so completely misinformed. There is no reason at all why the members on the list should come, as he is suggesting, from smoke-filled rooms and party lists. I would hope that my party, which has not made its decision on the matter, will decide its list system on the basis of a ballot of ordinary individual members. I have no doubt that this process will be followed by other political parties. There is no reason to suggest that it will be done by some stitch-up.

Mr. Syms: I understand what the Secretary of State is saying—it will be a party, rather than an electoral, arrangement.

An ordinary Welsh constituent will have a Member of Parliament, a Member of the European Parliament, a member of the assembly elected through the constituency system and four assembly members elected under the alternative member system. In other words, he will have seven people to deal with constituency problems. All of us in the House know that people are not always clear where the boundaries occur. If a constituent has seven people to write to, there will not be accountability. Who knows which assembly member is dealing with a matter?

The system will diminish accountability. Under the present system, it is usually clear who is the Member of Parliament and where the buck stops if someone is not answering letters. There will be a problem with so many

[Mr. Syms]

representatives. This is an area where more does not necessarily mean better and does not provide a more accountable system.

The proposals will be bad for the Union. They are expensive and will leave Wales over-governed with more political interference. The electoral arrangements are somewhat bizarre and will reduce accountability. The Bill sets too many bad precedents for the United Kingdom and leaves those of us who wish to maintain the strength of the United Kingdom a major task for the future.

7.51 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Unlike the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), I think that this is a great day for democracy and a great day for Wales, as were 1 May and 18 September.

The enemies and despisers of democracy among the Tory ranks have made their predictable points against government being closer to the people. "Ranks" may not be an appropriate description, given that there are no Tory Members representing Welsh constituencies. The same distrustful hot air and anti-democratic rhetoric was spouted in Wales and Scotland by the Tories before the election. Where, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are those Conservative Members now? The British people ejected them, and the Welsh and Scottish people ejected them entirely.

Fortunately, the new Labour Government's plans for welfare to work and a minimum wage will ensure that former Tory Members are given an opportunity to contribute to society, perhaps in a way that they have not done previously.

Mr. Ron Davies: Get them back to work!

Mr. Jones: Get them to work might be more appropriate.

The Labour party has long argued that government should be based on partnership, democracy and inclusiveness. As part of that belief, the Welsh referendum was one of our key pledges. We delivered it, and Wales said, "Yes."

I must tackle the ridiculous suggestion that those people who did not vote were no voters. That is arrant nonsense. If that were the case, the last three Tory Governments would not have had majorities. Only 42 per cent. of the electorate voted for them, and if the 25 per cent. who did not vote had been counted as voting against them, they would not have had majorities. That is ludicrous. The "don't knows" remain to be convinced, and the Bill aims to create supporters from those "don't knows".

From a personal point of view, the Bill is a boyhood dream. A national assembly for Wales, as outlined in the Bill, will ensure that the people of Wales have the voice that they deserve, and will ensure that Wales is not left behind. We shall have fewer quangos and more democracy. Wales will secure more jobs, and better schools and hospitals. All that is part of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's vision of a modern Britain.

The Welsh Assembly will give Wales a better health service by ensuring that scarce resources are spent on nurses and doctors, not on bureaucrats and red tape. It will provide better skills by setting tough new standards for literacy, numeracy and overall achievement. It will provide better job opportunities by providing a voice in Europe and around the world to attract investment and back Welsh companies.

The assembly will provide better democracy and will ensure that decisions about local schools and hospitals will be made not behind closed doors in London but by people elected in Wales. It will provide better value for money, by bringing Welsh quangos to public account and scrutinising spending decisions.

I am particularly pleased that the assembly will improve the government of Wales by working in partnership with others, particularly Welsh local government. In this way, the assembly will bring the process of decision-making closer to the citizen, making national decisions closer to local government and augmenting the vital work of local government, rather than encroaching on its role.

The assembly is part of a wider vision of a modern Britain from a Government who believe that too much power is centralised in the hands of too few people, with too little freedom for local communities to decide their own priorities; hence the Government's proposals to meet the individual needs of Scotland, with a Parliament, and London, with a mayor. Perhaps, in time, we shall see regional governments throughout England. For the first time, decisions on schools, hospitals and other key services in Wales will be made by people elected by, and democratically accountable to, the people of Wales.

There is a desire to make Wales more powerful economically, and the Bill's proposals will do much to make this desire a reality by securing inward investment and stimulating home-grown enterprise. Wales can go even further. Through the character of its people, its innovative entrepreneurs and its fine educational heritage, Wales has unparalled opportunities to become an economic powerhouse in the context of sustainable development, making Wales an economic powerhouse today and tomorrow for ourselves and our children.

Sustainable development is not only a question of biodiversity, environmental protection, traffic reduction, renewable energy and securing clean air and water. It also provides opportunities to create jobs. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at the New York Earth summit on 23 June:

> "We must make the process of government green. Environmental considerations must be integrated into all our decisions, regardless of sector. They must be in at the start, not bolted on later."

As Wales is reliant on industries such as agriculture and tourism, a healthy, rich and flourishing land is vital. It is also vital that sustainable development is integrated into all parts of the new assembly's powers.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the point raised by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), who saw the assembly—quite how he discerned this I am not sure—as an opportunity for a vast new road-building programme in Wales? How does that square with sustainable development?

Mr. Jones: That is a good point—it will be up to the assembly. However, the hon. Gentleman is putting words into the mouth of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), who was not talking about vast new road building. We need the dualling of a few roads

between north and south Wales. If the hon. Gentleman has driven from north to south Wales—I do not know whether he has—he will understand what we are talking about. If he leaves the New Forest and visits Wales again, he may come to understand why we would like some improvements. However, we are not talking about huge five-lane highways.

Mr. Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) was referring to giving a higher priority to an integrated transport system for Wales? As someone who represents Wales, my hon. Friend understands how difficult it is for north Wales to connect to the south. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that involves not new roads, but improvements to the existing infrastructure?

Mr. Jones: I agree absolutely. The point is that the assembly will make those decisions whereas, at the moment, there are conflicting priorities for the Secretary of State, who makes the decisions. We have suffered from the fact that, until now, the Secretary of State for Wales has not been Welsh. On one occasion, a Secretary of State of ill fame preferred not to visit Wales. I do not know how he could have known whether the A470 down to south Wales needed to be improved.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am following the hon. Gentleman's remarks with interest, as he is dealing with a subject of great importance. Perhaps he can explain something to us. In the case of a trunk road, where a specific allocation is not made by the Department of Transport of the United Kingdom to the Welsh Assembly, how could funding for it be allocated by the Welsh Assembly, except by top-slicing the local authorities?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is obviously unaware of the present situation. I forgive him, as he is a Member for England. He could not be a Member for Wales, as there are no Conservative Members representing Welsh constituencies. The Welsh Office currently deals with matters such as the hon. Gentleman describes. The funding is available and is run by the Secretary of State for Wales. The assembly would take over the role of the Secretary of State for Wales. If the hon. Gentleman does not know that, I am sorry. He should know it.

Sustainable development should be integrated into all the assembly's functions. The assembly can make such decisions. Farming deserves an extra mention. A strong Welsh voice in Europe—

Mr. Letwin: I may be in genuine error, but it would be helpful to understand the point. Is the hon. Gentleman claiming that some sum of money, which is currently available to the Secretary of State, would be available to the Welsh Assembly for a trunk road programme, and that it would not include money that would otherwise go to local authorities in rate support grant?

Mr. Jones: Yes. I am rather surprised that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who was, I thought, educating the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), did not know that. It shows an even greater depth of ignorance if an hon. Member on the Front Bench does not know that. Of course there is no shadow Secretary of State for Wales, so perhaps we cannot blame the Opposition for their ignorance.

Farming in Wales is in trouble, but the Welsh Assembly would have a role in helping farmers to put their case to Europe. Their problems were generated by the previous Government, but are exacerbated by Europe because of the beef ban. When we have a Welsh Assembly and a representative who can go along with the UK Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, that case can be put strongly to Europe. In the longer term, the environmental and social reform of the common agricultural policy is probably the answer for our hill farmers. Sustainability, openness and accountability under a Welsh Assembly will benefit farmers, consumers and industry.

The creation of the Welsh Assembly should, in theory, be across party lines. It is, in the main, but sadly it does not seem to include the Conservatives. In the interests of democracy and of the people of Wales, I hope that one day some Tories will be part of that partnership.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives have tried to make devolution a left-right issue in terms of political persuasion. It is a left-right issue—one that involves making sure that Wales is not left behind, and doing what is right for the people of Wales.

The Bill is excellent. Even excellent things can be improved, but it is a wonderful start. Wales needed a voice, Wales deserved a voice, and now Wales will get a voice.

8.2 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I shall be brief. After the referendum, the Prime Minister spoke of the need to allay fears and to be sensitive.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) portrayed the narrowness of the result as having placed the Government under certain constraints. When asked to define those constraints, he gave two examples. First, he said that the Government had gone ahead with an element of proportional representation. I do not regard that as being sensitive or allaying fears. The hon. Gentleman's second example was the setting up of a consultative body, but as has been pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the Secretary of State has chosen the Conservative he wants on that consultative body rather than consult the Conservative party in order to make an appropriate choice.

It is all very well for the Secretary of State to say, "He wouldn't come to the meeting." When I want something from somebody, be it advice or assent to a particular proposition, I invite that person to a meeting. Setting aside whether there is an agenda for that meeting, should the person fail to come to the meeting I take the elementary precaution of writing to him or her so that I at least have it in writing. I might write a conciliatory letter or, depending on the circumstances, I might write a fairly snooty letter, but I would write a letter. That clearly did not happen in the case in question.

The Government have chosen the Conservatives they want to represent the Conservative party. We will not know until later in the week whom they have chosen, but that is unacceptable behaviour from a Government who, after the referendum result, set out to allay fears and to show sensitivity.

I shall analyse three areas in which the Government have shown no intention of allaying fears and no semblance of sensitivity. The first is the absence from the

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

Bill of any statement of the sovereignty of Parliament in Welsh affairs. The Secretary of State argued that that would be constitutional nonsense because this Parliament is sovereign and cannot be bound by its successors. To put a statement about the sovereignty of this Parliament in the Bill would, in the Secretary of State's words, be meaningless.

However, there is such a statement in the Government of Ireland Act 1920. It was included because of the need to allay fears. The fact that there is no such statement in the Bill shows insensitivity to the need to allay fears and greater priority being given to assuaging the desires of nationalist Members.

Mr. Hanson: Has the hon. Gentleman read clause 1(3)?

Mr. Swayne: I have, and at the outset of the debate I heard the Secretary of State's assertion that this Parliament is sovereign. The Bill should begin with a ringing declaration of the sort in the 1920 Act. For the Secretary of State to say that it would be meaningless because it could be repealed is nonsense. If this Bill becomes an Act, it too could be repealed, but that does not make it meaningless. The logic used by the Secretary of State is wholly inadequate.

The second area in which the Bill fails to address the sensitivity issue or to allay fears is the fact that the Committee stage is not to be taken on the Floor of the House. Despite the press release issued by the Welsh Office on 27 November, which was quoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes, the Secretary of State has made it clear that the entire Committee stage will not be taken on the Floor of the House.

The Secretary of State showed contempt for constitutional precedent when he said that he did not care about the precedents, that the procedure would be new and that he was proud of it. If the Government are attempting to show a measure of sensitivity, as the Prime Minister said, and to allay fears, the Secretary of State has robbed himself of one of the principal means by which he might have allayed fears—allowing a full and open debate on the detail of the Bill on the Floor of the House.

The third area in which the Government have failed to exhibit sensitivity and to allay fears is their persisting with proportional representation. The hon. Member for Swansea, East claimed that the proportional representation element would act as a constraint on the Government, but I believe that it is one of the most regrettable and insensitive parts of the Bill. It is one of the provisions that is regarded with the most suspicion by those who voted against the proposition of an assembly in the referendum. Persisting with proportional representation would be a retrograde step.

The Bill introduces a most pernicious form of proportional representation. It is pernicious for two reasons: first, it relies on the D'hondt formula, which is totally untransparent and extremely complicated for voters; secondly, the people will not vote directly for their representatives. It will lead to a most unhealthy separation between those who cast the votes and their representatives.

Under the proportional representation system, candidates must concentrate not on the needs, aspirations and concerns of the voters—who do not vote for the candidates—but on the priorities of those who make up the lists. It is argued that the lists may be compiled through some democratic forum within a particular party. It does not matter how wide the franchise is within a party: the decision will not be taken by the voters.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): Is not the hon. Gentleman overlooking the fact that 40 representatives on the assembly—the majority—will be elected directly and will be accountable to their electors? Is there not merit in the fact that in south Wales, for example, the Conservatives will be topped up and will receive representation on the assembly through the additional members system? In mid-Wales, Labour will probably receive representation that it would not have otherwise. Is there not merit in all the parties receiving greater representation in proportion to their total vote? That did not happen to the Conservatives on 1 May.

Mr. Swayne: No, I do not see any merit in that proposition. As far as I am concerned, 20 too many assembly members will be elected by proportional representation. The system will not be understood clearly by the electorate—the voters will be confused. Some assembly members will be elected by the people and others will not because they will be chosen within the party system.

A further danger is that proportional representation leads to the separation of the electors from the elected. Anyone who visits Germany, which suffers under the proportional representation system, will be struck by the fact that ordinary people in the street are deeply anxious about—even hostile towards—plans to abolish the deutschmark, but consult members of the political caste and one will find no reflection of that anxiety or hostility among the people's representatives. The political caste has become divorced from the electorate because it looks not to the electorate and its concerns but to those who compile the party list and their concerns. That is precisely the weakness in this system.

Mr. Öpik: I accept that the hon. Gentleman has a pernicious dislike of the proposed proportional representation system and assume that he does not wish to return to the first-past-the-post system, which would prevent the Tories from exercising any influence in Wales for a long time—so what system of proportional representation do he and his party propose for Wales?

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands my position completely. I am absolutely in favour of the first-past-the-post system. The Conservatives have not grumbled about the fact that we lost all our parliamentary representatives in Wales—although we made a not unhealthy showing in terms of total votes. We live and die by a system that has advantages and disadvantages. A clear advantage of the system is that it is understood by the people of Wales and of this country.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Does my hon. Friend accept that the phrase "first past the post" is an inadequate way of describing that voting system?

Its great benefit is that it links the representative to the constituency and to the constituents to whom he should report.

Mr. Swayne: That is precisely the strength of the system. We must recognise that many electors cast their votes against particular candidates. That is a phenomenon from which the Labour party benefited on 1 May—many voters were determined to see the back of a particular rascal. I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Labour Members would rob the electorate of that opportunity in the case of a third of assembly members.

That point may be regarded as a detail of the Bill that could be considered in Committee, but the Secretary of State has said that the Committee stage of the Bill will not take place on the Floor of the House. Furthermore, because the Government have made so much of the proportional representation element, they have in effect made it part of the principle of the Bill rather than a mere detail.

The assembly will commence with an electoral system that is not understood by the people and that has a built-in democratic deficit. On that basis, the Bill should be opposed.

8.16 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this historic debate on legislation to establish an assembly for Wales. I am genuinely saddened by Conservative Members' failure to learn the lessons of 1 May and before then. It seems to me that the Conservative party has failed miserably to understand why no Conservative Members speak today for Wales from Welsh constituencies, why the Conservative party received its smallest share of the vote in Wales for many years and why it was wiped out in Wales for the first time since 1906. It saddens me that Conservative Members have failed to understand those issues concerning the Welsh dimension.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): If the Conservatives are so out of touch with the views of the Welsh people, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain why the approach that we took to the Welsh Assembly proposal chimed with that of half of those who voted in the referendum?

Mr. Hanson: I shall come to that point in due course. All hon. Members have lessons to learn from the referendum campaign and its result, but that does not diminish the fact that the Conservative party has learnt nothing. I hope that, before the Bill completes its passage through Parliament, Conservative Members will come on board and help to make the assembly a success—which is what I believe most parties want.

Many other countries in Europe have regional government. I believe that regional government is, in itself, a good thing. The arguments against regional government advanced by the Conservatives during the referendum campaign and in today's debate would be greeted with incredulity in Spain, France and Germany. Regional government can be a natural form of government that is close to the people and good for the community.

I welcome the debate today because, like my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), I believe that it is a good day for democracy and for the people of Wales. I welcome the Bill because it will transfer the functions of the Welsh Office to a regional assembly. It will give added impetus to the control of the 2,000 staff and the £7 billion budget that the Welsh Office is currently operating. It will give my constituents and others local democratic input into public service priorities.

The Bill will also achieve something for which I have long campaigned in the House: it will make a start—I recognise that it is only that—on democratising the pernicious quango state that has existed in Wales for 18 years. It will also assist Welsh Office Ministers—and Ministers in future Governments—to raise a proper, effective voice for Wales in Europe on a range of issues.

I welcome the start of the removal of the quango state. I think that further action can be taken in due course. The establishment of the assembly will democratise the quango state, which in Wales especially has been the fiefdom of an unelected Conservative party over the past 18 years.

The Welsh Office currently makes 600-plus appointments. They are now being made by one Secretary of State and two junior Ministers. Under the previous Administration, those appointments included many, many people who were not representative of the people of Wales or part of the community. Some did not even live in Wales. The assembly will be a great step forward in terms of quangos.

One of my constituents, Mr. Philip Pedley of Cilcair, is an active Conservative who has fought three general elections for his party. He was appointed without one vote in Wales because he had contested English seats during three general elections. Mr. Pedley was appointed deputy chairman of Housing for Wales—Tai Cymru. He has benefited from the quango system. However, he voted for the assembly. Even as a Conservative, he went on a platform in my constituency and said that he recognised that the quango state was untenable and needed to be reformed for a democratic Wales and a democratic future.

The ending of the quango state will be a great step forward and of great benefit to the people I represent. Its replacement with a democratically elected forum will, in my view, enhance people's understanding of the work that is done on behalf of the people of Wales and enable them to have a real say.

One of my constituents even went to the stage of calling one of his race horses The Quango King. He was on so many quangos when he had that particular horse that he decided to throw a bone to democracy by so naming his horse.

We have a democratic deficit that will be filled in great part by the assembly. The faceless, unaccountable and often unelectable will be challenged by the assembly, which will govern on behalf of the people with their democratic mandate.

The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), who is no longer in his place, mentioned tensions between the assembly and Government bodies. The Conservative party has never had a majority in Wales during my lifetime—not in 1979, 1983, 1987 or 1992. Since I have been able to vote in general elections, the Conservative party has never had a majority in Wales. As a result, there were tensions, and there will undoubtedly be tensions in future,

[Mr. Hanson]

but those tensions will be against the background of the people of Wales having a say in their democracy and being able to elect a body to speak on their behalf. In some instances they will choose, perhaps, to elect an assembly that is in opposition to the Government, which is a perfectly legitimate thing to do. Tensions will be created occasionally, but they will be healthy tensions in a democratic system.

Mr. Jenkin: We hear much of the argument that because the ruling party at Westminster had no majority of Members in the Principality, the United Kingdom Government's rule in Wales had no legitimacy. Is that what the hon. Gentleman is saying? If so, he is articulating a nationalist argument, not a regionalist argument. That is a dangerous road to take his party down.

Mr. Hanson: The House has been sovereign and has been accepted as sovereign. It is still sovereign under the Bill. I say that the government of Wales should reflect the wishes of the people of Wales. When the assembly is established, the people will have an opportunity to put forward their case, to argue their case and to elect assembly members. They will have a democratic input into the running of functions that are now run by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Jenkin: The Government of Wales are sitting on the Treasury Bench—they are the Government of the United Kingdom. By setting up a separate administrative arrangement in Wales that is answerable to a separate assembly in Wales, the hon. Gentleman is institutionalising conflicts between Wales and London, between Cardiff—if that is where it ends up—and Whitehall. Is that not rather a dangerous thing to do given that some people do not support—the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who is not in his place at the moment, is one of them—the concept of the supremacy of Parliament? That being so, the assembly may become a platform for disputes about the sovereignty of Parliament.

Mr. Hanson: Much in the Bill will strengthen relationships in the Union and the relationship between the House and the people of Wales because it will give confidence to both. The assembly, once in place, will establish public authority over the 80 quangos that are now operational in the Welsh Office. That is a good thing. The Bill gives power to elected democracy rather than to a quango democracy.

The Bill will provide an economic powerhouse for Wales. It will provide for strong local national health service management as well as a strong input into education in Wales. It will provide a strong platform for transport improvements. It will also enshrine the relationship between voluntary organisations and other bodies that wish to have a role in that sector.

I welcome the extension of the role of the Welsh Development Agency so as to create an economic powerhouse. It will be given the power to have the Land Authority for Wales under its jurisdiction. Individual but co-ordinated actions will be possible across the gamut of economic development.

We shall have a raft of examples of democratisation without the existing structure being replaced by a dictatorship, which has often been the case in the past. We shall be pulling in a democratic structure that will enable people in Wales to determine their priorities within the framework of the United Kingdom as a whole.

As I have said to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), I believe that the Bill will bind the United Kingdom together. It provides for devolved regional government within the United Kingdom framework. The House will still be responsible for foreign affairs, social security matters, taxation and defence. Those are major areas of public expenditure. The £7 billion contribution from the Welsh Office is but a small part of overall expenditure on behalf of the people of Wales that is made by the House. The House will still be responsible for key areas of policy that affect constituents in Delyn and elsewhere.

The referendum campaign was a great success.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman claims that the referendum was a great success and talks about regionalisation of the United Kingdom with assemblies everywhere. Does he not realise that the referendum was an appalling fiasco and failure in Wales, which is why the Government have derailed the assembly programme in England?

Mr. Hanson: I do not accept that. The hon. Gentleman will find that in due course there will be regional arrangements for England, because they constitute the natural way to go forward. I regard the proposed establishment of the assembly and the referendum in Wales as successes. As has been said, there was cross-party co-operation, which added to the success of the assembly campaign. The three parties—the Liberals, Plaid Cymru and Labour—worked together to try to ensure that there was a mandate. I accept that it was a marginal mandate and that in my constituency area, Flintshire, there was a no vote. It was, however, a Wales-wide assembly vote.

I shall kill a couple of Opposition arguments. We all went into the assembly campaign as consenting adults. We all knew the rules before we began the campaign. Similarly, we all knew what the game was when we had the vote on 18 September. If Conservative Members feel that the Government would not have cancelled the Bill if they had lost the vote, they are living in cloud cuckoo land. It was an all-Wales vote, the margin was small but it was a yes vote. I hope that the Conservative party will accept that yes vote and begin to work with the assembly.

It is argued that there was only a 25 per cent. turnout for a yes, that many people voted no, and that 48 per cent. did not vote at all. Following that argument, 69 per cent. of the electorate of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) did not vote for him. That was true of 68 per cent. of the electorate of the hon. Member for North Essex, 67 per cent. of that of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and 70 per cent. of that of the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). I do not deny their right to sit in this Chamber. I do not expect them to take the Chiltern Hundreds or the Stewardship of the Manor of Northstead this evening. I recognise that

they won their contests under the rules; I hope that they recognise that the Government won this contest under the rules and that the assembly should proceed.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Hanson: I give way for the last time.

Mr. Jenkin: Can the hon. Gentleman say in which European countries with a history and tradition of referendums a simple majority of a 50 per cent. turnout would be enough radically to change the constitution?

Mr. Hanson: This is not "Mastermind", and my topic is not European referendums in the 20th century. I cannot answer that question; perhaps the hon. Gentleman will refer to it in his closing speech. The point is that, on 18 September, the rules were clear. The House set the rules and on 18 September the Government won on those rules.

The right hon. Member for Devizes claims that all those who did not vote, effectively voted no. He must have great prescience and be able to communicate with the dead. The register was drawn up in October last year and the vote was on 18 September this year. Many of the people who did not vote died or moved out of Wales during the year. He must be Mystic Mike. He has decided that all the people who died or moved are against. That is not practical; it is not real politics.

I hope that, after today's debate, the Conservative party will come on board. I do not want it to repeat the Winchester experience in the Welsh Assembly. In Winchester, it lost an election by a small majority, whinged about losing, took it to the nth degree and lost dramatically when it refought the seat.

I hope that the Conservatives will play a full and active role in the assembly and argue their case. Dare I say that I hope that they win the odd seat. They have a right to sit there, because they got 20 per cent. of the vote in the general election. I hope that, like my constituent Mr. Pedley and Lord Roberts, they will come on board, bury their differences and put their constituents in Wales first so that they have a voice in the assembly.

I have a couple of points on north Wales—my part of the country. There was a strong no vote in parts of north Wales. I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) privately and publicly about that. I hope that the Government accept that the no vote happened and that we need to campaign to ensure that people understand the relevance of the assembly. I voted yes, as did many of my colleagues and friends, but the campaign continues. It did not end on 18 September; it began in full that day.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State continues to make the campaign inclusive and to explain the benefits of the assembly and, following the process in the Bill, looks outwards to our communities. I hope that the regional committee will have a real and effective role in north Wales and that Ministers will try hard to ensure, both before after the assembly is established, that transport links between north and south Wales are strengthened, by rail, air and road.

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Mr. Hanson: I have given way enough. As the hon. Gentleman represents West Dorset, perhaps he should move to Wales and take part in the assembly. I hope that our constituents learn to use the assembly and make it strong and viable.

There has been some discussion of the siting of the assembly in Swansea or Cardiff. I do not want to be regionalist, but wherever the final base is, we need a one-stop shop so that people in my part of north Wales can have a close link with the assembly. They should be able to call in and use the internet; to feel the administration. Its physical presence should not require the four hours on the train or road that it takes to travel from my constituency to Cardiff.

There is much in the Bill that merits the support of all hon. Members in tomorrow's vote. I am proud to have supported the Bill during the referendum and I will be proud to vote for it tomorrow night. It will democratise much of what needs democratising in Wales. There is too much in the hands of Ministers. There is a crying need for people to play an active role in Wales. The Conservative party ignores that at its peril. If it does not play a full role, it will be sidelined even more than it already is in Wales.

8.35 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I wish mainly to address the implications of clause 80, but before the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) leaves his place, I would like to discuss a point that he made of which I have yet to be persuaded.

The Bill provides for a sum of money to be paid from central Government to the assembly. If the total sum remains invariant, and it is decided to allocate an increased proportion of that money to the trunk road programme—a point made by the hon. Gentleman and, I think, by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson)—I assume that it will have to come out of the current total. It must therefore come out of the health programme—is that what the hon. Member for Clwyd, South had in mind?—or the education programme, which seems unlikely. If it does not come out of those programmes, it must, as I suggested, come from top-slicing revenue support grant. That is by far the most likely outcome. I would be most interested in the hon. Gentleman's reply.

Mr. Martyn Jones: The hon. Gentleman's original question was not clear but he has clarified it, perhaps with some education from his Front-Bench colleagues. I was trying to point out that road programme spending priorities will be in the hands of the assembly, which might decide to take money from other sectors of the Welsh Office budget. My point was that it might want to improve one part of the A470 rather than another. The hon. Gentleman's point is separate from that.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful for that clarification. I remain wholly unpersuaded. The Secretary of State already has such discretion in respect of the trunk road programme. The assembly will either be able to reprioritise, compared with the present, or it will not. As far as I can see, it will be able to reprioritise only if it deprives another element of the same total budget.

Mr. Jones: I now know exactly where the hon. Gentleman is coming from. The Secretary of State currently has the power to prioritise road programmes in Wales. My point is that the assembly will have that power.

[Mr. Jones]

and that the assembly will consist of members from Wales with real experience of Welsh roads who will be able to make bids. Under Conservative Governments, we had Secretaries of State who had no experience of roads in Wales.

Mr. Letwin: Now I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, which brings me directly to the effects of clause 80.

Clause 80 will no doubt be extensively debated, if it is one of those that we will be vouchsafed the ability to debate on the Floor of the House. If not, it will no doubt be debated upstairs in Committee. It is the most remarkable piece of drafting it has been the privilege of the House to consider, even under this Government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said in his opening remarks, it states:

"The Secretary of State shall from time to time make payments to the Assembly out of money provided by Parliament of such amounts as he may determine."

That is unrestricted.

It is a most interesting piece of drafting. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said that he did not want the private finance initiative origins of the headquarters of this great assembly to suggest in any way the ability to pull levers that would affect its decisions. Clause 80 allows the Secretary of State unrestricted powers to pull levers of any sort.

Let us take the interesting case that I have just been discussing in my exchange with the hon. Member for Clwyd, South. Let us suppose that the Secretary of State for Wales determined that a decision on priorities set by the assembly in respect of transport or any other matter was slightly mistaken. If the Secretary of State did so decide, he would have available to him the immediate power to make the assembly listen to his view rather than to its view. He would be able to threaten—as, from time to time, is within his discretion—immediately to vary downwards the amount of grant given to the Welsh assembly.

It is, of course, possible to generalise, and to apply that small example to a wide range of issues. What we have here, however, is an interesting picture not of an assembly, but of an animated poodle that is to be led by the Secretary of State around whatever courses he may choose, by means of the strong chain that the Secretary of State holds—the fact that he is its paymaster.

That prompts an interesting question. What have the Government in mind to establish? Let me return to my earlier debate with the hon. Member for Clwyd, South. Do the Government intend to provide for the ability to reprioritise? If so, why, in drafting the legislation, did the Secretary of State not specifically bind his own hand to prevent himself from varying the amount downwards, merely because of the reprioritisation? Or does the Secretary of State intend never to exercise the power to vary the amount downwards as a use of prerogative power—or quasi-prerogative power—to force the assembly into a certain plan of action? Why does he not provide for that in the Bill?

The Secretary of State has repeatedly described this as a process rather than an end point. Perhaps he intends the assembly, over time, to be given tax-raising powers, and therefore feels that it will become less important and less of a lever. If that is his intention, surely it behoves him to tell the House now.

One way or another, we are bound to conclude that the Bill bears a striking similarity to the Bank of England Bill, in that it appears to give another body a basis for independence—but, having given that appearance, it takes it back in clause 80. It creates a poodle, and, moreover, a poodle that can be kicked. It gives the Secretary of State the ability in practice to determine almost every aspect of the assembly's action by means of a constant subtle threat to use the financial lever, and then to complain, when the assembly takes steps that it is virtually bound to take because of the financial stringency imposed by the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that it is the fault of the assembly rather than that of the Secretary of State. Similarly, under the Bank of England Bill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer can de facto control the Bank of England's activities by setting certain targets, and can then complain that it is the Bank of England's fault if the wrong interest rates have been set.

That is a point of the utmost constitutional importance, and it brings us to a line of thought that has been brilliantly exposed in a series of speeches by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). Speaking on the entirely different topic of the European Union, the right hon. Gentleman has often reminded us that the biggest question that we face when considering constitutional issues is what we are trying to aim for. The problem that is revealed in clause 80 does not concern the mere mechanics; it concerns the objective.

It must become clear to anyone who reads and understands clause 80 that the Bill and the assembly are founded on a certain political necessity, rather than on any clear concept of what the Government are trying to do in creating the assembly. That attack could, perhaps, be levelled with less justice against the proposals relating to Scotland: at least the intention is clearer in that regard. In this case, the lack of objective is likely, over time, to create the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) exposed so clearly.

Where there is no objective at the time when the legislation is passed, there must be a great danger that, eventually, the assembly will itself assert objectives to which the House has never subscribed—that it will assert that the aim was somehow to create a genuinely independent state of Wales. We can be in no doubt that Welsh nationalist Members—none of whom are present now—will use that argument.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his reference to Scotland?

Mr. Letwin: Yes. I do not wish to suggest that I believe that the objective is entirely clear in the case of Scottish devolution—which I oppose—but I think that it is at least clear that, in the case of Scotland, there is an intention to give a Scottish Parliament something approaching a national status. Those of us who violently object to that proposal object to it on those grounds.

In this instance, I think that it is genuinely unclear what the Government have in mind. As I have said, I believe that in the long run that will be more likely to generate constitutional tension. Where there is a vacuum of ideas, the vacuum will be filled, and filled above all by those in the assembly who have a particular doctrine.

Whatever we may think of the Welsh national position—and Conservative Members wholly disagree with it—it is at least coherent: it has a clear objective.

It seems altogether likely that, when a Government enact legislation that betrays the fact that it has no objective and creates an assembly that is a poodle, the poodle will react by becoming very vicious. It will try to obtain the maximum mileage by running up and down and yapping, and by trying to bite the heels of those who attempt to control it.

I fear that we are creating the basis for continuing constitutional tension. The assembly will seek to assert itself, and to establish for itself an aim that the Bill—both mechanically and by intention—fails to give it. That strikes me as a remarkable example of lack of constitutional understanding and constitutional foresight. The most important task for a United Kingdom Government considering the constitution of the United Kingdom is not to reach a particular answer, but always to think about the long-term effect on our constitution—not just in Wales, but in the United Kingdom as a whole—of a particular set of objectives, or lack of objectives.

That brings me to my last point. Labour Members have repeatedly asserted that there is a deficiency in Conservative doctrine, or the rights of Conservatives here, because there are no Conservative Members of Parliament in Wales. We are not debating the constitution of Wales; we are debating the constitution of the United Kingdom, or one aspect of it. In that, every UK citizen has an interest. We have an interest in it mechanically, but also from the point of view of the precedent and the concept that are established here.

If we in the House accept legislation that establishes new constitutional mechanics without clear objectives, we put in doubt the whole future of the country's constitution. If we accept the establishment of an assembly that will lead to constitutional friction within the United Kingdom, everyone in the United Kingdom will suffer the disadvantages of that friction from now on. That is why I oppose the Bill.

8.47 pm

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): I have listened to many speeches today, some of which have led me to believe that we need the Bill so that the people of Wales can govern themselves as we want them to be able to.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team on the publication of the Bill. Our people—the people of Wales—have waited a long time for this day. I am particularly pleased and proud to be a Member of Parliament because I have witnessed this historic event. The White Paper published in July gave us in Wales an opportunity to engage in open and frank discussions on how we wished to be governed, and, between July and 18 September, that is precisely what we did.

The White Paper was endorsed by the nation in the referendum on 18 September. The Bill translates the White Paper's proposals into the detailed provisions that are necessary to establish the Welsh Assembly. The nature and number of clauses in the Bill show the efforts that my right hon. Friend and his team have put into taking account of the views expressed by individuals and organisations in Wales.

As a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which has met several times since 18 September, I have been privileged to hear the views of a wide variety of bodies, such as the Welsh Local Government Association and, contrary to what Conservative Members have said, the Welsh Development Agency, the Confederation of British Industry, the Welsh Trades Union Congress and others. The Select Committee has also received many written representations. The overwhelming view is that we are moving in the right direction to enable us to have a real say in how we want to be governed in Wales.

It is important to listen with tolerance to different points of view. Partnership is the key word for the success of the proposals contained in the Bill. I welcome clause 110, which requires the assembly to make a scheme for promoting local government in Wales, and to establish a partnership council for Wales consisting of members of the assembly and of local authorities. If our communities are to benefit from the establishment of a Welsh Assembly, it must have a strong, firm working relationship with democratically elected bodies in those communities. We must understand our communities and get the best deal possible for all the people, because they will be paying for and receiving services provided by the assembly and local authorities.

Communities and their needs differ greatly within Wales. In Conwy, tourism and agriculture are extremely important. I know that the Secretary of State and his Ministers understand fully the points that I am making.

Mr. Hain: I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned tourism, which is vital in her part of Wales. Does she agree with me that the Welsh Assembly will provide a platform for Wales to market itself in Europe, Britain and internationally, which will give additional benefits to areas such as hers, and will ensure that Wales is put on the map in a way that it never has been before?

Mrs. Williams: I whole-heartedly agree with my hon. Friend. People in my constituency and in neighbouring authorities who depend on tourism will look to the Welsh Assembly, and will look favourably on the proposals in the Bill.

The needs of the people working in tourism and agriculture can be fully understood only by representatives that have been elected democratically by those communities. That is why partnership and constant dialogue is paramount if we are to succeed as a nation. The Bill cements that dialogue.

The Bill acknowledges the importance of the voluntary sector. Those of us who have been involved in local and national politics for a long time understand that voluntary organisations are the backbone of our society and communities.

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Williams: I am running out of time, so I shall not give way.

Without the dedication of voluntary workers in our communities, the previous Government's care-in-the-community proposals would not have got off the ground. When in government, the Conservative party cut to the bone the finances of social services, health,

[Mrs. Williams]

education and other services that are important to our people. Hard-working voluntary workers deserve to be properly recognised at long last, and they are mentioned in the Bill.

Since the Government were elected on 1 May, they have taken long, determined strides towards more open government. There is a long way to go before many of us will be satisfied. Several clauses in the Bill refer to more open government, which the Conservative party would not understand. Surely those proposals should be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I am sure that it would come as a great surprise to my hon. Friends if I failed to refer to clause 62, which requires the assembly to establish committees for north Wales and for each of the other regions of Wales. The function of such committees will be to give advice to the assembly about the regions with which they are concerned. In north Wales, we welcome that provision.

I represent a part of Wales that has been neglected for a long time, that needs the right type of inward investment, where the nature of its rural communities has been neglected, and where the railway system is inadequate. I could go on. I am convinced that the proposals in the Bill are the way forward: they are exciting and far reaching. The people of north-west Wales needed these proposals yesterday, not in two years' time. They offer the people of Wales the opportunity to build a dynamic, successful, yet caring and compassionate society for Wales within the United Kingdom. I hope that the House gives overwhelming support to this historic document.

8.56 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Liberal Democrats are wholly behind the proposal for devolution in Wales. It is courageous of the Government to risk giving Welsh people responsibility for their own future. We believe that this experiment is destined to succeed.

I shall limit my comments to considerations of the economy, regional development and the regional structures that will be required for the successful development of Wales. I should also like to make a brief foray into some of the concerns that have been expressed by Conservative Members, who still seem unable to understand the benefits that a democratic structure and devolved system of government will bring to Wales.

In the past 15 years, many aspects of the Welsh economy have improved. The growth of manufacturing employment has outpaced that in the rest of the United Kingdom in the past 10 years. Since 1983, Wales has been one of the few regions of Europe to increase manufacturing employment. Certain sectors, such as the electronics and automotive sectors, have benefited still more from inward investment. The main driving force has been the big improvement in manufacturing productivity. That was despite a Conservative Government.

In fact, perhaps because we had a Conservative Government, some long-term forecasts suggest that Wales may remain one of the UK's poorest regions for some time. Benchmarking Wales against the rest of the UK suggests that its GDP per head is 17 per cent. below the UK average, even in the face of poor medium-term trends in the 1990s for other parts of the UK. Household income is 14 per cent. below average; average full-time earnings are 10 per cent. below; and in some parts of Wales they are as much as 20 per cent. below average. Economic activity is, on average, 8 per cent. below the UK average rate. Those figures are not much to cheer about, and they form a powerful reason for giving Wales economic autonomy to a greater or lesser extent.

There are four specific areas in which Wales can take the creative lead in the UK on rural and environmental policy within a general economic framework. If that is to be achieved, there must be a devolved assembly to make the right decisions. The four areas are: integrated rural policy; a strategy for food; a strategic environmental planning policy; and the initiation of a system of environmental duty. One must first consider what Wales needs. It definitely needs an economic policy that is sympathetic to the environment. Therein lies my first criticism of the Bill. It has not taken sufficient note of the environmental opportunities that are open to Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: The hon. Gentleman will recall that, when I opened the debate, I said that the Government intended to table amendments. One of those will most certainly place a duty on the assembly to have regard to the principle of sustainability. We are currently consulting, and I invite the hon. Gentleman to let us have his observations. If he wishes to make written submissions on behalf of his party, we shall consider them and include them, if we can, in a new clause or an amendment.

Mr. Öpik: I welcome the Secretary of State's offer, and I assure him that we shall take it up. His suggestion is welcomed not just by the Liberal Democrats, but, I am sure, by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the many other organisations that have lobbied us. I am sure that they will also be willing to contribute.

Dr. Marek: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Secretary of State could go a little further and publish some of his draft proposals, so that we may comment on them? The assembly will be open and we are to have a freedom of information Act, but of course at the moment the civil service and Ministers work in the same old way as the people in the previous Tory Administration. Before my right hon. Friend chides me, perhaps I should say that it is not quite as bad as that. I am not being at all critical. There is a case for exposing such drafts of policies, and that might be a useful way to get consensus on the issue.

Mr. Öpik: I welcome that suggestion. Contrary to what Conservative Members have said, it is encouraging that, during the Bill's evolution, the process has been inclusive. That happened before the election, and between the election and the publication of the Bill. I hope that it will continue as we approach the election of members of the assembly. Any move that opens discussion and allows all interested parties to participate is a welcome addition to the process of inclusive politics and constructive opposition.

Mr. Ron Davies: My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) does not need my invitation to express his view. I welcome the comments by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) about the Government's inclusive style. Just before Christmas, there will be a meeting of the Green Alliance which, as he

knows, consists of environmental groups in Wales. It will come as some surprise to my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham to know that the old regime does not apply in Wales, because a senior civil servant from the devolution unit in the Welsh Office will meet the Green Alliance to discuss our thoughts on how an amendment should be phrased.

Mr. Öpik: I am delighted to hear that. If the public transport system in my neck of the woods were more effective, I might endeavour to turn up. However, as I have a smelly old diesel vehicle, I might have to steer clear, and cycling to Cardiff is perhaps beyond my physical capabilities.

I should like to speak a little more about some economic issues. There was some discussion about the Barnett formula. I understand that there is no reason whatever to assume that Wales will be worse off under that formula simply because it has a devolved assembly. I understand that under the Barnett formula money can rise or fall, and that the formula could be completely changed. However, that is separate from the issue of having a devolved assembly.

Mr. Wigley: Did the hon. Gentleman hear Lord Barnett say on Welsh television some three weeks ago that, if the Barnett formula were reviewed now, Wales would almost certainly be better off under that review than under the present formula?

Mr. Öpik: I did not see the interview to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but I have no doubt that that is true. Who better than Mr. Barnett—[HON. MEMBERS: "Lord Barnett."] I tend not to recognise these heady titles. Coming from the Republic of Estonia, my parents, of course, never had to try to recall such privileges.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: Would it not be for the benefit of the House if the hon. Gentleman commented on the fact that the Barnett formula was originally invented in the late 1970s to cope with the anticipated devolution, which never took place because of the referendum result in 1979? Therefore, it would be the height of absurdity to claim that democratic devolution is a threat to the Barnett formula, as that is what the formula was devised to accommodate in the late 1970s.

Mr. Öpik: Again, the hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. In other words, we have been here before and, at that time, there was no danger to the Barnett formula from the simple virtue of introducing a democratic process.

Mr. Hain: May I remind the House that, today, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury published a statement reaffirming the Government's commitment to the Barnett formula? Were it to be revised, in all likelihood Wales would benefit, because, under the Conservative Government between 1979 and 1997, Wales's gross domestic product fell relative to the English average, as a result of which, in any revision, Wales's overall block assessment is well placed to be uprated. Of course, the Barnett formula covers the percentage change in the block, not the total block, as it were.

Mr. Öpik: I welcome this continuing good news from all around me in the Chamber on the Barnett formula. Indeed, I am beginning to fear that Wales will be awash with money, with the changes that have been described.

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): We shall get some more good news if my hon. Friend keeps going.

Mr. Öpik: Indeed. I should keeping going until Wales is the wealthiest part of Europe.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Öpik: I shall happily give way for, I hope, further good news, this time from the Conservative party.

Mr. Jenkin: I should be extremely grateful if the hon. Gentleman took the trouble to turn up at the Second Reading of the Bill on the government of Scotland to make all these explanations, and to make clear what he has discovered today, so that Scottish Members are equally well informed about the future of the Barnett formula and the likely effects on Scottish spending.

Mr. Öpik: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generous offer, but as a humble, relative new boy to the House, I believe that even the Öpik empire does not extend yet to Scotland. However, I shall pass those comments on to my colleagues north of the border.

It is interesting to note that the Barnett formula has not, as the Minister pointed out, taken account of the 10 per cent. fall in GDP over the past decade—I believe that that is in real terms—and that needs to be addressed.

Clearly, and without dwelling on it, there is a serious crisis in the rural economy, brought on not least by the most recent announcements by the Government—which I personally regard as regrettable—on the sale of beef on the bone. A Welsh Assembly could be regarded as an opportunity to lobby directly for the rural interests of those agricultural communities. Let me stress that Wales, perhaps more than any other part of the United Kingdom, is experiencing the deepest hardship in its rural economy on account of the proposals that have been made.

Mr. Denzil Davies: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about beef on the bone. As I understand it, if the Bill is passed, the agricultural powers of the Welsh Office will end up in the Welsh Assembly. Does he understand that, in that situation, if an English Minister of Agriculture banned beef on the bone, a Welsh Assembly might not have to ban it?

Mr. Öpik: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. The Liberal Democrats are deeply concerned about the limitations on the assembly's powers. We would like it to have primary legislation powers, which would provide a greater opportunity for Wales to fight its corner without endless reference to Westminster.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I want to make my position clear. Is it the hon. Gentleman's understanding of the Bill that, if the English Minister of Agriculture was able to ban by order—not primary legislation—beef on the bone, as appears to be the case, a Welsh Assembly would not have to pass such an order, and people in Wales could continue to eat beef on the bone?

Mr. Öpik: We could certainly do that in secret, but I shall give way to the Secretary of State to clarify the point.

Mr. Ron Davies: My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) makes an interesting and persuasive case. If powers to make orders relating to animal or

[Mr. Ron Davies]

human health were transferred to the assembly, my right hon. Friend's point would be correct. However, it is likely that the draft order that we shall produce, certainly in good time for the Committee stage, when we can have something more than a wide-ranging discussion on these issues, will make it clear that matters relating to animal or human health are likely to be reserved. Currently, the sort of order referred to by my right hon. Friend is made jointly by the Minister of Agriculture and me, as Secretary of State for Wales. Such an order is likely to continue, without those powers being transferred to the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Öpik: I am guided by the right hon. Gentleman's statement, and I thank him for the clarification—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Öpik: I want to move on, as other hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; I do not want to delay him unduly. Does he realise that an enormous hole has now been blown in his argument? If, as the Secretary of State has assured us, the Welsh Assembly will not have the slightest control over the matter, how on earth will it help the Welsh people, in respect of beef on the bone and other issues, to have a Welsh Assembly?

Mr. Öpik: I want to make some progress— *[Interruption.]* I shall briefly answer the question head on.

If the Welsh Assembly genuinely has the opportunity to represent the interests of Wales in the European forum—which to a greater or lesser extent is the case—there is no doubt that, if we were to achieve a phased lifting of the beef ban across the United Kingdom, not only would Northern Ireland have a good chance of being first in such phasing, but Wales would have a good chance of having its ban lifted earlier than the rest of the United Kingdom— *[Interruption.]*

Opposition Members deride that comment. If they choose to reject my point, they are simply rejecting the efficacy of a devolved system of government. Many times they have said that they have little faith in a devolved system, but I cite the great belief of people in Scotland in a devolved system. They believe that they can make decisions in the European forum as well as in the United Kingdom forum. I also cite the guidance that we had today from the Secretary of State that that will, to some extent, be the case. It is something that we can discuss at greater length as the Bill proceeds.

I want briefly to make the point about proportionality, which has been made many times before. We support a different system of election, but as the Bill is unequivocal on the proposed system, we reiterate once again our plea to increase the proportional nature by adding 10 additional places. I shall not rehearse arguments that have been made many times before, but we genuinely believe that there is plenty of evidence that that would achieve a more proportionate outcome.

We accept the Secretary of State's unequivocal commitment, in writing, that the issue will be reviewed if it turns out that the system that has been chosen is not proportionate. We welcome that longer-term commitment to finding a proportionate system.

We must be clear about regional development agencies, and about the political structures across Wales. Economic and political autonomy will have to be clearly defined within the context of the Welsh Assembly. We cannot overestimate that matter.

I very much agree with the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) that the majority in the referendum was insufficient for us to assume that everyone in Wales was completely comfortable with a Welsh Assembly. Liberal Democrats very much believe that a regionalised system that is transparent and devolves decisions to the regions of Wales will go a long way towards allaying many of the fears.

No speech by me would be complete without mention of an integrated transport system, with strengthened and improved road networks consisting not of new roads but of improved roads; a more coherent approach towards an integrated rail network, with heavy emphasis on shifting freight from road to rail; and a regional air network. I am delighted that Ministers have now acknowledged the importance of a regional air network and I hope that that will continue to be an important priority in the coming months and years.

I should like to make a few comments about the criticisms and concerns of those who are still unwilling to accept the case for a Welsh Assembly—or even the result of the referendum. In a rather dramatic intervention, the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) reaffirmed the Conservative party's commitment solely to the first-past-the-post system. How ironic, therefore, that Conservative Members singularly rejected the first-past-the-post referendum result. There are no quotas or thresholds in general elections, and I have never heard Conservative Members call for them.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Öpik: I shall in a moment, for the last time. Oh—it is the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

How can Conservative Members expect to be taken seriously when—after the event—they whinge about the process simply because they did not like its outcome on 18 September?

Dr. Lewis: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman—in my fourth intervention in the debate—the difference between a vote on an issue of immense constitutional significance and a straightforward vote in a general or any other election? The only reason why Conservative Members were not able to propose a threshold is that debate was guillotined. The Conservative party did propose a threshold in the other place.

Mr. Öpik: Let me put the hon. Gentleman out of his misery. He has ignored the fact that, whereas decisions on legislation and policies governing the United Kingdom are tactical, the biggest decision that we make in the United Kingdom is electing a Government, who facilitate everything else. Therefore, when he implies that a constitutional decision is somehow greater, he ignores the fact that the Government facilitate those very constitutional changes. He can continue that line, but he is mixing up the tactical and the strategic. If he continues in that manner, I should very much like to hear—although not in an intervention in this debate—how he wants to

change the United Kingdom's electoral system. If he is implying that we need to introduce a proportional representation system to elect the Government, I very much welcome his point.

I assume that the hon. Gentleman, as he is a member of a party of great principle, will encourage his party not to offer a single candidate under a list system, which it believes is undemocratic—although I do not imagine for a moment that that will happen.

On funding, the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) made some important, reasonable points about the size of the pot, echoing concerns that have also been expressed by those of us on the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Mr. Ron Davies: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the issue of the Conservatives and the electoral system, is it his understanding that, under the present arrangements, it is most unlikely that the Conservative party would ever get elected according to constituency selection? Does he agree that it is only under the additional list system that the Conservatives are likely to have any representation in Wales?

Mr. Öpik: The Secretary of State makes the point that has been reiterated on many occasions, but apparently it has not been heard by those who stand to gain the most from a change to a fairer system of election. Believe or not, I would welcome the introduction of a system of election of assembly members that offered advantage not only to the minority parties in Wales, but to the non-existent party in Wales, the Conservative party.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Öpik: I shall give way, but for the last time.

Mr. Jenkin: Can we take it that the only reason why the Liberal Democrat party supports proportional representation is that it believes that it does better under that system than under the present first-past-the-post system that we have in the House of Commons? If so, and given that the Conservative party will put up candidates for the Welsh Assembly under PR, is he not being hypocritical by standing for this Parliament under a first-past-the-post system?

Mr. Öpik: The hon. Gentleman's second point is entertaining but entirely illogical, and his first point is perhaps even more amazing. If there is one party that stands to lose its status of importance in Scotland and Wales through the introduction of PR, it is the Liberal Democrat party, and if there is one party that stands to gain from its introduction in Scotland and Wales, it is the Conservative party. Although it might be difficult for some hon. Members to accept, the Liberal Democrats continue to support the change to fair votes out of principle rather than out of self-interest.

As I said, the hon. Member for Poole made some interesting comments about funding. We, too, have argued about that on a number of occasions. We proposed that the assembly should have tax-varying powers, and we regret that it will not. As I said in an earlier intervention, money could be found in other ways, for example, by replacing quango appointees with elected representatives of the assembly. That could save many millions of pounds—the upper estimate is a saving of as much as £24 million, although I have not corroborated that figure. Currently, there are 1,400 quango appointees in Wales and 1,273 councillors. In other words, there are more unelected appointees than elected councillors. Surely there is money to be saved by replacing those appointees.

Hon. Members have also asked about how we shall invest in the priorities that matter. The answer, as the hon. Member for Poole acknowledged, is by changing those priorities. A repeated anxiety is that the assembly will destabilise the Union. Five words negate that concern—the United States of America. It is one of the most stable nations in the world, yet it is governed according to a federal system. It is unquestionably because of that federation and the acceptance of cultural variation, even law-making variation, across the United States, that that enormous nation is effective.

It has also been argued that the assembly would be bad for business. I simply do not accept that and, once again, the United States' experience seems to negate that argument. It is a laudable act of faith among those who will run the assembly that they will be able to devolve decisions to the regions of Wales, which will provide the impetus for success. The Development Board for Rural Wales is a classic example of having regional autonomy has helped to reinvigorate an ailing economy.

The location of the assembly has also been mentioned, and if I may add my tuppenny worth, I see no reason why the home of democracy in Wales, Machynlleth, should not be chosen, provided that the road network was greatly improved.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Everyone understands the hon. Gentleman's need to press for his own little area, but is there available in Machynlleth a meeting place of sufficient prestige with sufficient seating capacity, which could be available by May 1999, as Swansea guildhall would be in a cost-effective way?

Mr. Öpik: Without entering into too parochial a debate, I can guarantee that, for £14.5 million, I would build it myself.

Mr. Anderson: In time?

Mr. Öpik: Oh, yes, in the time available.

I apologise for having taken so much time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I want to raise a few points about the closed list system. We share the concern of the official Opposition that such a system carries the danger of party patronage. Even if that difficulty could be resolved, a problem of public perception would remain and assumptions would be made about jobs for the boys. We cannot constructively pursue that argument here on the Floor of the House, but I hope that we shall be able to debate it in subsequent stages of the Bill.

Mr. Hain: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as he has been so tolerant of interventions. If—as is likely to be the case both for the Labour party and for his own—the selection of candidates in the list is determined by one person, one vote among the electorate, does the hon. Gentleman agree that that

[Mr. Hain]

would create conditions in which democracy prevailed to a far greater extent than is suggested by the "jobs for the boys and girls" syndrome?

Mr. Öpik: The Minister suggests a compromise solution that is far better than a simple closed system, which the public might suspect of being a set of appointments for the party faithful. Nevertheless, we still prefer the concept of an open list, although we can talk about the details at a later stage. I reiterate that my reason for saying this is that we must have a strategically transparent system for electing assembly members, so that no one can believe that certain individuals are there only as a reward for party activities and not primarily for the interests of Wales.

My final point about the electoral system relates to clause 5, which has caused some confusion. It is not entirely clear to me whether it precludes an individual from standing in a constituency as well as in a list. I should be grateful if the Minister clarified that point of interpretation when he sums up the debate tomorrow.

I have tried to cover a few specific areas, but I shall conclude on a broader point relating to the attitude of those in the Chamber tonight towards the introduction of a devolved assembly. It seems that there are those who still do not accept that, at the end of the day, devolution is a reasonable act of faith in the people to whom the responsibility is to be devolved. I once saw a wonderful cartoon, in which a father angrily asked his son, "How can you act so irresponsibly?" to which the son replied, "But Dad, that's how irresponsible people act!" In the same way, if we tell the Welsh people, ad infinitum, that they are incapable of governing their own affairs, they will live down to that expectation. However, finally—thankfully—on 18 September, enough people in Wales decided to believe in the national spirit to vote for the national devolution that we are now debating.

In the Greece of 2,500 years ago—a country with few resources and a small population—the people showed great vision and achieved far greater success than would ever have been predicted for them. Fifty years before that success, there was a substantial political reform that set in place the democratic opportunities and processes that led to the creation of an empire.

I am not suggesting that the Welsh will roll across the marches and take over Shrewsbury, however much those who live near the marches might want that to happen. I am suggesting that, with the opportunity of an assembly from 1999, Wales can express its own culture as it has never done before, and it can allow its language to thrive in a way that would not have been thought possible half a century ago. Wales will be able to experiment with its political structures in a way that seemed impossible even 20 years ago. Perhaps above all else, Wales will be able to create an economic climate that adds to the great success that the Welsh Development Agency has already had in acquiring foreign investment and foreign trade.

It may not be known by many hon. Members, but Wales already has its own space programme, called project Dragon Fire—

Mr. Evans: No doubt it operates from the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. Öpik: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is correct: it operates from my constituency. Its self-styled leader operates from a pub called The Bell, and hon. Members are most welcome to come to meetings of CASA—Cymru Aeronautics and Space Administration. Contributions from the Government would be most welcome.

If there is one message that must come out of this Chamber to Wales, it is that Westminster has ascribed to Wales the authority to define its own future. It is that self-belief that will make the attitude that goes with the structures of democracy a success. If, after the debates that we are having here today and tomorrow, and as the Bill proceeds, we all pursue that objective constructively, we can have not only an effective, inclusive, cross-party consensus where differences of opinion are respected and welcomed, but a Wales which, in 10 or 15 years' time, will be the pride of the United Kingdom and the envy of the world.

9.31 pm

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this important debate about beginning the process of decentralisation in Britain and of democratisation in the governance of Wales.

A clear understanding of what happened on 18 September is essential if we are to debate the Bill constructively. Quite simply, the people of Wales made a decision: they decided that they wanted to move away from rule by Whitehall outpost and quango archipelago; instead, they voted for government of the Welsh people for the Welsh people by the Welsh people. They voted for a directly elected Welsh Assembly, the "National Assembly of Wales" described in the Bill. They voted for democracy in the democratic process that was the referendum.

It is very depressing to hear Opposition Members sneering at that democratic process and, having lost the argument and lost the vote, saying, at worst, that we should ignore the result or, at best, interpret it to mean something other than the go-ahead for the Government's proposals as described in the White Paper. That democratic process and that referendum cannot and must not be treated in such a cavalier fashion. Neither turnout nor closeness of result can seriously be used to argue that the Bill should not be approved substantially unchanged if we are to respect what the people of Wales have said.

In fact, the turnout on an old register in a poll held at the end of the summer was far higher than is achieved in local government or European elections across the whole country. Should we, therefore, scrap our local authorities or not send representatives to the European Parliament? Some people argue that there should have been a threshold—we have heard that argument today. If we are honest, we know that the only people who argue for thresholds in such referendums are people who want to prevent change. A threshold is fundamentally undemocratic and possibly anti-democratic because it adds anyone not voting, for whatever reason, to the number of votes cast for one side of the argument.

That is the twisted logic of the Conservative Members who repeatedly preface their questions with, "As 75 per cent. of the Welsh people do not support the assembly". It is nonsense. Without compulsory voting, democratic decisions must be taken by the people who exercise their right to vote, and fairness demands that a simple majority must decide the question.

Dr. Julian Lewis: For the fifth time, I argue that Labour Members do not accept that, when a vote takes place on an issue changing the constitutional rules of the game, the criteria for changing those rules should be higher than a simple majority. That is a constitutional safeguard in many democracies throughout the world, and it should have been a constitutional safeguard in this case.

Mr. Caton: I understand that argument, but I do not agree with it. By imposing a threshold, one defends the status quo. Unfortunately, when we examine the Conservative Government's record, we find that they were prepared to impose thresholds to secure yes votes on some issues. When they were trying to remove council housing from local authority control, they imposed a threshold to shift the balance towards the yes votes. The Conservatives are not consistent in defending the status quo with thresholds.

There is an argument for thresholds, but I do not agree with it. I believe that a democratic decision should be taken on a simple majority vote, whether it be in an election for a Government or for a change of structure.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I remind my hon. Friend of another example that shows that the Conservative party may be less than consistent—ballots in respect of grant-maintained status for schools. In a ballot in my constituency, despite a very small turnout and a minuscule majority, a school became grant-maintained. Therefore, for the Conservative party it is a matter not of principle but of what happens to suit its purpose at any moment.

Mr. Caton: That is absolutely true, and I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. Indeed, if we are thinking of ballots on grant-maintained status, the very fact that parents of children from feeder schools were excluded from the democratic process is another example of vote rigging by the Conservative party.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) *rose—*

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) *rose—*

Mr. Caton: I give way to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley).

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will agree that the Welsh assembly—

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): The hon. Gentleman has just come in.

Mr. Bottomley: I have not.

The hon. Gentleman will agree that the decision to set up a Welsh Assembly is more important than the conversion of a building society from mutual status to profit earning. Why does he support the Government, who say that a building society seeking to convert needs an absolute majority, but a referendum for a Welsh Assembly does not?

Mr. Caton: The circumstances are very different. When attempts are made to bring about changes that will affect the interests of the members of a building society, who have joined for a purpose, those interests should be protected. That is a very different matter from changes in the general democratic process in a country, whether it be changes in structure—constitutional change—or the election of a Government, a council or whatever.

Mr. Ron Davies: I encourage my hon. Friend to continue to be robust in rejecting the arguments of Conservative Members. Will he reflect on the fact that those arguments would have more credibility now if they had been advanced during the passage of the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill? Conservative Members had every opportunity to table amendments to ensure that there was a threshold. Will my hon. Friend reflect on the fact that, because Conservative Members refused to do so then, the arguments that they are making now are spurious?

Mr. Caton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no, he isn't."] Oh, yes, he is. As my hon. Friends have said, we fought the referendum on a set of rules. We complied with the rules. Everyone knew those rules during the referendum process.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Is not this an illustration of parliamentary sovereignty in operation? Tonight, we have heard much from Conservative Members about parliamentary sovereignty. Does my hon. Friend agree that Parliament determined the rules within which the referendum would be conducted and that Parliament, exercising its sovereignty, determined that there should be no threshold?

Mr. Caton: My hon. Friend has made the point rather better than I managed to.

Mr. Paterson: The hon. Gentleman says that constitutional change should be made by majority. Does he agree that the British constitution belongs to all the people, and that it is a denial of democracy to have excluded 85 per cent. of the electorate from the referendum?

Mr. Caton: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand what those of us who had a vote were voting on. We had, and have, devolved government in Wales, in the form of the Welsh Office. It has considerable powers. All that we voted for on 18 September was to make its powers accountable to the people of Wales. That was rightly a decision for the people of Wales.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): The hon. Gentleman claims that changing the status of a building society requires an absolute majority, but changing the economic

[Dr. Liam Fox]

status of our nation—as, for instance, with economic and monetary union—requires a simple majority of one. Is that the logic of his argument?

Mr. Caton: That is an interesting question, but I have made my case. *[Interruption.]* That would indeed be my position. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) is being far too noisy.

Mr. Caton: I am happy to give way next to the Minister.

Mr. Hain: Parliament decided in the summer to hold an advisory, consultative referendum. Conservative Members have missed the point, which is that Parliament retained its sovereignty in the matter. It decided not on a binding referendum but on a consultative one. It therefore makes perfect logical sense to require a simple majority—which is what it was.

Mr. Caton: That is a good point. As for the wider British electorate's involvement, on 1 May the British electorate were of course involved. The Labour party fought the election on the idea that we would offer the people of Wales and of Scotland democratically elected and devolved government. They had their say then.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Another factor is that the party that claims to be the party of the Union would have been well on the way to destroying that Union if the clearly expressed views of Wales and Scotland had been overwhelmed by an English vote. Indeed, there could be no better recipe for the break-up of the union than if Wales and Scotland had been denied the constitutional settlement that they wanted.

Mr. Caton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is another reason why thresholds are so dangerous. If a simple majority vote for a particular course of action and are then denied the ability to take that course by the threshold mechanism, unrest is created.

Mr. Wigley: Is not the logic of these tedious Conservative interventions the idea that there should be a threshold for our Westminster votes as well? Are the Tories seriously advocating such a dramatic change in our practices here? They look bemused. It seems that they want to lay down thresholds for others, but not to entertain the idea here.

Mr. Caton: The right hon. Gentleman makes a useful point.

I wish to refer to the advisory nature of the referendum. As a Member of Parliament, I feel honour-bound to listen to the people of Wales. That is why I believe that we should not move too far away from the substance of the White Paper, as that is what the people of Wales voted on. That is not to say that there is no opportunity for change or debate. I confess that I have concerns, for instance, about the closed-list system in the electoral process; such matters should be debated in the Chamber and in Committee. I am pleased that the Bill so accurately reflects what we voted for in the referendum.

I do not intend to take up too much time by repeating points that were made during debates on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Act, which were central to the debate in Wales during the summer campaign. Instead, I should like to address three specific matters: first, the future of the quangos; secondly, the committee structure that will emerge from the commission's drawing up of draft Standing Orders, and their consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State; and thirdly, the right of consultation by representatives of interest groups in Wales.

First, on quangos, some of my hon. Friends were disappointed that the White Paper did not go beyond dealing with the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Land Authority for Wales and Tai Cymru. I suspect that they were disappointed with the contents of the Bill. I do not share their disappointment.

Mr. Win Griffiths: My hon. Friend is right to list the quangos to be dealt with by the Bill. However, he needs to remember that, under the existing powers, the Health Promotion Authority for Wales, the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, the Cardiff Bay development corporation and the residuary body will all be out of the way. We are currently carrying out the reconfiguration of trusts in which a substantial number of those will also disappear.

Mr. Caton: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point.

I was involved in the development of devolution policy by the Welsh Labour party. I cannot remember a time—from early drafts onwards—when we were not looking at giving the assembly the main job of examining the functioning of the quangos. I have no problem with that, and I can see that the various bodies mentioned by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary must be dealt with urgently. However, it would be wrong for us to say to the assembly, "You are in charge of how the quangos function and you must make sure that they are transparent, accountable and more effective than what we had before," while imposing a fait accompli on the assembly.

It is the job of the assembly to look at how the quangos in Wales function and to improve them. In that sense—and although some of my hon. Friends may feel that all we have is a campfire of the quangos—we are handing over the matches and the firelighters to the assembly to continue the work of democratising Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: I want to ensure that my hon. Friend fully understands the rationale of the Government's position, which is quite compatible with the Labour policy that he was instrumental in forming. It is a central requisite of the devolution policy that the assembly should be fully empowered to deal with all the public bodies to which my hon. Friend has referred. In the case of the Welsh Development Agency, for example, the assembly will be fully empowered to carry forward any further changes.

The Government took into consideration the uncertainty and delay that might have adversely affected the work of bodies such as the WDA, if, at this stage, we

said that in two and a half or three years the assembly would be empowered to carry out a restructuring. The Government's view was that the uncertainty hanging over the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales made it imperative for us to take early action, so that the powerhouse could be created to carry forward the work of economic development in Wales.

Mr. Caton: I entirely accept the logic of that action. The creation of the powerhouse is important also because of the changes on the structural front emanating from the European Union. We need one organisation to cover all the functions previously dealt with by three.

My second concern relates to the committee structure that is to be developed for the Welsh Assembly. I note the intention to create subject areas covering all the matters listed in schedule 2. There are 18 of them: agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food; ancient monuments; culture; economic development; education and training; the environment; health and health services; highways; housing; industry; local government; social services; sport and recreation; tourism; town and country planning; transport; water and flood defence; and the Welsh language.

I recognise that all those matters must be covered by subject committees. My worry is that the commission and eventually the Secretary of State may plump for too many committees. With such large subject areas, there may be a temptation to go for a large number of committees, and thus more chairs, leaders, First Secretaries or whatever we will call them—more chiefs and fewer indians. That does not make for democratic government or for effective government. I hope that the Secretary of State will bear that in mind.

Mr. Wigley: Does not the Bill allow sub-committees to be set up for each committee? The committee may be both a supervisory committee for the Minister and a body akin to a Select Committee, given the powers that are available. Those powers may best be exercised through a sub-committee system, with a restricted number of main committees, and with sub-committees to focus on the detail to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Caton: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that the commission and the Secretary of State will consider such an approach.

There has been some debate about whether the assembly should work according to a Cabinet system or a local government committee system. The Bill allows for a new and different system that combines the best of both.

Mr. Ron Davies: For the sake of clarity, I assure my hon. Friend that the advisory committee that will precede the work of the statutory commission will have a very wide remit. It can certainly consider the question whether the assembly operates on the basis of a Cabinet system or a local government system. I await the outcome with interest.

My hon. Friend referred to the list of functions in schedule 2. The purpose of the schedule is to make it clear that the Secretary of State will have the responsibility for laying orders transferring functions in those areas to the assembly. It is not meant to be a prescriptive list of the committee structure. I agree with my hon. Friend, and the point was made by the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), that there might be six, eight or 10 committees, rather than the entire list in the schedule.

Mr. Caton: I thank my right hon. Friend for those helpful remarks, and I welcome the approach that he is likely to take.

As for the right of consultation for interest groups in Wales, like other hon. Members, I warmly welcome the provision in clause 110 that requires the assembly to draw up a scheme to sustain and promote local government. I particularly welcome the creation of the partnership council. The key to better government in Wales will be the right relationship between the two tiers of democratic representation in our country. Councillors and local authority employees have expressed fears that the assembly may seek to take over their responsibilities. Those fears have been aired in the Chamber today.

I believe that the White Paper did much to dispel those concerns. However, the Bill—and, in particular, the creation of the partnership council—will inspire further confidence that the assembly is good news for local democracy, as well as for democracy at the all-Wales level. After 1999, the quality of most of our major public services and our ability to grow as a sustainable economy will be in the hands of both our new assembly and our local councils. With a dynamic and constructive partnership, things can only get better.

The responsibilities and structures for which the Bill provides establish an excellent base on which to build. I am also pleased to see the requirement in clause 111 for the assembly to develop a scheme to promote the voluntary sector. Voluntary organisations throughout Wales will welcome a structure in which the criteria for financial assistance, the ground rules for monitoring the use of resources and the methods of consultation are debated openly and decided.

However, I note that the Bill does not include similar consultation rights for the representatives of the main economic players: the employers and employees. Perhaps, in answering the debate tomorrow, the Under-Secretary will confirm whether consideration has been given to a statutory right of consultation for the social partners, either jointly, as a Welsh economic committee, or separately, as the Wales Trades Union Congress, the Welsh version of the Confederation of British Industry or some other appropriate representative organisation.

Mr. Hain: I draw my hon. Friend's attention generally to clause 64(3)—he need not consult it in detail unless he wishes to do so—which makes it clear that business will need to be consulted in terms of regulatory appraisals of any regulations that the assembly might introduce.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the third or fourth time that the Government's Front-Bench spokesmen have helped to pad out the speech by the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton). Is it conventional to provide such assistance

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

to an hon. Member as we approach 10 o'clock? Is the intention to exclude other hon. Members from speaking in the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Worthing, West is making accusations. Interventions are perfectly within the rules of the House—that is why I have allowed them.

Mr. Hain: For the benefit of the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley), I was seeking to draw to my hon. Friend's attention the fact that clause 64 addresses precisely his concern that business should be consulted. We have issued an open invitation to business, the voluntary sector and several other interest groups in Wales to submit their agendas to my right hon. Friend's advisory committee—and thereafter to the statutory commission—to explain what relationship they want with the assembly. It is an inclusive process, which will extend to the opening of the assembly in 1999.

Mr. Caton: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I still recommend that thought should be given to the social partner approach to consultation with the economic players. Structures for consultation obviously help, but the culture of the assembly will be just as important. The electoral system, fair committee structures and rights to be heard will help to create a democratic body that is more constructive and inclusive and less confrontational than anything we have seen before.

Working practices are part of the answer but attitude is equally important. A heavy responsibility lies on the shoulders of our first elected assembly women and men. It will be their job to nurture a co-operative and consensual culture. The location of the assembly might help them to achieve that objective. The mind-opening significance of daring even to consider basing our assembly outside Cardiff has provided enthusiasm and excitement in Swansea and south-west Wales. That has been matched only by the arrogance of some statements from Cardiff-based media.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Dr. Nick Palmer be added to the Administration Committee.—[*Mr. Clive Betts, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

CATERING COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Patrick McLoughlin be discharged from the Catering Committee and Mr. Keith Simpson be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Clive Betts, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Cynog Dafis be discharged from the Education and Employment Committee and Mr. Paul Keetch be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Clive Betts, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Paul Flynn be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Mr. Huw Edwards be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Clive Betts, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

Conygar Quarry, North Somerset

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

10 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I shall begin the debate by making it clear that this is not another not-in-my-back-yard debate about quarrying. My constituency has many quarries within it and my constituents are used to the problems that are associated with quarrying. They are used to making sacrifices that they regard as part of their civic duty. They know that road building, for example, is an important part of improving the country's infrastructure.

I initiated the debate because I feel that a genuine injustice is being done. If the letter of the law has not been broken and if procedures have not been wrongly conducted, at least the spirit of the law has been ignored.

It will perhaps be useful for me to put on the record a brief history of Conygar quarry in Clevedon. It is a 19-acre sandstone quarry, which was worked during the 19th century. Permission was registered under an interim development order in 1947. It ceased production in the late 1950s, incidentally with a maximum recorded output of 17,000 tonnes per annum. Tipping permission for inert waste was granted in 1962. As a scrap yard, the quarry was used until 1989.

In 1990, the site was purchased by Tasplot Ltd., which took Woodspring district council, as it then was, to the High Court in that same year for denying knowledge of the planning permission. In an undefended action, Tasplot obtained £2,000 in damages, a full-page apology twice in the local newspaper, the *Mercury*, and a declaratory judgment on the basis that no evidence was offered by the district council and so it had to accept anything that Tasplot demanded.

Tasplot, as many of the owners of the quarry mysteriously have done, went into receivership in 1992, owing over £800,000. After much action group lobbying, the quarry was registered as dormant under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. An appeal against that registration was rejected by the then Avon county council, which thankfully we managed to abolish shortly afterwards.

In 1994, an application by Federated Aggregates Ltd. to reopen the site with a new road across the Gordano valley was requested. Avon county council allowed extraction of only 40,000 tonnes per annum. That restriction was accompanied by 100 generally acceptable but not universally popular, by any means, working conditions.

Federated Aggregates Ltd. lost interest, as did many companies before them, and Conygar Ltd. obtained control. Recently, a local farmer, in conjunction with Conygar Ltd., appealed against the conditions. Then came the inspector's bombshell.

This is a major local issue. It affects those near the quarry and all those living in Clevedon, the largest town in my constituency. It took a recent trip by air from nearby Lulsgate airport for me properly to appreciate the sheer scale of the quarry. The sight from the air of the number of residential properties adjacent to the quarry, the development that has taken place since it was opened and, not least, the school close by, has to be seen to be believed. Hon. Members will agree that an issue's importance can be measured by the size of one's postbag. I dealt with about five times as many letters about the quarry as about hunting.

Avon county council's conditions were not welcome, but they were accepted. That says much for the patience and understanding of the people who live nearby. They were willing to accept the conditions. The town council accepted them; the district council accepted the situation. As the Member of Parliament representing the wider area, I was willing to accept it. I pay special tribute to the action group, whose determination has achieved so much in bringing the issue to public prominence. The inspector did not share the democratic view, and it is to a point of democratic deficit that I should like to return.

I told the Minister that I would mention the environmental setting of the quarry, because the Government talk of having a new priority for the environment. Let me tell them about us. We are a seaside town. The quarry lies at the edge of the Gordano valley, which contains priority landscape and wildlife conservation and historic landscape areas. It is a site of special scientific interest and lies within the Bristol green belt. Those facts have either been ignored or are considered irrelevant. It is important not only for the quarry in my constituency but for the situation beyond that such factors are taken fully into account in the decisions of faceless bureaucrats.

One of my biggest worries, having also been a general practitioner in a nearby town, is safety. The quarry opens into the narrow Norton's Wood lane. The matter was put well in a letter from a constituent, Dr R. J. Pring, who said:

"The lane onto which the quarry fronts is narrow (too narrow for two lorries to pass) with no footpath, is part of the local cycleway and is used by horseriders. The lane itself then exits on to a 'B' road almost opposite the road serving the comprehensive school. Travelling the opposite way, the lane narrows, and lorries would either have to negotiate about four miles of narrow lane until reaching a road for Portishead, or take a left hand turn passing through another small village and emerging onto the 'B' road at a blind crossroads."

Since the quarry reached its maximum output in the 1950s, Clevedon comprehensive school has been built. There is a busy and dangerous junction. I had forgotten how dangerous it could be until I had a narrow miss on Saturday morning while visiting the quarry site. Some 1,500 local school children aged four to 18 use the same roads. If anything happens because of the increased traffic that will result from permission to quarry an unlimited amount, more than a small amount of blame will lie with whoever's signature lies on that permission. It would be almost comical, if it were not true, that a cemetery was not allowed by the highways authority for safety reasons, but we are to have unlimited quarrying and an unlimited number of lorries on our narrow lanes.

The inspector's report must be seen to be believed. It is almost as though the report was written by one person and the conclusions by someone else who had not only never visited the district but not read the report in the first place. Paragraph 43 states:

"Although I have little evidence on the economic structure of the operation it seems to me that to prevent access from 1.00–2.00 may be unduly onerous. Nevertheless, I appreciate that the view could be taken that there would be unacceptable risk to school children at lunchtimes".

[Dr. Liam Fox]

The inspector accepts that there may be unacceptable risk but, lo and behold, in the conclusion, the unacceptable risk becomes acceptable. The previous restrictions that safeguarded our children at the local school simply disappear.

The inspector states:

"I consider it unlikely that large numbers of primary school children would be out at lunchtime".

There is no mention of the quarries opposite the secondary school, where a large number of pupils are out at lunchtime—pupils who deserve our protection.

Paragraph 40 of the report states:

"Delivery vehicles are most likely to have difficulty negotiating the (Walter Road) junction. I am convinced by the written and photographic evidence and by my inspection, that the junction is potentially dangerous and that there would be harmful effects on safety and amenity resulting from the use by heavy vehicles of the narrow lane. Most danger would be caused to those on foot and on bicycles."

The report concludes that an unlimited number of lorries would use the junction, and that—in the inspector's own words—that would be dangerous.

I could go on and on—I could give example after example—but let me just say to the Minister that there is a democratic deficit. I was aware of it when my party was in government, and I do not pretend for a moment that that was not the case; but if Secretaries of State simply sign the recommendations that inspectors give them, and we as a democratic body have no way of redressing those decisions, what is the role of democracy in the process?

The decision is ultimately being made by a faceless bureaucrat who, on the basis of one visit to my constituency, is able to overturn what I think and what my district council, my town council, local people and the action group think. Everyone's view is irrelevant: all the rounds in the planning inquiry are meaningless except the last round. As long as the last round is won, that is enough. The Secretary of State will sign, and that is it. We as democratic politicians have no locus, and that cannot be right. What will be the Government's response to a situation that allows lorry movements to increase from 20 a day to an unlimited number, an increase in extracted tonnage by 300 per cent. to 125,000 tonnes, no lunch-time lorry restrictions, unlimited blasting and earlier starting times? All that will be to the detriment of our local environment.

Let me make this clear to whoever owns the quarry, or will own it in the future. We understand that time is money, and we know the value of delay. I shall use my offices to investigate any way, any device and any project to make the quarry unviable. I look to the Government to help to prevent an act of unsafe, unfounded vandalism. The people of my constituency—people in Clevedon and in north Somerset generally—are slow to anger, but that should not lead us to understate their determination. They have shown admirable resilience and courage in their battle over the quarry. They have my admiration, and, for as long as I represent them, my total support.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on securing the debate, and on his speech. I know he will understand that my response must necessarily avoid comment on the details of the case, because the Secretary of State no longer has any jurisdiction in the matter. Indeed, the legal processes in the case are complete. However, I want to make it clear at the outset that the Government recognise and understand the real concerns raised locally by quarrying and its impact on the environment. Successive Governments have sought to respond to those concerns, and to achieve a sensible balance between the interests of the economy and the construction industry and those of the environment. That is reflected in primary legislation.

I shall return to the planning processes of the Conygar quarry case shortly. For the avoidance of doubt, it is important to set out the stages through which the consideration of the quarry has passed. First, however, I shall set out the legislative position in some detail, as it is important to explain clearly the purposes of the reforms of recent years.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, successive Governments have accorded the reform of old quarrying permissions considerable priority in recent years, and I want to remind the House of the progress that has been made.

The modern reform of the mineral planning system began as far back as 1976 with the publication of the Stevens committee report. Its recommendations formed the basis of the Minerals Act 1981, which is now consolidated in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and is the cornerstone of modern mineral planning legislation. The 1981 Act introduced a duty on mineral planning authorities—in current terms, the counties, unitaries and national park authorities—to review and make orders updating mineral permissions, and established that the minerals industry should bear part of the costs under the polluter pays principle.

However, the provisions in the 1981 Act for review and updating of conditions did not work well in practice. Mineral planning authorities were reluctant to risk incurring compensation liabilities, which were difficult to assess, in advance of using their order-making powers. The shortcomings of the 1981 Act were recognised, and, as a result, two further pieces of legislation were enacted to deal with them.

The first was the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. The then Government legislated to reform interim development order planning permissions. They were the earliest remaining mineral permissions in the United Kingdom, and were granted under interim development orders between 1943 and 1948, chiefly to meet wartime needs and the demands of post-war reconstruction. Conygar quarry is one of those IDOs, and received its permission in 1947.

Those permissions had few, if any, planning conditions attached, and in many cases records of their existence had been lost. Under the 1991 Act, IDO permissions had to be registered with local mineral planning authorities and then submitted to them for updating of their working and restoration conditions.

All IDO permissions remain valid and cannot legally be revoked without compensation. That is consistent with the wider general principles of planning and property law. There is no compensation for the cost of complying with new conditions, but our planning guidance makes it clear that conditions imposed on active sites should not

"fundamentally effect the economic structure of the operation."

For dormant sites—sites where there was no substantial working for the two years between May 1989 and April 1991—full modern conditions may be imposed without compensation. Full planning guidance is given on the operation of the 1991 Act in mineral planning guidance notes 8 and 9.

On the whole, those reforms have worked well over the years, and are delivering real benefits as older quarries are brought up to modern environmental standards. In recent years, the responsible members of the quarrying industry have taken steps to be good neighbours, and to reduce the environmental impact of their operations. As society looks towards higher environmental standards, the industry's standards will also have to rise. I look to the industry for a positive response in cases of difficulty, so that local harmony and good relations between quarry operators and local populations can be sustained.

The Environment Act 1995 built on that earlier success and made provision for similar reforms to deal with permissions that were granted between 1948 and 1982. The details of that legislation are not relevant tonight, except in one important aspect.

It is very important that, once modernised, mineral permissions do not slip back again. None of us wants to be continually confronted with this issue. The Environment Act 1995 therefore provides for periodic reviews, at 15-year intervals, of all mineral permissions, irrespective of the date on which they were granted, to ensure that, once modernised, they are kept in line with current environmental standards and best practice. This is a particularly important aspect of the reforms, and has clear benefits.

The overall aim of the review process, which successive Governments have supported, is to ensure environmentally sound outcomes while not prejudicing economic viability. The hon. Gentleman made that point.

I want to outline the sequence of the planning processes involved in the Conygar quarry case, so that the Department's role is clear and transparent. Conygar quarry received its planning permission in 1947. It was registered as a dormant site under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 by the then Avon county council. The mineral planning authority for the quarry now is North Somerset district council.

An application to reactivate the quarry was made by Conygar Quarry Ltd., and was the subject of an appeal to my Department. A planning inspector visited the site on 2 July 1996 and, after a thorough and independent consideration of all the issues, reported to the then Secretary of State on 22 November 1996. As no decision had been issued before the general election, the matter fell to be determined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. He agreed with the inspector's recommendations on the conditions to govern this case and issued his decision letter on 25 June 1997.

The recommendations included conditions on traffic, time limits on blasting, and vibration limits in line with Government guidance. As the hon. Member for Woodspring raised some of those issues in his speech, I should like to respond briefly on each. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in the decision letter and in the inspector's report, considerable attention was given to conditions regulating traffic weights, access and signing. The hon. Gentleman referred to passages from the inspector's report.

The report included conditions governing automatic wheel and chassis washes, and the sheeting of lorries to provide for the cleanliness of roads leading to and from the public highway and of vehicles leaving the site. Traffic conditions were also included to control access to and from the highway, to provide for the display of on-site signs showing recommended vehicle routes, to warn HGV lorry drivers visiting or leaving the quarry about local schools, and to prohibit night-time working.

The inspector gave careful consideration to the issue of output from the site in paragraphs 114 to 122 of his report and produced firm recommendations. Indeed, he recommended a shorter period for controlling the average output from the site and allowed for more frequent monitoring. He considered that this

"would prevent the possibility that a long high peak in production could lead to very high levels of traffic over a protracted period."

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State saw no reason to disagree with that, and imposed conditions accordingly.

As the hon. Member for Woodspring referred to two passages in the inspector's report, it is right that I should refer to the relevant recommendations. I shall quote from paragraph 40 of the inspector's report because the hon. Gentleman quoted from it and spoke about potential danger to schoolchildren. The paragraph ended with the following words which the hon. Gentleman did not quote:

"I am satisfied, therefore, that there is a need for a condition preventing the distribution of stone at times when the lorries are most likely to come into conflict with other road users."

In paragraph 44 of his report the inspector turned to the subject of the safety of schoolchildren. He states:

"In my experience, the peak time for arrival at schools is short and well defined. On the specific evidence, it seems to me that a period of restriction from 8.30 to 9.15 would not be unreasonable".

Paragraph 46 makes the following recommendation:

"No vehicle in excess of 1 tonne laden weight shall enter or leave the quarry except between the hours of 07.30 am—08.30 am, 09.15 am—3.00 pm, and 4.00 pm—6.00 pm Mondays to Fridays inclusive and 08.00 am—1.00 pm on Saturdays. These restrictions shall not apply at times of the year when both the East Clevedon Primary School and the Clevedon Secondary School are not in session."

That obviously reflects the inspector's concern for the safety of schoolchildren.

The inspector also recommended blasting conditions providing for limits on the timing of blasts and on ground vibrations. I accept that these may differ from those desired locally, but the inspector made firm recommendations on the type of blasting conditions that were appropriate and in line with published guidance and, therefore, they were accepted by my right hon. Friend.

I understand that there has been some concern about the end date of the permission. I want to address the end date issue specifically as it is important that it is clearly understood. Many old mineral permissions that were granted planning permission before 1982 were open-ended. That is to say, they had no end date whatever.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

The Minerals Act 1981 recognised that that was unacceptable, and imposed a time limit of 60 years on all permissions which at that time were open ended.

In the case of Conygar quarry, the 60-year life runs to 2042. I recognise that that date is still considered to be much too long. However, the then Government concluded that it would not be right to change the date. Consequently the 2042 date can be changed only by agreement between the operator and the mineral planning authority. If the mineral planning authority alters the date unilaterally, it risks liability for compensation.

The inspector considered the end date of Conygar quarry, but pointed out that, although the mineral planning authority would have liked to curtail that date, schedule 2(1)(c) of the 1991 Act allowed no scope for that to be done. However, the Secretary of State made it clear in the decision letter that, although the legislation does not permit variation of the 2042 condition, nothing in practice prohibits operations on the site ceasing before the end date.

The operator, the mineral planning authority and any interested third parties had a right to challenge the Secretary of State's decision in the High Court within six weeks of the date of the decision letter—that is, by 6 August. No such challenge was made, the legal avenues are now closed and the Secretary of State has no further jurisdiction in the matter.

That is not to say that no further avenues are open should the circumstances surrounding the site change. As I have mentioned, under the provisions of the Environment Act 1995, all mineral permissions are subject to periodic review. That means that the quarry will be subject to periodic review at least twice more—in 2012 and in 2027—before the planning permission expires.

Furthermore, if North Somerset district council, as the mineral planning authority, considers that action is needed sooner than the next 15-year review—because, for example, the planning circumstances have changed materially since the decision letter was issued—it can modify or revoke the permission using its order-making powers, but it may have to pay compensation to the operators if it does so.

As the law in relation to order-making powers has only recently been reconsidered, it may be helpful if I set out the main features. Mineral planning authorities have order-making powers to act in cases of urgency between normal 15-year periodic reviews, or in cases of technical default. New regulations—the Minerals Compensation Regulations 1997—that modify the basis on which compensation is assessed following such orders came into force on 25 March with all-party support. Those regulations brought the compensation entitlement for such cases into line with that for periodic reviews. The Secretary of State's guidance on the orders and new regulations was published as mineral planning guidance note 4 in August.

If a mineral planning authority makes an order, it is subject to confirmation by the Secretary of State, so I do not propose to go further beyond that outline of what mineral planning authorities can do.

Dr. Fox: Given that, by 2042, even I will be 81, will the Minister help us with the legal problem in the short term? It seems odd—I am not a lawyer—that we cannot have a cemetery in the lane because it is too dangerous, but that we can have a quarry in the lane, where the lorries are larger than the hearses we might have locally. How can it be that the district council, through the highways authority, can stop the cemetery going ahead, but is powerless to stop the quarry traffic? Will the Minister undertake to ask his Department to get a legal view on what powers the district council has through the local highways authority to restrict traffic on safety grounds?

Mr. Raynsford: I regret that I have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. As I have made clear, the matter has now reached the end of the process in which the Secretary of State has any involvement. The legal processes are terminated. The option was there for people who were unhappy with the decision to challenge it in the High Court under the agreed procedures. No such challenge was made. As I have stressed, the legal avenues are closed and there is no further opportunity for the Government to take any role in this case.

Dr. Fox: That was not my point. I was asking the Minister whether the Government, through their responsibility for the local authority, could ask their lawyers to give us a view on the relative responsibilities of the district council's highways authority and its role in challenging the right of access—for example, to a quarry where permissions have already been given. It is a slightly separate matter from the Government being involved in the permission itself. I would be grateful for that legal view.

Mr. Raynsford: As I have made clear, the inspector covered in considerable detail issues of traffic. I have highlighted one or two of the passages in his report to show that he considered matters that the hon. Gentleman implied might have been overlooked. Therefore, the matter has been given thorough consideration. However, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to write to me, I will consider any matters relating to hazards that may exist on local highways, and talk to my right hon. and hon. Friends who have responsibility for those matters.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Primary Care

1. **Mr. Pond:** What proposals he has for increasing the role of primary care within the NHS. [18227]

12. **Mr. Prosser:** What proposals he has for promoting the role of primary care. [18240]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): The development of primary care is one of the Government's medium-term priorities for the NHS. We recently launched a salaried doctor's scheme which will improve the quality of services and help tackle health inequalities. From 1 April next year, health authorities will be able to fund local development schemes to improve general medical services. We also intend to proceed with pilots under the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997 to explore more flexible ways of delivering primary care. Our further proposals will be set out in the White Paper to be published at 3.30 pm today.

Mr. Pond: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that general practitioners in my constituency of Gravesham and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) have recently developed a highly successful scheme of co-operation? Is he further aware that we have recently opened a minor injuries unit in Gravesend and North Kent hospital, again managed by nurses and GPs, as the first stage to establishing a proper community hospital in the borough? Is not the way forward for the health service putting GPs and nurses in the driving seat and ensuring that they can match local decisions to local needs?

Mr. Dobson: What my hon. Friend says is true and very welcome. Such developments, which we have been looking at and studying, make us confident that the proposals that we shall be introducing this afternoon are going with the grain of the people within the NHS, who are trying to develop better and better services for local people.

Mr. Prosser: Does my right hon. Friend agree that most patients look upon their local nurses and health care professionals as the linchpin of the NHS? Can he assure me that he wants to see places such as Aylesham health centre, Deal hospital and Buckland hospital in my constituency flourish and expand?

Mr. Dobson: What is wanted is a first-class health service, close to home so that people do not have to travel long distances to find primary care, community care and community hospitals. That is what is wanted increasingly by local people and the profession, and we want to help them bring it about.

Mr. Rowe: Is the Secretary of State aware that his emphasis on primary care will be widely welcomed? At a time when the responsibility for developing the health service is shifting increasingly to primary care, is there not something absurd about carrying on the kind of rationalisation of hospitals that is going on now, without any reference to GP preferences? For example, in Kent, the Kent and Canterbury hospital and others are under threat.

Mr. Dobson: As everyone knows, the number and nature of hospitals in the NHS has been changing since the NHS came into being. We are determined to ensure that any changes reflect the needs of people living in a particular area. As I understand it, in the area represented by the hon. Gentleman, the proposals are out for consultation. The new Government want to move to a situation where consultation is genuine and not just a period of time.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Is the Secretary of State aware that Professor Howard Glenerster has suggested that GP fundholding has caused a shift in the balance of power back to GPs for the first time this century? Is the right hon. Gentleman committed to doing everything that he can to build on the success of GP fundholding and extend those opportunities to others?

Mr. Dobson: When our White Paper is published this afternoon, the right hon. Lady will see that we are trying to build on the parts that have worked and dispense with the parts that have not worked.

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend will be aware that Salford has one of the new GP commissioning pilot projects. Despite its unfortunate acronym, the Salford health action group is working tremendously hard to improve the health of the people. Will my right hon. Friend tell us how important he thinks is the voice of patients and users in such projects?

Mr. Dobson: There are some who suggest that I am noted for my vulgarity, but never in the Chamber—or at least, not this Chamber.

My hon. Friend has made a crucial point. We need a national health service that is moulded to the needs of the patients, and the medical and nursing professions are as wedded as anyone to that concept. They are trying to liaise with local people to ensure that the services that

they provide meet the needs of local people. We are determined that our changes to the national health service will help to achieve that. I am sure that everyone will be better off as a result.

Herefordshire Health Authority

2. **Mr. Keetch:** What plans he has to reduce bureaucracy in the Herefordshire health authority. [18228]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Herefordshire health authority has recently announced that it will be implementing a new management structure which will save at least £100,000 per year. That sum will be available for investment in direct patient care to improve the health of the local population.

Mr. Keetch: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the Herefordshire health authority has the widespread support of the people of Herefordshire? Does he further agree that the implementation next April of the Herefordshire unitary authority, with boundaries coterminous with the health authority, will provide an opportunity for excellent co-operation between the local authority and the health authority? Will he give a commitment that his Department will do everything it can to support such co-operation?

Mr. Milburn: We certainly shall—co-operation is in; competition is out. Co-operation is in especially at the boundaries between health and social care. We want there to be much more closely integrated care between health and social services to ensure that people on the boundary of the interface, who are the most vulnerable members of our community—the mentally ill, the disabled and the elderly—get the care and attention that they deserve.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is my hon. Friend aware of the warm and widespread support for the Government's proposals to reduce bureaucracy and administrative costs in the national health service, which has already contributed to additional money being made available for the treatment of breast cancer? That is very warmly welcomed in my Cambridge constituency.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Simply by cancelling the eighth wave of fundholding, we were able to free up £20 million for investment in front-line patient services, £10 million to improve breast cancer services and £5 million to improve children's intensive care services. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members agree that those are the right priorities for a national health service.

Mr. Maples: We share the hon. Gentleman's objective of channelling any savings on bureaucracy that he can achieve in the Herefordshire health authority into improving care for people in Herefordshire. By what criteria would he want people in Herefordshire to judge and evaluate his party's stewardship of the national health service?

Mr. Milburn: The people of Herefordshire will be able to judge our stewardship of the national health service very simply—on the proportion of investment that goes into front-line patient services rather than into bureaucracy; on the basis of whether there is an improvement in patient services in Herefordshire and elsewhere year on year; and by whether waiting lists are shorter, as they will be, by the end of this Parliament.

Mr. Maples: I was interested to hear the Minister talk about funding. Will he promise the people of Herefordshire that the Government will beat the previous Government's record of increasing funding annually on average in real terms by 3.1 per cent?

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman had bothered to look at the figures for Herefordshire health authority, he would have noticed that, for the next financial year, the allocations made by this Government will mean an increase in cash terms of 4.69 per cent., compared to 3.38 per cent. for this year under the previous Government.

Distribution Formula

3. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** What representations he has received on changes to the distribution formula for allocating resources to local health authorities. [18229]

Mr. Dobson: The allocation formula for 1998–99 was changed better to reflect the health needs of local populations in every part of the country. That was announced on 29 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *828–29*. I have received no representations on that matter since that date.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am about to make a representation. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the formula was altered according to deprivation, the effect of which is to channel resources away from rural areas towards urban areas, with the result that the increase for next year will be only 1.35 per cent. in my constituency, as opposed to 2 per cent. nationally? That led to a public meeting in Cirencester, which was attended by 500 people, to protest about cuts in the accident and emergency department. Is it not wholly unfair that resources are being channelled from rural areas towards urban areas? My constituents should have a fair share of the national cake.

Mr. Dobson: As the elected Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—there are few more urban constituencies in the world—I can tell the hon. Gentleman that my health authority received exactly the same percentage increase as his. The changes were made in an effort to introduce more fairness into the allocation. The hon. Gentleman apparently does not know that, for the first time in the history of the national health service, an element of rurality was added to the formula to benefit rural areas. No Conservative Government ever did that, so the hon. Gentleman should be grateful.

Mr. Olner: I welcome the changes that the Secretary of State has announced. Will they work their way through to Warwickshire health authority where for many years the south of the county, where morbidity figures are low, has received more funding than my constituency

of Nuneaton in the north, where morbidity figures are high? Are morbidity figures being taken into account in the new review and the reallocation of resources?

Mr. Dobson: Mortality and morbidity statistics obviously formed a major part of the formula. However, we are not satisfied with the present formula and have set up a group to study it in time for further changes. The aim must be to allocate funds to those areas most in need, and the areas with high levels of mortality and of morbidity—in other words, sickness—must take priority.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that the national health service has been a leader in information technology and getting information to Ministers so that they can deal with problems. Has he read the *Financial Times* this morning in which professors suggest that the year 2000 problem will affect the NHS badly, and could cause deaths? Is he aware that the IT systems are already overloaded by the work being done on that problem, and that the announcement that he is to make at 3.30 pm in relation to more changes to the IT systems will cause a crisis in IT departments in the NHS?

Mr. Dobson: For a start, only a fool would regard the information technology systems in the NHS as satisfactory. I should certainly not address any laudatory remarks to them. They are incapable of supplying some of the most basic information that people might require. We want the health service to have information systems that help patients and help clinicians to provide better, quicker and more effective treatment. We shall get on with that. Since coming to power, we have taken action to deal with the 2000 problem. The main problem is not in the information technology systems, but in the embedded chips in all sorts of health service machinery, including scanners and other vital equipment in operating theatres. That is being addressed. It will be dealt with, but it will cost money.

Long-term Care

4. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** What action he intends to take to improve the quality of long-term care. [18230]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): We are introducing a range of measures to improve the quality of long-term care, including a royal commission on long-term care for the elderly, a long-term care charter, priorities and planning guidance on continuing health care needs for the NHS and proposals for independent regulatory arrangements for care homes and domiciliary care.

Mr. Campbell: My hon. Friend is obviously aware of the warm welcome for the royal commission. Will he assure the House that, when it is set up, he will hurry it up and urge it to reach its conclusions speedily so that care for the elderly can be dealt with as soon as possible?

Mr. Boateng: We share my hon. Friend's concern that the matter should be brought to a speedy resolution. Long-term care for the elderly is a matter of the utmost importance. We have asked the royal commission to report within 12 months. We are determined to replace the delay and prevarication that characterised the performance of the Conservative Government with speed and expedition.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman surely cannot deny that, with an aging population and a declining work force, the quality of long-term care will depend increasingly on the ability of people to make some provision for their own health care. Does he not realise that the Chancellor's savage attack on pensions and savings will make that harder—or do Ministers believe that, for the wealthy at least, quality long-term care is best provided by quality, tax-free offshore dosh in the style of the Paymaster General?

Mr. Boateng: Only a discredited relic of the previous Tory Administration could come forward with such a comment. This Government are giving new hope to the elderly. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is helping the elderly with their fuel bills. We are ensuring that the welfare of elderly people rises to the top of the nation's priorities, rather than remaining at the bottom.

Road Traffic Accidents (Payment of Care Costs)

5. **Dr. Gibson:** If he will take action to ensure that insurance companies pay the full cost of road traffic accident care to NHS trusts. [18231]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): Following the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 2 July 1997, *Official Report*, column 315, we are taking action to recoup in full the costs that we are entitled to recover from insurance companies for the treatment of road traffic accident victims.

Dr. Gibson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, which will please the members of the Norwich community health council who raised the issue with me. Will she consider extending that policy to the treatment of other patients, such as the victims of workplace accidents, many of whom are children?

Ms Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We shall update legislation to make the scheme more effective on road traffic accidents. On other matters, we shall ensure that the principles of a national health service funded from taxation and free at the point of use prevail.

Mrs. Roe: Will the Minister confirm that this is the only occasion on which the Government will ask outside groups to fund a core health service activity?

Ms Jowell: There is absolutely nothing new about the provision, which has been available since the 1930s. The Government are seeking to update it to make it work and to raise income that can be spent on front-line patient care.

Dr. Brand: The Minister appeared to agree with the question. May I check her phrasing? Did she agree that the NHS should charge the full cost of the consequences

of road traffic accidents or the full entitlement? Are there any plans to alter the entitlement that the NHS can claw back from insurance companies?

Ms Jowell: As I said in my reply, in redrafting the legislation, we are looking at ways of making the provision work in practice. At this stage, we are considering moving to a tariff system to replace the capped expenditure system that currently applies.

NHS Trusts

6. **Mrs. Humble:** What changes he intends to make to the current role of NHS trusts in shaping local health care. [18232]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper which will be issued shortly will set out how we shall fulfil our pledge to remove the wasteful competition of the NHS internal market. We shall show how all NHS bodies, including trusts, will play their full part in improving health care.

Mrs. Humble: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. In examining the role of NHS trusts, will he look especially at major tourist destinations such as Blackpool, which provide for the health care of large numbers of visitors as well as the resident population?

Mr. Milburn: I am aware of the problems faced by local health services in that respect. The thousands of visitors to Blackpool every year usually have a great time—including at the party conferences, when they manage to get there—but occasionally one or two fall ill. The current arrangements do not budget for that and, worse, the health authority has to issue an invoice every single time a patient falls ill on holiday. That is costly and expensive and it is regarded as an anathema by hospital clinicians. If my hon. Friend waits approximately 34 minutes, she may hear some good news.

Mr. Brazier: Is not one advantage of the trust system that it has allowed direct comparisons between hospitals? When a decision comes to be made on the future of the Kent and Canterbury hospital, should not the Secretary of State consider which is the most cost-efficient hospital in Kent, which hospital in Kent is able to recruit and retain the best staff and, above all, which hospital in east Kent has the support of the most general practitioners, who, after all, are the representatives of the patients?

Mr. Milburn: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the matter is the subject of consultation. If it is contested by one of the local community health councils, it will end up on Ministers' desks, so it is inappropriate for me to discuss the specific issues. Of course the Government recognise the important role of NHS trusts in providing health care for millions of people. We want to build on the success of some NHS trusts, but we want that success to be achieved across the country and to ensure that the shortcomings in some trusts are nipped in the bud rather than allowed to escalate.

Mr. Burden: Has not one of the worst aspects of the internal market been the way in which it has set GP against GP and hospital against hospital? In overcoming that internal market, is there not an important strategic role for local commissioning groups and health authorities in fostering co-operation? Does my hon. Friend the Minister welcome the review being undertaken by Birmingham health authority, and will he join me in encouraging the fullest public consultation on the proposals in the hope that it will bring Birmingham the capital investment that it has needed for too long?

Mr. Milburn: As my hon. Friend knows, I am aware of the consultation being undertaken by Birmingham health authority. I very much agree that there should be proper public consultation. The review covers public services and the public have a right to expect their voice to be heard. Those charged with the responsibility of shaping and delivering health services in future should operate to a simple maxim: the national health service is a public service—it belongs to the public and should listen to what the public have to say.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am sure that the Minister will agree that one of the most common pressures on NHS trusts is that of shortage of staff. Given that his answers and official figures show that, at the moment, in England alone, we are short of about 1,000 GPs and there are about 1,500 hospital doctor and more than 8,000 nurse and midwife vacancies, will the Minister assure the House that the health service will be given the money to recruit and fill all those thousands of vacant posts?

Mr. Milburn: The health service is being given the money to deal with such problems. I remind the hon. Gentleman, in case he has forgotten, that, during this year and next year, an extra £1.5 billion will be invested in the NHS in such areas as his. I hope that he will welcome that.

Mr. Tony Clarke: Does my hon. Friend agree that we must consider not only what is happening now but the legacy left by the previous Government, especially relating to debt in trusts? Many trusts, especially those in Northampton in my constituency, are unable to take advantage of our new plans due to the legacy of debt. Will he comment on the desirability of allowing, in special circumstances, extensions to the time taken to pay off debt, which will allow trusts to plan health care more effectively and thus reduce waiting lists?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The legacy left to this Government by the previous Government is one of record waiting lists and record debt. That is what we are having to tackle; and we shall tackle it. The Government do not want the NHS to enter the next financial year as it entered this financial year—up to its eyes in debt. That means that difficult and robust decisions will have to be taken. Of course we expect those decisions to be undertaken sensitively. Where it is warranted, I know that the NHS executive will be prepared to discuss with individual health authorities an extension to ensure that debts are paid off over time.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister accept that, under the trusts, we were able better to evaluate costs of procedures, and some trusts were doing better than others? Will he acknowledge that the number of procedures has increased the cost to the NHS? The previous Administration forgot that when they were praising the

number of procedures undertaken but not funding them. Will the Minister assure the House that, when considering local health care, there will be proper evaluation of pilot schemes, meshed in with trust provisions?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. All incentives under the market system were for NHS trusts to expand their business, regardless of whether that was in the interests of the wider health community—or, indeed, the community in general. In future, we shall be expecting NHS trusts to co-operate and work with one another so that there is maximum gain for patients. Not only doctors and nurses but managers in NHS trusts want that. They want to work together rather than being forced to compete against one another.

Mr. Pike: In the past, has not federation between NHS trusts on fairly routine services totally ignored the views of the public in consultation exercises? Do not most people want such services to be provided locally and not far from where they live?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that, just last week, in Committee, we approved an order opening trust board meetings to the public. That is important because trusts are public organisations and the decisions that they take have a real impact on the local community. In future, there will be no more secrecy concerning NHS trust board meetings and no more commercial, in-confidence information held concerning trust boards. Trust boards and NHS trusts are part of the wider NHS family and they must start acting as such.

Health Authorities and Trusts (Amalgamation)

7. **Mr. Tyler:** If he has reached conclusions on the amalgamation of *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* trusts; and if he will make a statement. [18233]

Mr. Dobson: The Government have no national blueprint for mergers between health authorities or between NHS trusts. We would seek to encourage mergers of both where that is in the interests of health care in the localities concerned.

Mr. Tyler: I accept that the Secretary of State would not wish to impose amalgamations, but will he encourage amalgamations where small trusts are presently duplicating their administrative costs? If so, will he give some indication of how quickly he would expect savings to take place, especially bearing in mind his comments earlier when he referred to the need to expand front-line services and to encourage the creation and maintenance of local community hospitals? In Cornwall, as the Secretary of State knows, we are currently addressing that problem.

Mr. Dobson: I am a great believer in horses for courses. In many parts of the country, it is right to amalgamate smaller trusts—perhaps two or three smaller trusts or a couple of small trusts with a bigger trust—but in other parts of the country local people and clinicians and, for that matter the NHS regional management, are convinced that keeping some of the smaller trusts in existence may protect services that would otherwise not get the attention they deserve. When proposals come to me, I will assess them against the needs of the people in the area.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does the Secretary of State accept that the East Cheshire NHS trust has been an outstanding success, not only because of its leadership and the superb support of the executive staff but because it is a united trust that deals with the range of NHS services, including acute services, community services and mental health services. That has been to the advantage of people in Macclesfield. I had a tremendous battle a few years ago to maintain a united trust against what was then the wisdom of separate trusts for virtually every arm of the health service.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman reinforces the point that I wish to make. People in east Cheshire are obviously well suited by the present arrangements, but people in other parts of the country do not fancy that arrangement and I do not wish to force it down their throats. As for conventional wisdom, over the years I have observed that it may be conventional but it is seldom wisdom.

Mr. Gunnell: Is it not a bit much for the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) to whinge about the NHS when my right hon. Friend has provided £10 million extra for health services in Cornwall this year and next? My right hon. Friend knows of the excellent proposal for the merger of two trusts in Leeds, on which all the Members of Parliament for Leeds have been consulted. What criteria will he use to judge whether the merger should go ahead? I hope, however, that he will comment first on the whingeing by the hon. Member for North Cornwall.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend has been in politics as long as I have and he knows that gratitude is the last thing to expect. Every time I come into the Chamber I expect Opposition Members to rise in grateful thanks for the extra funds that we have provided, but I am disappointed.

As a distant observer, I always thought that the merger of the two acute trusts in Leeds was a good idea and I was surprised that, when everyone in Leeds had agreed to it, my Conservative predecessor turned it down. I shall be not unfavourably disposed to the proposition when it comes forward again from the people of Leeds.

Influenza Inoculations

8. **Mr. Sheerman:** What restrictions are currently imposed on the availability of free influenza inoculations for the public. [18234]

Ms Jowell: Free influenza immunisation is recommended for people with underlying conditions that put them at most risk of serious illness or death should they develop flu and for people who live in nursing homes, residential homes and other long-stay facilities. Influenza immunisation is not routinely recommended for fit and healthy adults and children.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend will know that, in an average year, 4,000 people die of flu and that in an epidemic year—such as 1989—up to 30,000 die. We have heard suggestions that a particularly nasty epidemic is on

its way from Hong Kong. Is she aware that only 3 million—half of the 6 million vulnerable people in this country—have taken their flu jabs? Would it not be a good idea to promote immunisation, because we can prevent many deaths this winter and stop a great cost to the NHS?

Ms Jowell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who will be glad to hear that, so far, a record 7.1 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed. Efforts have been made by the chief medical officer to ensure that all GPs and practice nurses are aware of the importance of making flu vaccine available to people who are vulnerable and at risk of suffering serious illness if they contract flu. The drive to maximise the number of people vaccinated this winter against flu is further evidence of the Government's determination to do what works for patient care, based on the evidence of what works as part of delivering a modern and dependable national health service.

Kidderminster District General Hospital

9. **Mr. Gill:** What representations he has received regarding the future of Kidderminster district general hospital. [18235]

Mr. Boateng: The Department has received a number of letters from members of the public, councillors and local Members of Parliament on the future of Kidderminster hospital and health services in Worcestershire generally. As part of its strategic review of services across the whole county, Worcestershire health authority will conduct a formal public consultation during which all of these representations will be taken into account.

Mr. Gill: The Minister will recognise that any proposal to close accident and emergency services at Kidderminster hospital would be a devastating blow to all those people in north Worcestershire and in my constituency in south Shropshire who are served by the 1,230 members of staff at that excellent hospital, which provides 27 medical services. Does he agree with the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock), who said in a press release 12 months ago:

"It is a simple matter of funding. We will only prevent further cuts at Kidderminster if the Government provides enough money to the Health Authority to fund the hospital"?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend make a forceful point which will be taken into account in due course, along with all the other representations made during the formal consultation. Should the matter come to Ministers, we look forward to giving those representations the weight that is their due.

Mr. Lock: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is considerable anger among the people of Worcestershire who have learnt that the Tory-appointed former health authority was overspending by £8 million to £9 million a year and has run up debts of between £18 million and £23 million—debts that this Government and the new health authority must sort out? That is another example of our having to sort out somebody else's mess. Does he accept that there is concern in Wyre Forest that GPs—who are part of a commissioning group whose proposals include the retention of the accident and emergency centre—have not even had their proposal put on the drawing board for the proposed consultation? Will he see whether that proposal can be included in the forthcoming consultation on the reconfiguration of services?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes his point well. It is important that the consultation is wide ranging and takes into account all representations. GPs have an important contribution to make and I look forward enormously to considering their representations on this important issue. Bearing in mind the state of the finances of Worcestershire health authority, I hope that he welcomes the additional £1.5 million that the new Labour Government have made available to the authority to cope with winter pressures. That is the difference between the Labour Government and the Conservatives; they mismanage, but we manage more effectively.

NHS Building Projects

10. **Mr. Gale:** How many NHS building projects costing over £1 million have been completed since 1979. [18236]

Mr. Dobson: The national health service reported the completion of capital schemes costing more than £1 million only between 1980 and 1985.

Mr. Gale: Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that £25 million of the money spent during that period was spent creating a full district hospital and 24-hour accident and emergency service at the hospital in Margate that proudly bears the name of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother? Will he join me in congratulating the medical staff, nurses and administration team who have achieved a state-of-the-art hospital that serves the people of Dover, Deal, South Thanet, North Thanet, Herne Bay and other areas of south Kent? Will he take the earliest opportunity to ensure that the work of that hospital is not only continued but enhanced?

Mr. Dobson: Given the state of my voice, I will not risk repeating a Cook's tour of Kent. I would like to congratulate the staff of the national health service in every part of the country who have kept the faith and kept us reasonably well and healthy for all these years. I hope that they will be able to continue to do so.

Mr. Martlew: Going back to the original question, is the Secretary of State aware that since 1979 the people of Carlisle have been waiting for a new district general hospital, which was cancelled four times under the previous Government? The go-ahead was given only when we got this new Labour Government. We have started work on the site and the people of Carlisle will have a brand new hospital for the millennium.

Mr. Dobson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend and I am only sorry that I was unable to attend and, so to speak, cut the first sod.

Mr. Lansley: Given that the level of capital investment in the national health service is important—I am sure the Secretary of State agrees—will he explain why his Department issued a press release on 29 October stating that the level of capital investment in the NHS next year

would rise by 2.3 per cent. in real terms, when, as the Department now admits, that was incorrect and the level of investment will rise by only 2.3 per cent. in cash terms?

Mr. Dobson: It is certainly the case, on the basis of the figures in that press release, that the increase is in cash terms, and I apologise for that. In all the years that I was in opposition, I issued thousands of figures and only once got one wrong. In government, I do not intend to issue information that is wrong. We are taking steps to ensure that it does not happen again.

NHS (Non-executive Posts)

11. **Mr. Barry Jones:** If he will make a statement on the qualifications required of appointees to non–executive posts on health trusts and similar organisations within the NHS. [18238]

Mr. Dobson: The Government's new criteria for choosing who should serve as chairs or non-executive directors of health boards are designed to make the boards more representative of the communities they serve and to encourage more NHS users and carers to become board members. Candidates should normally live in the area served by the trust or health authority and be able to demonstrate a strong commitment to the national health service and the local community.

Mr. Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful reply. Can he assure us that at least some of the new members will be sympathetic to the aims of a Labour Government? Will he also assure us that the trusts will not remain stuffed full of Conservatives?

Mr. Dobson: I think that I can safely assure my hon. Friend that the odd person sympathetic to the objectives of the NHS has certainly crept on to some boards since we have been making the appointments. In all seriousness, there are Conservatives chairing and acting as non-executive directors of health trusts and authorities who many of my colleagues have said have done a good job, and a substantial number of them have been appointed. Also, a member of the former Conservative Cabinet has been appointed. As far as I know, no one has accused me of political fiddling in appointing Mr. Tony Newton as the chair of one of those boards.

Mr. Soames: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his pragmatic approach. Does he agree that what matters is not people's political persuasion but whether they can do the job well, because it is an extremely important job? Does he accept that I fought tooth and claw to have a strong Labour supporter appointed to the board of Crawley hospital because he was an excellent man for the job and did it extremely well? Will he examine all the cases personally to ensure that the process does not become a political charade and that those who are absolutely qualified to do the job are appointed?

Mr. Dobson: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, as it is indeed the case that he moved heaven and earth to get a Labour supporter appointed to one of his local boards because he thought that he would do a good job. That is what I want to do. I emphasise the fact that no nominee has come to my ministerial colleagues or me who has not been subject to the full Nolan procedure and a process involving independent members and the regional chairs of health authorities, at least half—indeed, seven out of eight—of whom were appointed by the previous Government. If Conservative Members do not like the nominations that are being made, perhaps they could speak to the people they appointed.

Professional Training

14. **Ms Keeble:** What extra financial support he has made available for professional training in the NHS. [18243]

Ms Jowell: The NHS will spend around £1.8 billion on health professional education and training this year. On 30 September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that these budgets would be increased by a further £50 million next year.

Ms Keeble: What professional training would my hon. Friend expect the NHS to provide to enable people who are currently in administrative work—especially work connected with the internal market—to move into patient care: people such as my constituent Christine Dowsett, who moved from secretarial work to patient care and is building a satisfying new career?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend's constituent is but one example of the way in which the Government are discharging their promise to move money and, therefore, in many cases people from jobs that involved red tape, bureaucracy and paper chasing in connection with the internal market, to front-line patient care. Our provisions for training in the national health service recognise the diversity of skills with which staff need to be equipped in order to deliver the modern and dependable care that people have a right to expect.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the Minister realise that all the GP fundholders in Lichfield do not want to be retrained in new systems? They think that the internal market, as she and the spin doctors call it, is a mechanism for providing the best care for their patients. They do not want more training: they want the status quo. What does the Minister say to them?

Ms Jowell: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be here in eight minutes' time to hear my right hon. Friend set out the Government's proposals for rebuilding the national health service and ensuring that his constituents have access to the quality of primary and hospital care that they have a right to expect.

Mr. Andy King: Can my hon. Friend assure me that, in the light of the small trusts that collapsed and were clearly a disaster under the Conservatives, such as Rugby national health service trust, which left us with rubble in place of a robust local health service, there will be clear criteria and guidance to protect local services that should be delivered locally and should not be taken away by predatory, larger, neighbouring trusts?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend knows that mergers involve ensuring that any staff who are affected receive the

training that they need to adapt to new circumstances, and that the situation that he described is currently subject to consultation.

Health Authority Funding

15. **Mr. Rendel:** What progress he is making towards aligning health authority funding with proposed targets under weighted capitation. [18244]

Mr. Milburn: For 1998–99, under their capitation targets, health authorities received real terms increases in their allocations above the average of 1.9 per cent. and up to 2.65 per cent. As a consequence, more than 90 per cent. of health authorities will be within plus or minus 5 per cent. of their target as set by the national weighted capitation formula.

Mr. Rendel: Is the Minister aware that Berkshire health authority was £19 million under capitation this year and is due to be another £13 million under capitation next year? That is having a cumulative effect and, as a result, health services in Berkshire are nothing like what they should be. That is unfair to the people of Berkshire. Will he make progress towards targets more quickly in future?

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman had bothered to examine the figures he would realise that, as a consequence of our changes to the funding formula, Berkshire health authority is closer to its weighted capitation target than it was under the previous Government. It might be worth reminding Liberal Democrat Members of the general largesse that this Government have spread around the NHS and particularly of the figures for health authorities covering Liberal Democrat-held seats: an extra £42.5 million this winter; an extra £257 million for next year; an extra £2.2 million for breast cancer funding; and an extra £1.6 million this year for children's intensive care. A bit of gratitude would not come amiss.

Sir Michael Spicer: Is not the real unfairness of weighted capitation that which exists between expenditure on health in England and in Scotland? Is it not wrong that 25 per cent. more per capita is spent on health in Scotland than in England? Is that what the Deputy Prime Minister had in mind when he said that we were going to have a fundamental review of regional distribution of moneys?

Mr. Milburn: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the formula has been in operation for the past 18 years; I did not hear him complain before.

Dr. Stoate: Will my hon. Friend confirm that Berkshire health authority will receive £15.5 million extra next year? Does he agree that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) should be glad that there is a Labour Government because we have already pledged twice as much money as the Liberals promised at the general election?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right. The cash increase for Berkshire health authority will be an extra 5.25 per cent. I hope that all hon. Members welcome that and, most important, that it will be welcome in respect of patient care.

Bureaucracy

16. **Mr. Hanson:** What action he is taking to reduce bureaucracy in the national health service. [18245]

Mr. Dobson: The Government are committed to maximising the proportion of health service resources devoted to patient care. We are doing that by removing the bureaucracy of the internal market and reducing management costs. On 22 May, we announced a programme of measures to start reducing bureaucracy by £100 million this year. By deciding not to proceed with the eighth wave of GP fundholding, we saved £20 million that had been earmarked for bureaucracy and nothing more; £10 million of that has already been invested instead in better breast cancer treatment for women in every part of the country and £5 million has been invested in improved children's intensive care. I cannot believe that anyone other than a shareholder in a paper company would not think that that money is being better spent.

Mr. Hanson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that excellent reply. Will he join me in welcoming the news in this morning's press that he intends to save an extra £1 billion in the next few years from red tape and to put it directly into patient care? Labour Members believe that every pound that he puts into patient care at the expense of bureaucracy is welcome.

Mr. Dobson: I accept everything that my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Bercow: Does the Secretary of State agree that the key to reducing NHS bureaucracy lies in the decentralisation of service, budgeting and management?

Mr. Dobson: Well, we had—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I shall answer. Those who have been following what has been happening with cancer screening might have noticed that the cervical and breast cancer screening schemes have both been failing because they are too decentralised. We cannot assume that everything should be decentralised, whatever the circumstances. However, we want to devolve as much power, authority and influence as possible to the doctors, nurses and other professionals who do the work in the health service.

Patient Care

17. **Mr. Todd:** What steps he is taking to improve the monitoring, analysis and reporting of *(a)* the outcomes and *(b)* the quality of patient care. [18246]

Ms Jowell: The national health service White Paper, on which my right hon. Friend will make a statement to the House in three minutes' time, will set out a range of

means by which the Government will seek to improve quality and outcomes for patients, which are at the heart of our determination to rebuild the NHS.

Mr. Todd: It is obvious that patients care most about successful outcomes. What steps are being taken to share the evidence of successful treatment and to compare the performance of different areas of the health service to ensure that we achieve the best possible value and the greatest number of successes in treating patients who seek help from our NHS?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is right: nothing matters more to patients than knowing that the treatment that they receive will work and that effective treatment is available to them regardless of where they live.

Clerk of the House (Retirement)

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a brief statement to make to the House. I have to inform Members that I have received the following letter from the Clerk of the House:

"I am writing to confirm to you my decision to retire as Clerk of the House on 31st December of this year.

I have greatly enjoyed my years in the service of the House, which began in October 1956, and I have felt it to be a signal honour in the last three years to hold the office of Clerk.

During my time there have been many changes in the House's processes and a great acceleration in the activities of committees. The House has taken control of its own finances, administration and works, and more recently has implemented the Jopling Report and dealt with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. No doubt other reforms will be implemented during the lifetime of this Parliament—proof, if any were needed, of the resilience of the institution and of its deserved place in the esteem of the legislatures of many countries in the Commonwealth and beyond.

The six House Departments and other support staff such as the police, as well as the staff employed by Members, all have important roles to play in securing the effectiveness of our parliamentary system. I believe they have responded constructively to the need for change and I am grateful to them for their support whilst I have been Clerk. Finally, I pay tribute to the understanding and friendship of successive Speakers, especially yourself, and of Members on all sides. It has been a great honour for me to have served in this place. Yours sincerely, Donald Limon."

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): Madam Speaker, your announcement signals the end of the distinguished period of service to the House of Sir Donald Limon, and will be heard with regret by all. I look forward to expressing my appreciation of Sir Donald's work when we debate a motion on his retirement. Our normal practice is to postpone until then the tributes that we would like to pay to him.

National Health Service

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): In good times and in bad, I have always been proud to be a member of the Labour party and I have never been as proud as I am today, as a Labour Secretary of State for Health to announce the publication of our proposals to renew and modernise the national health service, which our party founded. These are set out in our White Paper "The New NHS".

This White Paper is a turning point for the health service, the 1 million staff who work in it and all of us who use it. This Government were elected to save the heath service. We were also elected to change it for the better. We want to give it a new lease of life. Today we outline a 10-year programme of modernisation which guarantees that the NHS will get better each year—delivering quicker, higher-quality services for patients. The pace of change will be measured, but each year will bring new and visible improvements. Our plan is to give our country a modern and dependable health service that is once again the envy of the world.

We will make a start straight away. The White Paper abolishes the wasteful and bureaucratic competitive internal market introduced by the Tories. It sets out how services will respond more readily to patient needs, and describes new targets against which performance will be judged. Doctors and nurses will be in the driving seat. It spells out a whole new approach that we have called integrated care. It will break down the Berlin wall between health and social care, so that patients get swift access to care and treatment rather than being passed from pillar to post.

The changes we are outlining today will put quality, fairness and efficiency at the heart of the national health service. Quality will give patients a guarantee of excellence wherever they live. Standards will be raised right across the country. Fairness will give patients an NHS that is there for them when they need it, where they need it, regardless of their ability to pay—a one-nation NHS. Efficiency will deliver more money for patient care. There will be a relentless drive to cut out waste and unnecessary bureaucracy.

We will abolish the internal market, because it has failed. It has failed to deliver quality of care, fairness for patients or efficient services. It has set doctor against doctor, and hospital against hospital. Its business culture has been at odds with the ethos of the NHS and those who work within it. Patients want an NHS where staff can work together to provide better services, rather than having to compete against each other.

When I became Secretary of State, I promised that we would listen to the people on the front line—the nurses and doctors, midwives and other professionals and staff in the NHS. We have kept that promise. We have listened. That is why our proposals go with the grain. We are building on what has worked; we are discarding what has failed. For us what counts is what works. There will be no return to the command and control structures of the 1970s. Nor will there be a continuation of the divisive fragmentation of the 1990s. Instead there will be a third way—a new model for a new century.

We will keep the separation between planning and providing services, but we will end competition and replace it with a new statutory duty of partnership so that

local health services pull together rather than pull apart. We will end fundholding and replace it with primary care groups in each area, putting doctors and nurses in charge of shaping services for all patients. We will end the culture of secrecy and commercialisation, and replace it with a new duty of openness that will share best practice for the benefit of all patients. We will end short-term contacts, cost per case contracts and extra contractual referrals, and replace them with long-term agreements that offer stability and focus on quality.

Our detailed proposals for doing all that are set out in the 81 pages of the White Paper. The proposals will cut the number of commissioning bodies from around 4,000 to about 500.

We will set up primary care groups involving family doctors and community nurses in every area. They will be responsible for commissioning services for their local communities, and will account to health authorities for their activities.

General practitioners and community nurses will have a choice about the form their primary care group takes. For example, they will have the power to become free-standing primary care trusts, able to run community health services, including community hospitals. They will have a single unified budget, no part of which will be capped; so money will always be there to guarantee that patients get the medicine they need, when they need it.

The new unified budget will give GPs maximum choice in how patients needs are met. All primary care groups will work closely with social services to provide properly integrated care.

For the first time, NHS trusts will have a statutory duty to co-operate with other parts of the NHS and to meet quality standards. They will remain responsible for treatment and care, and hospital doctors and nurses will have a greater say in shaping local services for patients.

Over time, health authorities will relinquish most of their commissioning responsibilities. They will be leaner organisations with stronger powers. They will draw up long-term programmes for improving the health of their area—in consultation with local NHS trusts and primary care groups, but also with local authorities, voluntary bodies and education and research institutions. The health improvement programmes will provide the broad framework for local action to improve general health and health services.

All of us who use the NHS deserve a guarantee of excellence. There will be new national action to extend quality and efficiency into every part of the NHS, backed by a new performance framework that will measure what counts for patients.

There will be a new National Institute for Clinical Excellence to give a strong lead on clinical and cost effectiveness, drawing up new guidelines from the latest scientific evidence.

There will be new national service frameworks—on the lines of the Calman-Hine frameworks, which have worked so well in cancer treatment—that will guarantee consistent access to services and quality of care for all patients. The frameworks will draw on the best evidence available to establish the best ways of providing particular services.

To underpin the drive for quality, there will be a new commission for health improvement, to spread best practice and tackle shortcomings.

Patients will also have a guarantee that public money is being used to best effect. NHS trusts will no longer be competing, but they will be comparing: comparison, not competition, will drive efficiency. A national schedule of comparative costs of treating different conditions will be drawn up, and each NHS trust will be judged against it.

Management costs will be capped. There will be clear incentives and sanctions to drive performance improvements at every level. Trust performance will be benchmarked for both quality and efficiency, and the results will be made available to the public.

Over the lifetime of this Parliament, we estimate that the changes will shift an extra £1 billion from bureaucracy into front-line patient services. That will be on top of the extra £1.5 billion that the Chancellor has made available this year and next year for the NHS. We will continue to raise spending in real terms every year on the health service.

The changes will give patients a modern and dependable health service that makes best use of developments in modern medicine and information technology, to offer readily available high-quality services.

We have already promised to cut waiting lists. We will have done so by the end of this Parliament. I announce today three new milestones by which people will be able to chart our progress towards the new NHS.

First—at home—everyone will be able to contact NHS Direct, which is a new 24-hour telephone advice line staffed by nurses. Three pilot care and advice helplines will begin in March 1998. By 2000, it will cover the entire country.

Secondly—at a community level—patients will benefit from quicker test results, up-to-date specialist advice in their own doctor's surgery and on-line booking of out-patient appointments by connecting every family doctor to NHSnet, which is the NHS's own information super-highway. Demonstration sites will be in operation in 1998, and the services will be available to general practitioners across the country by 2002.

Thirdly—in hospitals—everyone with suspected cancer will be guaranteed a specialist appointment within two weeks of their GP deciding that they need to be seen. That will start in 1999 for every woman with suspected breast cancer, and be extended to all other cases of suspected cancer by 2000.

We have great ambitions for the national health service. We will take on those who say that the NHS has had its day, and all we can do is preside over its decline. We will work with the 1 million people who make the NHS so special, even now, to turn it into a modern and dependable service for the coming century.

We know that doctors and nurses and all the staff of the national health service wish to rid themselves of the unfairness and inefficiency of the current system. That is our ambition, too. It is what they want, and it is what the people of this country want.

Next year, the national health service celebrates its 50th birthday. The Labour party that founded the national health service is now setting about modernising it to prepare it for the challenges of the next 50 years: a new national health service, drawing on new technology, new drugs, new quality standards and new ways of working; a

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

new national health service, based on its timeless principle that the best health services should be available to all—the best for all, quality and equality for the new century.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The dilemma facing the Secretary of State in formulating policy is the same one that faced us. His policy objective is one that we share—to improve the quantity and quality of patient care—but that is difficult to achieve in the context of an aging population, medical advances, rising expectations and limited money.

What all that calls for is maximum financial efficiency and maximum clinical effectiveness, and the structure of the national health service needs mechanisms to drive that. We did that when we were in office. We introduced general management and we introduced the purchaser-provider split to separate commissioning from delivery of service, which allowed trusts to get on with providing services.

We gave contestability of contracts to provide some choice between providers. We instituted fundholding, which put money and decisions as near to patients as possible. I remind the House that, although the Labour Government are adopting many of those principles today, they opposed them all when they were suggested.

Those mechanisms drove change. When the Secretary of State and I talk to trusts—although I doubt the Secretary of State asks this question, because he will not want to hear the answer—they say that most of the change achieved in the past five years has been driven by GP fundholders, not by health authorities. In a recent survey, 85 per cent. of the trusts surveyed said exactly that, and 70 per cent. of those said that the changes that had been driven had benefited all patients, not just those of GP fundholders.

Of this country's GPs, 58 per cent. have chosen to become fundholders, and more than 60 per cent. of this country's patients are patients of fundholders—they, too, believe that the change has been effective, and 93 per cent. of them wish to retain their practice-based budget. Almost all academics and health economists agree with that, and their criticism of us is not that we instituted an internal market, but that we never really let it work.

What is crucial is who holds the budget. Fundholders were happy to take that on, balancing their clinical freedom with financial responsibility. If the Secretary of State's commissioning groups do not have that same power, they will not achieve the same results or, indeed, the better results to which he aspires.

I welcome the Government's acceptance of many of the principles of the internal market. I welcome the retention of the purchaser-provider split, with the choices that that allows. I welcome the retention of the principle of a primary-care-led NHS. I welcome GPs remaining in the driving seat in developing primary care and commissioning secondary care. All that builds on principles that were established by our reforms. I congratulate the Secretary of State on accepting and building on those reforms, as his colleagues will find he has done when they take the time to read the White Paper.

However, I am concerned that the new group commissioning model is being imposed on all GPs, and that it may prove too prescriptive. There has been enormous value in the variety of commissioning models that have developed in the past five years, including fundholding and multifunds on one side, and commissioning groups of non-fundholders on the other. We cannot support the total abolition of fundholding, and we shall work over the coming weeks to persuade him that, within his group commissioning model, practice-level budgets should continue for those GPs who want them.

There is a danger that the loss of independence of fundholders will lead to a loss of the initiatives that they have developed for their patients—for example, more patient services available within practices, not in hospitals—and of improvements in hospital services that have been driven by fundholders.

We shall press the right hon. Gentleman to allow maximum flexibility in his new commissioning group structure, and let GPs choose control over practice-based budgets where that is what they want. I am not sure how groups of 50 to 60 GPs will manage to agree anything. If they cannot agree and if they cannot devolve budgets, there is a danger that they will become mini-health authorities.

Flowing through the White Paper—notwithstanding what I have welcomed about it—there is a touching old Labour faith in co-operation and good will; but these new commissioning groups will succeed only if they have the power to make real choices. If the new commissioning groups are not flexible and cannot make real choices to influence providers, they will not achieve the objectives that the Secretary of State has set for them.

The White Paper is unclear on a couple of points. The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I have not had a chance to study it in detail, but I should be grateful for some clarification. Will the commissioning groups be able to make choices among secondary care providers? Will they be able to devolve part of their budgets internally within the groups? Will the Secretary of State try to ensure a full day's debate on the White Paper in the new year, once we have all had a chance to study it?

Is the Secretary of State's model for GP commissioning open to further suggestions? Will it give GPs the flexibility to develop commissioning in ways that they may choose—perhaps different ways in different places? Will GPs be compelled to use a particular hospital, or will they be able to choose which hospital to send patients to?

What does the right hon. Gentleman have to say to the 58 per cent. of GPs who have chosen fundholding, or to the 93 per cent. of this group who say that they want to keep practice-based budgeting? After all, they number more than half the country's GPs. Why should they be prevented from improving patient care as they wish?

Will the Secretary of State in due course—perhaps not today—detail how the £1 billion that he says will be saved from reduced red tape will be achieved? Can he promise us today that, under Labour, the number of qualified nurses will increase by at least 3,000 a year on average, as it did under the former Government? Can he promise to beat our record of increasing the number of in-patient and day cases treated by an average of more than 4 per cent. a year? Above all, can he promise to beat the previous Government's record of increasing national health service funding by more than 3 per cent. a year in real terms?

We and the British people will judge the right hon. Gentleman's stewardship of the Department, and these reforms, by those exacting standards.

Mr. Dobson: The response of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) suggests that the country believed that we had a sort of NHS nirvana until the end of April 1997. Most people do not like what has happened to the health service; most people working in it do not like it, either. They find it wasteful and unfair to patients. They do not like the fact that those working in the NHS have been forced to participate in activities that they find unfair and unpleasant.

It was not I who described the effects of the internal market on doctors as repugnant: it was Sandy Macara, the chairman of the British Medical Association, who said that the present system is repugnant to doctors. What is more, he did not try to single out doctors in the way the previous Government tried to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King) spoke earlier of a problem that had arisen in Rugby because of the internal market: nothing was done, nothing could be done. GPs, whether fundholders or non-fundholders, could not bring about any improvements in the hospital in question. As a result, the people of Rugby have been punished, in effect, by having their hospital taken away from them. Our proposals to establish quality standards and ensure that they are met, and to give more power to GPs and community nurses, will prevent just that sort of episode.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether GPs will be allowed to send patients to the hospital of their choice. He actually used more obscure language, but I think that that is what he meant. Before the previous Government's changes, a GP could send patients to any hospital in the land. It was that Government who introduced restrictions; we, of course, will allow GPs to do so again. But we must not put GPs in the position of not wanting to send people living in Rugby to Rugby hospital because it is not good enough. They should not be forced to send people to Coventry for a decent level of care. We need to ensure decent care in every hospital in the country. The Tory system has failed to deliver that.

The hon. Gentleman spoke mockingly of a

"touching old Labour faith in co-operation and good will".

I plead guilty to that any day; most doctors and nurses would plead guilty to it as well. They were horrified that their management sometimes told them that they were not allowed to co-operate with the hospital down the road because it might undermine their commercial position.

I have talked to nurses and to cardiac surgeons who tell me that, for commercial reasons, their management prevented them from disclosing to others and publishing scientific papers about improvements in treatment because that local management thought that it would undermine the competitive position of the hospital for which they were working. We will be getting rid of all those absurdities.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon talked as if everything had worked well. We have to get down to the solid examples of what was going on. Under the present arrangements, we have, in theory, national standards for cervical cancer and breast cancer screening. There is no statutory obligation on the trusts carrying out the screening to meet any of the quality levels that have been established. Virtually their only obligation is to break even, and, under the previous Government, an increasing number could not even do that.

We are putting in place a system that will set standards and place obligations on those who are responsible for meeting those standards. They will be obliged to meet them, and we will put in place quality assurance arrangements which will ensure that they do meet them. Doctors, nurses, midwives, other professionals, non-professionals and managers in the health service have told me that they want the sort of things that we are proposing. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that what we are proposing today will be unpopular with the professions concerned, he should wait for a day or two and see what their response is.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I offer a warm welcome to my right hon. Friend's statement, which will be widely welcomed throughout the country. One of the consequences of the previous Government's record on the NHS is that I regularly find myself writing five, six, seven or more separate letters about one constituent's problems because of all the various agencies which were brought about through the previous Government's fragmentation of the NHS. That occurs particularly where we have an overlap between health and social care.

Can my right hon. Friend say a little more about his proposals to break down what he rightly describes as the Berlin wall between health and social care? If my right hon. Friend goes back to 1974, he will see that, historically, one of the most damaging decisions for health care in this country was that of Sir Keith Joseph, when he removed from local authorities the public health function and started to create the confusion that has reigned ever since on the issue of social care and health care.

Mr. Dobson: I thank my honourable and good Friend for his welcome for what we have announced today. We are trying to address exactly the point he made about patients and the people representing them being badgered and passed from pillar to post because of the need to approach half a dozen agencies within the national health service and the local authority in order to get proper care for somebody.

It is difficult enough for a Member of Parliament, and it must be almost impossible for some poor old lady who probably cannot see very well or has other problems. My hon. Friend obviously shares my view that the touching faith in co-operation and good will might apply there as well as in the arrangements we are making. We will be producing a further White Paper on social care at the beginning of the new year.

On public health, the chief medical officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, is presently looking at how best to deliver the public health function at national and local level. I have not yet seen his report, but I would expect that he might see a greater role for local authorities, which used to play a bigger part than they do now.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): A serious White Paper on the future of the NHS is very welcome. As today's successor to the party which was the other parent of the NHS, we will always be constructive in battling for the best publicly funded national health service. We will support the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in everything they do to achieve that.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Where we differ, it will not be personal antagonism; it will be because we have a different view of how to get there. That will always be the basis of our criticism. Like other hon. Members, I hope that we have an opportunity for a full debate early in the new year when we have all had the chance to consider the White Paper—as we will carefully—and give a response in due course.

The big questions for the Secretary of State are those asked outside this House: what will the health service do, and will there be the resources to pay for it? However welcome a National Institute for Clinical Excellence may be, there will still be two sorts of rationing for health service patients. First, for this Parliament at least, some 1 million people at a time are likely to be rationed by waiting lists. Secondly, there will still be rationing by post code—or will it be the case that, no matter where people live, they will always have access to exactly the same services as everybody else? That is a main cause of complaint now.

Is there really proof that the proposed system for commissioning will be much more cost-efficient than the present one? There is some evidence to the contrary. Where is the evidence that it will be more accountable? Many of us believe that representatives of the public, democratically elected—not professionals—should choose the priorities in health and social care. The White Paper appears to place more power in the hands of professionals.

Of course we welcome saving money from thousands of unnecessary contracts, if that is the case. However, will the right hon. Gentleman assure me that claims that, for example, £1 billion will be saved in bureaucracy—that is the figure in the White Paper—will be independently verified, as opposed to just being the subject of Government pronouncement and spin doctor repetition? It is a high figure: 10 per cent. of the management costs of the health service. I want the right hon. Gentleman to confirm that he really does believe that 10 per cent. of management costs can be saved during this Parliament.

I have two final points. First, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the internal market is not being abolished? The Tory internal market is being abolished, and we welcome that, but, if there are purchasers and providers, and if there are contracts—even if they are called service agreements—the reality is that there is a market. Or is the right hon. Gentleman saying, as he did in the Rugby example, that there will be no opportunity for a purchasing doctor to choose to go outside his area if he so wished? *[Interruption.]* If there is to be choice, there is a market, and if there is a market, it is continuing—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman made the point that we will debate these matters in full in a few months' time. I appreciate that he is the Liberal Democrat spokesman, but even so he is taking an inordinate length of time. There must be 50 or 60 Members trying to catch my eye, and there is no way in which even half of them can be called if this continues. I want just one question from each Member called, and then I shall wind up questions on the statement.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Secretary of State say whether, as well as his good aspirations, the Government intend to increase, in real terms, the amount of public wealth spent on national health? We get it on the cheap. Will there be not just the plans, but the resources that the NHS needs?

Mr. Dobson: I do not know whether I dare welcome the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the White Paper. It is a serious and solid document, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) for the enormous amount of hard work that he put into its preparation.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised a huge number of topics. I shall try to reduce that to a few points. First, there will be massive reductions in the number of transactions within the NHS and the number of people carrying out those transactions. The commissioning will come down from between around 4,000 bodies of one sort or another to about 500. That will have parallel beneficial effects on those dealing with them.

There is no internal market. There cannot be a market unless there is competition, and there is not going to be competition. Generally speaking, most GPs in York, for example, where I came from originally, want to be able to send their patients to York district general hospital, because it is the local hospital and because it is convenient for patients and their relatives.

GPs want the hospital to be absolutely top-notch, but, unlike under the present system, they will be able to send their patients to Leeds, Sheffield or wherever for specialist treatment if they so choose. We cannot have the situation that arose in Rugby, when nothing happened, the hospital went down the drain, and the population of the area were punished for the failures of management within the NHS. That is what we are going to avoid. There will be massive reductions in costs.

Yes, we want to apply national standards. Our arrangements are intended to tackle and eliminate the gross variations in treatment and quality, but I come back to one point: despite everything that has happened, for most people in most parts of the country and for most of the time, the NHS does a damned good job, and they are grateful.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is to be the form and function of the proposed National Institute for Clinical Excellence?

Madam Speaker: Well done.

Mr. Dobson: It is intended to bring together the various professionals to consider the latest evidence on new technology and new drugs, to assess their value and decide which ones are worth pushing, and in effect brand some things as good for the NHS. It will then be up to the rest of the machinery to get on with it, but the process will be led by the professionals. The standards applied will have to be acceptable to the professions. I hope that the institute will be successful.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): The proposals represent more evolution and modification than some of the destructive and extremely negative comments that the Labour party made in opposition, but what specific targets is the Secretary of State planning to set?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) said, over the past 18 years, the average increase in spending has run at 3 per cent. in real terms, whereas the right hon. Gentleman is looking at 1.7 per cent. in real terms. He has to do more with less. The only specific target announced so far was to take 100,000 people off the waiting lists, but that was followed by the biggest increase in the number of people on waiting lists that the NHS has ever known. What are the targets, and what redress will there be if the Secretary of State fails to meet them?

Mr. Dobson: I should have thought that the right hon. Lady knew from her experience as Secretary of State that, when anyone starts reciting figures about the money that has been spent on the health service, the public switch off. They switch off if I do it, and they certainly used to switch off when she did it. After all, she was found in several opinion polls to be the least sincere politician in Britain, and God knows there is a lot of competition.

People will see change and improvement in the national health service year in, year out, because we will bring together the people working in the service—doctors, nurses and others—rather than have them working against one another. They will be improving standards, we will be putting in place the appropriate machinery, and we will be increasing the money available to the NHS in real terms year on year.

The right hon. Lady was a member of the Government who set the last budget. This year and next year, we are finding £1.5 billion on top of what her Government intended to find, so a period of quiet from her might not be a bad idea.

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): On behalf of community nurses and other health professionals, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. He is proud, we are proud, and I know that Aneurin Bevan would be particularly proud. I welcome the shared role of community nurses and general practitioners. Will my right hon. Friend enlarge on how he envisages the development of the role of community nurses?

Mr. Dobson: There will be a greater role for all nurses who want to increase their contribution, and who have the necessary and skills and training. Community nurses will play an important and influential role, along with general practitioners, in the commissioning process.

Commissioning is not the only issue. One of the problems of the previous system was that the organisation of general practitioners centred on purchasing hospital care. More joint effort and thought should be put into improving primary and community services.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As an honorary vice-president of the Royal College of Midwives, I congratulate the Secretary of State on reversing the fragmentation that was occurring in the national health service, and ensuring that it is an integrated, seamless service. Does he accept that there is some concern about the abolition of fundholding, because fundholding practices provide the widest range of medical services at a doctor's surgery or medical centre rather than a hospital, saving the health service money? Will he give an assurance that his reforms will not bring that to an end?

Mr. Dobson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I have said this before and I shall say it again: he has made a singular contribution—an honest, decent contribution—to health debates. He has always stuck to his guns, and I respect him for that.

We are trying to ensure that the best manifestations of fundholding, together with the big improvements that non-fundholders have made in recent years, remain and strengthen the system. We want to eliminate the disadvantages. We may even manage to convince a substantial number of fundholders. Indeed, I think that we may have convinced them already.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the White Paper will be warmly welcomed by those doctors and health care workers who have pioneered locality commissioning schemes, such as that in south-east London, on the basis of co-operation and good will in the face of Tory market dogma? The range of services they provide is the envy of many fundholders. Will he confirm that, at long last, doctors and nurses will be put in the driving seat for decisions about the treatment that patients should get?

Mr. Dobson: I can certainly confirm that we intend that doctors, nurses and other health care professionals should be in the driving seat. As for fundholders, as those hon. Members who were at Health questions know, we have established 42 pilot commissioning schemes, most of which involve fundholders from those areas who volunteered to take part.

Multifunds and similar ideas are steps away from the individualistic aspects of fundholding—a recognition that, when all the doctors, community nurses and other primary care professionals in one area get together, they can be more influential and have more scope and choice than when they act as individuals. I know that that may sound a trifle socialistic; but it is true.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the right hon. Gentleman assure me that the reforms to the functions of health authorities will ensure the future of joint hospitals trusts, such as the Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS trust in my constituency? There must co-operation between the commissioning health authorities in a locality rather than competition. The York model, together with the limitless funds supposedly available for general practitioners in the future, should ensure that they will be able to commission services in the local hospital, which my constituents and those in Watford greatly appreciate.

Mr. Dobson: I do not like making promises that I cannot guarantee to deliver, and I certainly cannot guarantee the future of any particular hospital when it is raised in the Chamber as it has just been. I would expect GPs in the hon. Gentleman's constituency to try to make sure that the best secondary hospital services were available to their patients as near to their patients' homes as is sensibly convenient, and reasonably cost-effective. I hope that everyone involved in the health service in the

[Mr. Dobson]

area will co-operate to that end. I welcome the hon. Gentleman as an obvious co-operator among the wild competitors opposite.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the abolition of the Tory internal market will result in the abolition of the senseless competition between NHS organisations such as hospital trusts? Instead of sharing expertise and information and co-operating with each other, they have been tempted to compete against one another, to the detriment of us all.

Mr. Dobson: I can certainly confirm that, in future, trusts will have a statutory obligation to deliver services to the quality standards that have been laid down. They will also be under a statutory obligation to co-operate with other parts of the national health service. It is a pretty extraordinary thought that, until we change the law, my hon. Friend's local hospital is under no obligation to co-operate with the hospital in Slough, which is not far down the road. It seems crazy, but that is the system we have inherited.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): If the Government intend to have no more than about 500 commissioning units, that implies that each will cover a very large area—particularly in rural areas—including some minuscule practices serving no more than 2,000 patients? If a rural area has a natural coherence and identity, will the Secretary of State ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to recognise that and that no artificial limit will be placed on the number of people that can constitute one of the commissioning groups?

Mr. Dobson: As the right hon. Gentleman may recollect from when he was an Environment Minister, I am a great believer in horses for courses. We do not seek to enforce one model in every city, suburb and rural area. We want a system that meets the needs of the patients. We are determined to provide a national health service that is moulded to the needs of the patient, rather than the patient having to be moulded to the institutions.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I warmly welcome the White Paper. Will my right hon. Friend explain its impact on maternity services? In the next 12 months, 750,000 women will give birth, and virtually all of them will be attended by midwives. Will he give an assurance that the budget for maternity services will not rest solely with GPs, but that other professionals such as midwives will have a say?

Mr. Dobson: That is certainly the case. There will be an increased role for everyone involved in primary care, including midwives, who also have a significant role in hospitals. That may be one sector where massive savings can be achieved—in any particular town or city, it is possible to predict how many women will become pregnant in any given year.

However, in many areas, contracts are issued case by case, and the paperwork costs a fortune. Longer-term contracts that are not issued case by case, would produce savings, particularly in maternity services, as it is possible to predict how many people need treatment and run a financial system that suits those circumstances, instead of the ridiculous system now in place.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): From reading the White Paper, it would appear that the Secretary of State is not proposing any substantial reduction in the number of NHS trusts, but rather that trusts co-operate in primary care plans and various other things through health authorities. Will he give thought to ensuring that proposals to reorganise NHS trusts are put on hold while implications are considered?

One of the difficulties with the example of the Rugby NHS trust, which the right hon. Gentleman cited, is that it is a small NHS general hospital trust. There must be provision in NHS services for small hospitals, such as the Rugbys of this world or Horton general hospital in Banbury. If he is not proposing substantially to reduce the number of NHS trusts, will he consider putting such proposals on hold until we have all had a chance to consider the implications of today's White Paper, especially for smaller hospitals?

Mr. Dobson: That would not be a sensible way of approaching matters. The point that I made at Question Time was that we want to encourage mergers between trust and trust and health authority and health authority which appear to make sense to people in the locality. We do not want to lay down the law; we want to encourage them.

More than 50-odd trusts are involved in merger talks about which the public know. I do not think that any virtue would be served in going back on our recent decision to agree to the merger in Derby, or holding back our examination of the proposal which I understand will be coming from Leeds to merge the two acute trusts there.

I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. In certain particular circumstances, it might be wise to hold off certain mergers, but that should, generally speaking, be a matter for those in the locality concerned.

Mr. Ivan Lewis (Bury, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the only basis for the competition in the health service under the previous Government was that they were preparing it for privatisation? Does he acknowledge that people will welcome the White Paper because it proves that, without privatising the NHS or encouraging competition, it can be modernised by encouraging collaboration and all the values which were the basis of the health service when it was created?

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The right hon. Gentleman has stressed the need for the health service to reflect patients' needs. That is a view which I share entirely. What safeguards does he intend to build into his system to ensure that medical freemasonry and cosy relationships between some GPs and some consultants do not militate against patients' interests and choice?

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): That is a googly.

Mr. Dobson: No, it is not a googly. We have to work on the assumption that the bulk of the medical profession

does a good job, wants to do a good job, does not want a cushy number and wants to look after patients—although there will be a limited number of people who will not fall into those categories. We need in place a system that ensures that they do their job properly to the professional standards that their professional colleagues have laid down. That will certainly come about as a result of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence.

I very much welcome the fairly recent decision of the General Medical Council to address the question of doctor performance and people who are not living up to professional standards of patient treatment. Although self-regulation is not right in other areas, I strongly believe that it is appropriate for the medical and nursing professions. However, it is up to them to demonstrate to their colleagues and the public that self-regulation works. We want to encourage them to do so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the reason why he is able to make today's statement is that the British people woke up in time? They realised earlier this year—and perhaps a bit before—that the national health service was on its way to the hands of insurance companies and other speculators, which would probably create a service costing twice as much and similar to that in America?

Blessed with this good fortune, I hope that my right hon. Friend will realise that he will have to fight for every penny with the Chancellor of the Exchequer—£10 billion extra already collected in taxes—due to the advance of medical science. He will always have to remember this: the NHS is not just a service; it is a cause worth fighting for.

Mr. Dobson: I certainly agree with the last point that my hon. Friend makes. The national health service is popular with people in this country, partly because it provides them with such a good service when they and their families are in need, and partly because of the principles on which it is based. When I am doing okay, I pay in to look after people who are in trouble: in turn, if I fall ill or have an accident, other people pay in to look after me.

People believe, because of that principle, that the national health service does not just bind the nation's wounds: it helps to bind the nation together. That is why the people treasure it.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The Secretary of State referred to quality standards and targets. Is there any contradiction between those and the reference he also made to long-term agreements? If too many institutions are committed to long-term agreements and fail to meet the quality standards or targets, insufficient flexibility may exist to enable the institutions to improve to meet the targets.

Mr. Dobson: We live in a world of dilemmas, and the right hon. Gentleman's point contains some truth. Therefore, we will have to try to ensure that the problem does not arise.

It is not a question of the local primary care group making an agreement with its local hospital on how many services will be provided and to what standard and price they will be delivered. I expect that arrangements will be made so that, if standards are not met, either improvements can be enforced or the institutions can break out of the contract.

We do not want the ultimate weapon to be used, but it may need to be available in the negotiations to give weight to the demands of the primary care group. Primary care groups and their patients do not wish to be forced to transfer their trade to another hospital 20 miles away. That is why, in parallel with the pressures that the primary care group will be able to apply locally, we will introduce national measures to drive up standards and to ensure that they are maintained.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Dobson. Go and rest your voice.

Points of Order

4.27 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to have to ask you for a ruling, but this morning, from the news bulletins, and especially from the "Today" programme, one would have gathered that we would have two statements in the House this afternoon, not one. We were told in some detail what the Government will propose in a White Paper on freedom of information.

As soon as I got to my office, I rang the Chancellor of the Duchy's office; asked whether there would be a statement, and was told that there would not; and asked whether a White Paper would be published today, and was told that it would not be published. Again, we have government by leak and innuendo. I put it to you that it is intolerable that we should hear on the radio what purports to be an accurate account of an important item of Government policy, instead of hearing it in the House. I should be grateful for your guidance.

Several hon. Members: On a point of order.

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must wait for my answer, and not be so impatient.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to apologise most sincerely to you and to the whole House for what appears to have been a premature disclosure of some features of the freedom of information White Paper which I hoped to present to the House this Thursday. I should like to assure you that I myself had no part in this, and no knowledge of it. No one is more annoyed than I that these details should have emerged, and I believe that it is a disservice to the House.

Although it could be informed speculation, we cannot discount the possibility that it may have been premature disclosure from within Government. Therefore, I am taking this matter very seriously, and I have set in train the task of looking further into the circumstances surrounding the reports.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the Minister.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Could we have sensible points of order, please?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): This is a genuine point of order, Madam Speaker. We have listened to exchanges for approximately an hour on the NHS White Paper. At the same time, a booklet relating to the health service in Scotland, "Designed to Care", has been published. However, we have not had a statement from the Scottish Office on the document, although hon. Members appreciate that there are different aspects of the health service in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister responsible for health in Scotland have been briefing the press all day, yet Scottish Members have not had an opportunity to question the issues contained in the document. It almost seems as if the Scottish Office has published a document which should be called "Designed to Ignore Scottish Members of Parliament".

Madam Speaker: The hon. Lady appears to be asking me whether I have heard from the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he is seeking to make a statement on the document to which she has referred. I have not heard that a statement is to be made, but I am sure that those on the Front Bench will have noticed what she has said.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You did not ignore Scottish Members of Parliament.

Mrs. Ewing: We are the only two Scottish Members here, Tam.

Madam Speaker: Of course I do not ignore Scottish Members—they are part of the whole in this House, as far as I am concerned. I call them whatever the statement may be, and whatever Question Time it may be.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you heard from the solicitors acting for the late Robert Maxwell and currently acting for the Paymaster General about whether there is any legal impediment preventing the Paymaster General from coming to this House to make a personal statement about his financial affairs? In particular, we should like to know whether there was any impropriety in his dealings with the late Robert Maxwell's companies.

Madam Speaker: I have had no communication from solicitors. I am rather delighted that I have not.

Press Complaints Commission

4.32 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the establishment of a statutory Press Complaints Commission; to make further provisions in respect of libel actions brought against newspapers; and for connected purposes.

I am seeking leave to bring in a Bill to change the status of the Press Complaints Commission from a self-regulatory, voluntary body to a statutory body with legal authority. I pay tribute to the present chairman, Lord Wakeham, for his tireless work in trying to make the press barons more accountable to the code of practice.

None the less, about 200 people every week feel that they have been wronged by inaccurate press reporting. The majority are forced to settle for less than they should, simply because of the imbalance between the powers and financial clout of the press barons and the powerlessness of the individual. If a newspaper refuses to correct an inaccurate, irresponsible or malicious story, there is very little an aggrieved party can do.

Currently there are two forms of redress; neither is entirely satisfactory. The individual can pursue a libel case in the courts, but the costs are prohibitive. Understandably, there is no legal aid for libel, and facing the financial might of the press barons is quite daunting. Alternatively, the matter can be referred to the Press Complaints Commission. If the Press Complaints Commission upholds the complaint, the newspaper must publish the verdict by way of a correction.

However, the size, position, timing and content of that correction is not a matter for the wronged person, who has absolutely no influence as to what is printed. Inevitably, therefore, the correction fails to rectify the damage done by the original article. So the dice are loaded against the public and there is a clear need for a new body to balance better the power of the press moguls and those who have been wronged. Let me make it clear that I am not proposing a privacy Bill, although the new Press Complaints Commission would certainly be involved in implementing any changes made to privacy law.

I seek the leave of the House to concentrate on another issue, which is not privacy but to redress the damage done by inaccurate, irresponsible or malicious reporting by increasing the remedies available to the individuals. Most people who are wronged by the press want nothing more than for the record to be put straight by way of a correction and an apology, and they deserve nothing less. However, at the moment an apology can mean virtually anything. Editors may offer to write another article, which is favourable to the person wronged, to publish a letter from the aggrieved individual or to publish a correction—never an apology.

Inevitably, such pieces are not accorded the prominence that they deserve and are designed to attract as few readers as possible. Understandably, newspapers do not like to admit when they are wrong and are reluctant to publish anything that suggests that they have made a mistake. They shy away from admitting any blame. People who run newspapers have a public responsibility to get things right. When mistakes occur, they have a duty to put them right quickly and frankly.

Under my Bill, corrections and apologies will have to be of a minimum size. Never smaller than the offending article, they will appear on the same page as the original article, with the same headline size and a wording agreed by the person who has been wronged. It is important that the impact of the apology matches that of the offending article. That is not impractical, as newspaper editors already argue, although it may be unpalatable for some.

If editors refuse to publish a correction and an apology, which they are fully entitled to do if they believe that there is no cause, there will still be other ways for the individual to proceed. The Press Complaints Commission will still have the power to consider the complaint and make a ruling. In addition, two funds will be established—raised by way of a levy on newspapers, either on profits or turnover. The first will be a compensatory fund to repay any expenses to the claimant arising from the publication of an inaccurate article, such as legal fees and so forth, perhaps, up to about £5,000. The other fund will be able to offer an interest-free loan for individuals to pursue libel cases.

In either case, the funds will be made available only after the Press Complaints Commission has judged the claimant to have a bona fide, prima facie case. While the compensatory fund would require an annual top-up, the loan fund would be made good either by the aggrieved party, should he or she lose the libel case, or by the newspaper, should the libel be upheld, although some provisions will be needed to pay off bad debts.

I propose one final sanction, which would be used only in the most extreme and serious cases. If the Press Complaints Commission deemed that an article was written with malice and recklessness and without regard to the consequences of publication, it could suspend the circulation of a newspaper for one day. In effect, it would take the newspaper off the streets because it had been irresponsible and totally reckless. That is a draconian measure, but it would act as an ultimate deterrent for editors who want to publish scurrilous material regardless of the damage that it might cause.

The Bill is not an attack on the press, but an attempt to gain the support of the House to give real teeth to the Press Complaints Commission, with the aim of outlawing inaccurate, irresponsible or malicious journalism. As far as most editors and journalists are concerned, there is nothing to fear because the vast majority of them are diligent and responsible.

My aim in seeking leave to introduce the Bill is to level the proverbial playing field between the individual and the press barons; to reduce the incidence of poor reporting; and to provide David with the rocks to fight Goliath.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Anthony Steen, Mr. Clive Soley, Mr. Martin Bell and Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Mr. Anthony Steen accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of a statutory Press Complaints Commission; to make further provisions in respect of libel actions brought against newspapers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 December, and to be printed [Bill 99].

Orders of the Day

Government of Wales Bill

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on amendment to Question [8 December], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Which amendment was, to leave out from the word 'That' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'this House, deploring the failure of Her Majesty's Government to respond to and allay the legitimate fears of the Welsh people expressed in the referendum vote of 18th September and in particular the omission from the Government of Wales Bill of any statutory assurances in relation to the supremacy of the Westminster Parliament, to the protection of geographic and cultural minorities, to the proper resourcing of Wales to reflect need, and to the safeguarding of the position of Wales within the United Kingdom and its voice within Europe, declines to give a Second Reading to the Government of Wales Bill.'—[*Mr. Ancram.*]

Question again proposed, That the Amendment be made:—

4.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): On 18 September the people of Wales backed the Government in creating a modern new democracy for Wales. They voted for a new Wales and a new future. They demonstrated that we in Wales are ready for the new century, more confident about ourselves than in the past.

Nobody can pretend that it was a decisive yes vote, but as my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) and for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell) said—their contributions yesterday were most welcome—most no campaigners accept the will of the people. As the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) added, only English Conservative Front Benchers want to rewrite the rules of democracy by insisting that a narrow yes vote is somehow really a no vote. Even Conservatives in Wales accept the result and the need to respond constructively to the Bill. Notably, Lord Roberts of Conwy voted no, but he is not trying to turn the clock back and has advanced some interesting ideas.

The truth is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) argued, the result was an historic achievement, overcoming old divisions between north and south; English and Welsh speakers; and industrial and rural areas—divisions that were so ruthlessly and contemptibly exploited by the Tory-led no campaigners, who appealed so nakedly to fear and grubby parochialism.

The Tories wanted Wales trapped in the past—weak, divided, and cowering before power centralised in London—but the Government led a broad popular coalition, spanning all parties, to secure a swing of 30 per cent. since the ill-fated referendum of 1979. Significantly, that swing was bigger than in Scotland, even surpassing Labour's 1 May landslide. It was a vote not for separatism but for democracy: for decentralising power from Whitehall to the people and modernising our almost mediaeval British constitution.

It was not a shock to see the Conservatives opposing this extension of democracy: the shock would have been if they had done otherwise. They opposed every great constitutional reform—votes for working-class citizens; votes for women; reform of the House of Lords—so why should they make an exception of Wales? Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) pointed out, they also opposed the establishment of the post of Secretary of State for Wales and the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): Why is the Minister so anxious about the vote? He attacks everyone left, right and centre, and the witchfinder general of Wales tries to extirpate Labour Members who voted no. There must have been large numbers of those—250,000 more than the Conservative vote. What is behind all this? There was a massive rejection on the day: 75 per cent., given the chance to vote yes, did not do so. The Minister is trying to make 75 per cent. seem insubstantial as against his own 25 per cent. What is it all about?

Mr. Hain: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's spirited attempt to prop up the empty Opposition Benches. I was merely replying to points raised by Opposition Members in yesterday's debate, in accordance with the courtesies of the House.

The Tories wanted to be able to inflict Redwooditis on Wales again, if they returned to government. We want that disease banished forever from Wales, so that never again can the likes of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) trample all over the people of Wales. We all thought that Redwooditis, a form of political BSE, had been made safe by slaughtering more than half the Tory Members at the general election—it was indeed a radical cull, strictly in line with the rules of public health and safety—but we discover that it has not been eliminated.

Redwooditis has remained deeply embedded in the spinal cord of the Tory party and has emerged among Opposition Front Benchers as they stumble groggily through the devolution debate. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is the Tories' voice for the valleys; Wales is safe with an Essex boy, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin); and then we have the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the Marquis of Lothian, who is the answer to the West Lothian question personified.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Will the Minister confirm that Devizes, and indeed Scotland, where I come from, are rather nearer to Wales than South Africa?

Mr. Hain: Not nearer than Neath, which I represent—with a record majority at the general election, I might add—but I none the less welcome any more spirited interventions from the right hon. Gentleman.

Yesterday, the right hon. Gentleman spoke of the Bill as a "dangerous dog's breakfast"; I do not know what a safe dog's breakfast might be. He gave a curiously lacklustre performance: perhaps, as a closet devolutionist going back 20 years, his heart is not really in it. By contrast, his Back-Bench colleagues, the hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made thoughtful contributions, and I look forward to hearing more from them in Committee.

I notice that the right hon. Member for Devizes has promised a second referendum on devolution. If he does not mind, I will give him some comradely advice: referendums are not that easy to win. I speak from personal experience. If the Tories ever won another general election, I would relish the prospect of fighting a no campaign to keep the national assembly for Wales, but I offer a prediction: that second referendum will be yet another Tory broken promise. We got used to them in government, and now we are getting used to them in opposition.

Look what happened to the Tory Leader's promise of a referendum last time: the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who treated Wales as a youth training scheme for his leadership of the party, promised a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty; but that was in June, and we all know that six months is a long time in Tory politics. Last week, the Tory leadership refused to table an amendment calling for a referendum when the treaty was put before the House. The new Tory leader's motto is, "U-turn if you want to, this man's definitely for turning."

I see from yesterday's *The Daily Telegraph* that the Leader of the Opposition is now trying to get Scottish Tories to

"break with the past and reinvent themselves"

by changing their name following their disastrous election result. [HON. MEMBERS: "Like new Labour."] We will come to that.

One of the Tory leader's advisers told the newspaper:

"The old name is potentially damaged goods".

All sorts of new names are being canvassed: the Scottish Unionist party; the Progressive Unionist party; and even the Democratic Conservative party, which I would have thought a contradiction in terms. I am sure that, if that new thinking is applied to Scotland, Wales will not be left out. Perhaps I can be helpful: what about the Tories calling themselves new Conservatives? In Wales, that could be Ceidwadwyr Newydd, or Toriad Newydd: real vote winners.

Mind you, it is not surprising that they are having this trouble, as the Tories' name came from a gang of 17th century Irish outlaws known as the bog trotters. Perhaps that explains the incontinent rumblings of the right hon. Member for Devizes yesterday.

Long after our Tory shadows in opposition have faded from memory, my right hon. Friend's name will be entrenched in Welsh history as the person who delivered devolution for Wales. Perhaps future generations will salute him by demanding a St. Ronald's day; I am sure that Opposition Members will support that.

The Bill is not only about democracy. Wales is, by United Kingdom or European standards, a poor country. Our gross domestic product per head is 18 per cent. lower than England's: a gap that has widened over the past 21 years. Average earnings are 11 per cent. lower than in England, whereas in 1979 they were only 3 per cent. lower. Youth unemployment, at more than 19 per cent., is almost half as high again as in England.

Economic inactivity rates for those of working age, especially men, are higher than in England. Health is worse and so is poverty. While some areas, notably the south-east and the north-east of Wales, have prospered, others have stagnated at best. That is the dreadful legacy that the Tories want to maintain with the old style of government.

The Tories want Wales to be poor and divided. We want Wales to be a new, modern world-beating country, united for the first time through an assembly that will ensure that the needs of all parts of Wales are fully understood and fairly represented, a point eloquently argued by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik).

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the Minister leaves the question of poverty, could he clarify something? We received in the Library today a document entitled, "Principles to govern determination of the block budgets for the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales". In paragraph 8b, on the Barnett formula, it states:

"action taken by the Scottish or Welsh administrations in a devolved area has knock-on costs for the UK Government or vice versa."

Can he explain the background of the statement that has appeared?

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend always asks penetrating and well-researched questions. I think that he will find that the answer is contained in the memorandum to which he referred.

The speech by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire was witty and eloquent. I assure him that the Secretary of State will seriously consider his generous offer to construct the assembly building all by himself.

The Tories want to maintain the politically corrupt Tory quango state, which accounts for more than a third of the Welsh Office budget. We want the quangos abolished or merged, and all made subject to democratic accountability through the assembly, which will have sweeping powers to reform them. The Tories want local authorities strangled; the Bill offers a new partnership to empower local government, as my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) and for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) argued.

Meanwhile, we are building an integrated Welsh Development Agency for the whole of Wales. Tai Cymru will be merged with the Welsh Office. Health service trusts will be reduced in number and reshaped. Cardiff Bay development corporation will be wound up. As my hon. Friends the Members for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) and for Gower (Mr. Caton) argued, that amounts to a fundamental shift in the way public services are delivered in Wales.

Most significant is the merger into the WDA of the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales. The Bill creates for the first time a single economic development agency for Wales. It will remove the complexity, confusion and waste that result from existing arrangements and give the assembly a powerful vehicle to improve economic prosperity across Wales. In partnership with local authorities, the business community and many others, the new WDA will have a pivotal role in developing and delivering the objectives of economic growth and prosperity for the whole of Wales. It will also be charged with delivering local solutions for local businesses and communities in the different parts of Wales.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): How does the Minister square that with the statement this morning in

[Mr. Owen Paterson]

the Welsh Affairs Committee by Mr. Chris Barber of the Federation of Small Businesses of Wales that the merger of the DBRW into the WDA would have a catastrophic effect?

Mr. Hain: That statement has not been repeated by many, if any, business men across Wales. They see the enormous advantages to Welsh businesses, small and large, of a unified powerhouse agency, especially with the development of English regional development agencies, which I welcome. I am sure that Mr. Barber does not speak for the whole of business in Wales.

The all-Wales remit of the new agency will tackle inequalities in investment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) pointed out in the Welsh Grand Committee last month, inward investment has created 12,280 jobs in Newport, Cardiff and Caerphilly but only 43 in Conwy, Pembrokeshire and Denbighshire. At least in part, that reflects the democratic deficit that Wales has endured for far too long.

Only by bringing the quangos, and especially the enlarged WDA, under the control of a democratic assembly representing the whole of Wales can the needs of areas that have lagged so far behind, particularly in the rural north and west, be properly addressed. To do that, the new organisation will need a strong regional structure, with boundaries closely aligned with those of the reconstituted training and enterprise councils, the economic forums and the strong regional committees for the assembly that are established by the Bill, a matter rightly stressed by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) yesterday. The WDA-led powerhouse will be equipped to spearhead our drive for a world-class Welsh economy for the 21st century, and subject to the Bill's passage, will be fully operational by autumn next year. The Bill is therefore the vehicle for not only the political but the economic regeneration of Wales.

The assembly created by the Bill will be a modern institution, accessible to the whole of Wales, in keeping with its mission to serve the whole of Wales. In that respect, I stress the importance of the Secretary of State's advisory committee. It is open to new ideas and suggestions for how business, the trade unions and voluntary groups—from women's organisations to school governors—wish to relate to the assembly. We want to create a new political culture in Wales, a new participatory democracy.

We also intend to pioneer a new digital democracy. The assembly will be designed to make use of new technology, not only in members' offices but in the chamber and externally, to link up with the outside world. I realise that the right hon. Member for Devizes has a problem pronouncing the word "digital", but if he wants I shall show him how to spell it afterwards.

The Bill ushers in an exciting new era for Wales. It is no surprise that the Tories oppose it. History teaches us that the Tories, through the English Tory establishment, always respond in a reactionary way to demands for reform. The familiar pattern is being played out before us over a Welsh Assembly. First, they rubbish the case. Secondly, they resist it, often uncompromisingly. Then, when they see that they are losing the battle, they slide into the third phase of trying to co-opt the pressure for change, as shown by last year's proposals to beef up the role of the Welsh Grand Committee, as if that could substitute for genuine devolution. Fourthly and finally, they are forced to cave in to the will of the people. When that happens, as it surely will, none of them will ever admit to having opposed a Welsh Assembly in the first place.

4.56 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the chance to speak on the second day of the Second Reading debate. It is wonderful to follow the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain). It is so good to hear the Neath accent again—although, strangely, despite my 30 years of living in Swansea, I had quite forgotten that it sounded like that. When I refer later in my speech to inward investment, I shall not be referring to the hon. Member for Neath.

This afternoon, I shall touch on issues that were debated yesterday and introduce other matters that need to be addressed in Committee. We have been criticised by the three pro-devolution parties for being negative and for acting as an Opposition. I make no apologies for doing so. I regret that we are the Opposition but we recognise that we are the Opposition. We are the only party that speaks on behalf of the three out of four people in Wales who did not endorse the proposals. Much has been made of the twisting of the figures of 18 September into a resounding endorsement, which they were not.

The result was not brilliant for any of us. At just over 50 per cent., the turnout was down from 58.3 per cent. in 1979, when I voted no in Swansea. The split between yes and no could not have been closer—just 0.6 per cent., with 11 areas voting for and 11 against. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said yesterday, Offa's dyke seems to be moving west.

It would have been better if the percentage majority in favour had been in double figures. That would have settled the issue once and for all, but it did not and it remains unsettled. The Prime Minister knew that it was not a brilliant endorsement because the day after the referendum, on the steps of No. 10, he said that he would need to address the fears of the large number of people who did not endorse the devolution proposals. What action has he taken? The Welsh Assembly is to be called the National Assembly for Wales, cynulliad cenedlaethol Cymru. A name change is always worth a try. As new Labour knows, it sometimes works. But more than a name change will be needed to sell the merits of this case.

The other major change was that the assembly bandwagon, which was due to roll in to a town near you in England, rolled backwards into Wales. It has been derailed. So the English have a great deal for which to thank the Welsh, but the Welsh have little for which to thank the Prime Minister.

Another change, we are told, is that there is to be an advisory committee which will help in setting up the assembly. We are told that it will represent all political shades. That would have been a step in the right direction, had the Secretary of State asked the parties for nominations, as the Secretary of State for Scotland is doing. We were told yesterday that the Conservatives had been consulted, but neither the shadow Secretary of State nor I have been asked to suggest a name. We have checked with a number of our representatives from Wales and they have not been asked to put forward a name.

We have tabled a parliamentary question to ask exactly whom the Secretary of State for Wales consulted. We look forward to the answer. Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to intervene now and tell us whom he consulted about the nomination.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): I am more than happy to confirm that I have received a parliamentary question from the hon. Gentleman and, of course, I shall give it careful consideration and let him have a full reply. The point that I make is the one that I made in yesterday's debate to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I invited him to the Welsh Office at the same time as I invited the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) and the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). They came and discussed matters with me, but the right hon. Gentleman chose not to come. In his absence, I could hardly have a consultation with him.

Mr. Evans: This simply will not do. As even the *Western Mail* says, recent events do not get this whole thing off to a good start—and that newspaper was pro-devolution at the very beginning. The Secretary of State has a cheek to talk about inclusivity when he has just given that sort of answer.

I was in the room when that telephone conversation took place. The Secretary of State talked about trying to force his own nomination on to the Welsh Grand Committee. Not content with choosing the Conservative nominee on the advisory body, he wants to choose one of the Welsh nominees on the Welsh Grand Committee. This is a strange and twisted form of democracy. Perhaps the Secretary of State will say whether the nominee to serve on the advisory body will be the hereditary peer mentioned in today's *Western Mail*.

Mr. Davies: As the hon. Gentleman was with the right hon. Member for Devizes at the time of that conversation, he will be in a position to confirm that I invited the right hon. Gentleman to come to see me at the Welsh Office to discuss a range of issues that were likely to be before Parliament this Session. It is a matter of regret to me that the right hon. Gentleman declined that invitation. The fact that the other two party leaders accepted my invitation and have been involved in the consultation process is a demonstration of their wisdom, and the foolishness and short-sightedness of the right hon. Gentleman who leads for the Conservative party on these matters.

Mr. Evans: The major difference is that the representatives from the other two political parties are behaving as if they were sitting on the Government Benches. We already know that the Secretary of State for Wales likes to close down debate in his own party. Now he is trying to dictate who should be the Conservative nominees on various bodies. Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to confirm whether the nominee is the hereditary peer mentioned in today's newspaper? Is that his Conservative nomination for the advisory committee?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman obviously has such a thin speech that he needs me to pad it out for him. I can confirm to him that the first meeting of the advisory committee will take place in Cardiff on Friday. All members of the committee will be present and their CVs will be made available. The whole of Wales, including the hon. Gentleman, will have the opportunity then to find out precisely who sits on the committee.

Mr. Evans: There the Secretary of State goes again, marginalising the House of Commons. He has been given the opportunity to tell it the membership of the Committee today, but no, the information will be spin-doctored away in the media. He should not talk to us about inclusivity.

Mr. Davies: As the hon. Gentleman wants to take the debate a stage further, perhaps I should explain that the committee will be my advisory committee. The purpose of it will be to consult people in Wales and offer advice to me.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): But you are the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Davies: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I shall explain that the purpose of the advisory committee is to offer advice to me so that I can offer advice to the statutory commission which will prepare the standing orders. The committee will offer advice to me as Secretary of State, not to the House of Commons.

Mr. Evans: Then let us have no more pretence that the advisory committee will represent all shades of political opinion. Let us make the position clear to the Secretary of State for Wales. He seems to be having a little difficulty here. As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell) put it yesterday, all that we are asking for is a bit of chwarae teg, or fair play, on this. We do not want to hear that all political shades are being included when the Conservative party has not been asked for its nomination.

The Secretary of State for Wales has an opportunity today to seek some sort of consensus and a step forward. He was told by Lord Roberts that we were expecting a letter asking for the Conservative party to put forward a nominee. We are still awaiting that letter. If we receive it, we will put forward a serious suggestion.

If the Secretary of State carries on in this fashion, I must make it clear to everyone in the Chamber and outside that the person whom the Secretary of State has chosen does not represent us and has not been chosen by us. The person has been selected by the Secretary of State for Wales. He does not and will not speak for the Conservative party. He will speak only for the Secretary of State for Wales. I ask the media to take note of this: that nominee, whoever he may be, will never be accepted by us as a spokesman on our behalf.

Mr. Davies: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is far wide of the mark. The people who sit on the advisory committee will not represent anyone. They will not represent political parties or vested interests.

Mr. Ancram: They do in Scotland.

Mr. Davies: Of course it is different in Scotland. The members bring to the committee their personal expertise and point of view. They do not represent vested political interests.

Mr. Evans: Let us make it clear that there is no Conservative party representative on the committee.

[Mr. Evans]

The Secretary of State can ask us to put forward a name. We will do so. But no—all that we have heard today is, "This is my advisory committee." The Secretary of State should not talk about inclusivity or the spread of political views.

Let us move on, as it seems that we shall make little progress on the issue of the committee. It has been pointed out to me that yesterday the Secretary of State for Wales said that there was a Conservative representative on the committee. He is not a Conservative representative and he does not speak for us. I move on.

The other point that I wish to make relates to the scrutiny of the Bill. We are not in the business of wrecking the Bill, but it contains more holes than a Swiss cheese and we, along with other right hon. and hon. Members, will seek to fill them in and improve the Bill. Let us follow the convention and take this important constitutional matter on the Floor of the House. The Secretary of State has said that he will table amendments of his own. Labour Members—of varying persuasions, no doubt—will want to table amendments. Let us not steamroller the Bill through a small Committee Upstairs as if it were perfect. This is another matter on which we can make progress, but only if the Secretary of State will meet us half way.

I now turn to the siting of the Assembly and the farcical nature of this shabby, sorry exercise. I know that it is the pantomime season, but recent events are at a new level. Where shall we site the assembly? In Cardiff city hall, of course. "Oh, no, you won't," says Russell Goodway. "Oh, yes, we will," says the Secretary of State—and now it is likely that the assembly will not be there. All that is missing is the familiar ring of, "It's behind you." The Secretary of State must wish that this whole sorry business was behind him. This does not bode well for an harmonious relationship between the assembly and the Secretary of State for Wales, assuming that he still holds that office when it starts up—I am generous enough to assume that he will be.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): What possible relevance do the hon. Gentleman's comments have to the Bill and the debate today?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman made a lengthy speech yesterday. The same question could be asked about much of his speech.

The siting of the assembly was mentioned time and time again in yesterday's debate. If we cannot get that right, what can we get right? The Labour leader of the capital's authority is at loggerheads with the Secretary of State, whose warm, magnetic charm has, unusually, failed him on this occasion. We are now witnessing an unseemly, squalid row.

Mr. Hain: I note that the hon. Gentleman is even laughing at his own lines. Is he suggesting that my right hon. Friend should have agreed to pay more for Cardiff city hall than the independently valued market price?

Mr. Evans: No, of course not. I find it peculiar that everyone thought that a deal had been done with the Labour leader of Cardiff city council. Everyone thought that the assembly would be based at Cardiff city hall, but after the referendum, after the people of Wales had decided, we found out that there was no such deal. It all seems rather strange to us.

We are naturally taking a keen interest in exactly where the new assembly will be sited. It does not bode very well for the assembly's future if, at the outset, a Labour leader of a local authority cannot get on with a Labour Secretary of State for Wales. What happens if one of them is replaced by someone from another political party?

An unconsultative document has been rushed out to seek suggestions about which lucky area will house what some see as a gravy train. And who can blame all the Welsh authorities for fighting to house something that will bring in its wake public service jobs and all that that entails? Even my old home town, the proud city of Swansea, has become entrenched in the bidding process.

What would have happened if the row about the assembly's location had broken out before the referendum? After all, Cardiff voted no on 18 September and it seems as though it is still voting no today. The Conservative party believes that the financial estimates in the White Paper must be adhered to—after all, the £17 million start-up costs and running costs of between £15 million and £20 million are high enough.

That money must either be saved by abolishing the quangos—the Bill only makes a small start on that—or will have to come from money that would otherwise be spent on front-line services such as doctors, nurses, teachers and policemen. The average nurse costs £325 a week; the average policeman costs £491 a week; and the average teacher costs £432 a week. The price of the average politician in the assembly has not been settled by the Bill, but after the initial salary has been agreed, it will subsequently be set by the members of the assembly.

We know what will happen, because we need only look at the expenses charged by Welsh Labour local authorities when they have a say about them. We will scrutinise those costs carefully. That does not make us penny-pinching, it means that we will hold the Government to account to ensure that they keep to the spending limits presented to the Welsh people.

To help towards that end, we will oppose the ludicrous amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats to increase the number of assembly politicians from 60 to 70 at a cost of £750,000. We must remember that the areas represented by the Liberal Democrats voted no on 18 September. They did so not because they wanted more politicians but because they wanted fewer. With such crackpot thinking from the Liberal Democrats, come the next general election those people will want fewer Liberal Democrat representatives at Westminster—and so do we.

The Liberal Democrats have a long tradition of support for devolution and—

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire) *rose*—

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Evans: One would think that that party would make sensible suggestions about the Bill. How long does one need to sort out one's plans?

Mr. Livsey *rose*—

Mr. Evans: I am more than happy to give way.

Mr. Livsey: The hon. Gentleman has implied that the majority of Liberal Democrats voted no on 18 September. What is his evidence? There is none to prove that that is so.

Mr. Evans: The areas broadly represented by the Liberal Democrats voted no. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends know that, because I appeared on a television programme with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) until 4 o'clock on the night of the referendum . Nobody was less pleased than he was when his area's result came through.

Mr. Öpik: The hon. Gentleman will remember my enormous relief that my prediction about a heavier defeat turned out to be unfounded. Would he agree that it is possible that the Liberal Democrats in those two constituencies voted yes while others may not have been persuaded?

Mr. Evans: That argument may get the hon. Gentleman to sleep at night, but it does not wash with any of us on the Conservative Benches.

The Liberal Democrats' suggestion that there should be an extra 10 seats in the assembly at an additional cost of £750,000 a year is entirely inconsistent with their claim to be a responsible, third party. It is, however, entirely consistent with their position as a high-tax, high-spend party. Perhaps those extra 10 seats would be paid for out of their mystic 1p tax rise. Never has there been a better return on a penny spent—well, almost never.

The Liberal Democrats have joined in the debate on what to call the assembly. The Scots will have a legislative body with tax-raising powers—that is called a Parliament. The Liberal Democrats want to call the Welsh Assembly, which, thankfully, will not have primary legislative powers or tax-raising abilities, a Senedd, which is Welsh for a Parliament. Let us not insult the Welsh any more than they have been insulted already. Such a suggestion is an insult to their intelligence—an assembly is what it is and what it should be called.

Let us consider the issue of proportional representation—or, rather, unproportional misrepresentation, as the proposal is neither a true system of PR nor will be representative of the wishes of the Welsh people. It will cause confusion to the masses. People will not know to whom they should bring their constituency problems. Should they write to their elected constituency Member of Parliament—a process that works extremely well at Westminster—to their constituency member of the assembly, or to an assembly member who is elected under the list system? Will those latter two representatives have the same authority, or will the constituency assembly member's word carry more weight? Can the Secretary of State tell me the answer, or has he not thought it through, as he has failed to think through so much connected with the issue?

If the proposed voting system is introduced, we will have such a complicated system of elections throughout the country and in Wales that I am sure the people of Wales will be turned off by it and utterly bewildered and bemused by the sheer variety of voting systems in use in the United Kingdom. It is almost as though the Labour party is determined to make Britain a showcase for different PR systems—for the assembly, for London, for Europe, and perhaps at local elections. I know that it is also considering the voting procedures for Westminster. Its proposals will offer a fabulous case study for political studies undergraduates and a nightmare for the man on the Clapham omnibus or on the No. 12 bus to Swansea city centre who is trying to take part in an election or write to his representative with a problem.

The Secretary of State claims that the additional member system will be good news for the Conservative party. I thank him sincerely for thinking of us when he made those plans, but if that is the case, it makes our principled stand a moral one as well. Why? Because we believe that the new system will only add to Welsh nationalism and anti-English sentiments, bringing nearer by the day the total break-up of the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) feared in his speech yesterday. We will fight against that tooth and nail, for the good of the Welsh people and for the good of the people of the United Kingdom

We already know that Plaid Cymru sees the assembly as the journey and not the destination. It is not content with the half of the cake that is currently on offer to it. It will come back for the other half soon.

We will make a number of suggestions about the proposed funding arrangements for the assembly, as stated in clause 80, which is a classic of its kind. It states:

> "The Secretary of State shall from time to time make payments to the Assembly out of money provided by Parliament of such amounts as he may determine."

That's all right then, isn't it? But as Secretary of State, with his fading glory and influence, is eclipsed by every other spending Department, what real security will there be for the assembly? Yesterday, we heard in speech after speech from those on the alliance Benches about how the assembly will improve education, how it will revitalise the health service, how new jobs will flood in and how roads will be built that will make the Roman roads look like dirt tracks. Wales will become the most powerful country on the planet thanks to the assembly—and all with no extra money.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has already said that the Barnett formula will stay. The can of worms has now been opened, however, and the English regions have woken up to the formula's financial implications. Per capita spending in Wales is £4,352 compared with spending in England of £3,743—a difference of £609. If Wales were to be self-financing, the basic rate of tax would be 45p in the pound.

The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) has said that the Government must get rid of that formula and give the money to England. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) believes that London should get all the extra cash. The Barnett formula has not been enshrined in the Bill, nor is the element of needs funding. We will seek assurances about that in Committee. The last thing that Labour Members will want is for the assembly to be tempted to top-slice revenue support grant money to pay for their land of milk and honey.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The hon. Gentleman, as hon. Member for Ribble Valley, will be aware of how important defence procurement is in overall public expenditure. His constituency probably receives more public expenditure in defence procurement per head than any other constituency in the western world. He has made himself known for lobbying for more public expenditure for Ribble Valley and for his constituents who work at British Aerospace factories in the Preston area. I think that he will accept those points. Does he

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

accept that—if we add defence procurement to domestic public expenditure—Wales receives 5.1 per cent. of identifiable UK public expenditure, whereas it has 5.0 per cent. of the population? Will he comment on those figures and relate them to the argument that he has been making?

Mr. Evans: No, because the Barnett formula was created to ensure that there was a needs formula to protect the needs of the Welsh people and the Scottish people. Since the Government's devolution proposals have come to light with the referendums, a can of worms has been opened, and English people and English Members of Parliament are asking why so much money is going to Wales and to Scotland and not to their own areas. Such a debate is bound to ensue. If there is a review of the Barnett formula, we do not know what the outcome might be, because we have no guarantees. We do know, however, that hon. Members will fight hard to ensure that they win as much money as possible for their own areas, based on the needs of those areas.

Mr. Hain: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that his understanding of the Barnett formula is that it is needs-based? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Evans: Population is used as a basis of determining need. In Committee, we will ensure that the needs basis will be continued into the future—something of which there is no guarantee. The Secretary of State is not dealing with the matter in the Bill, although he is doing so in the explanatory and financial memorandum—which, as he knows, has no status. One of the fears of the people of Wales is that, if there is a review, there could be a review downwards. What will happen then?

Mr. Hain: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I am sorry to detain the House, but that is sheer gibberish. He does not understand the Barnett formula, and I urge him to study it. As he is talking about needs, I should point out that Wales's GDP is 18 per cent. less than the English average. GDP in south-east England, which he mentioned, is 14 per cent. above the English average. If there were a genuinely needs-based assessment of resource distribution in Great Britain, Wales would do very well in it.

Mr. Evans: I am very pleased that that reassures the Under-Secretary of State for Wales. I assure him that a can of worms has been opened. Has he considered the demands that will be made by the politicians who will be elected to the London assembly? They will demand a big slice of the cake. Whereas Labour and other alliance Members think only of how large their slice of the cake will be, Conservative Members fight to ensure that the cake becomes larger, so that everyone can have a greater slice of it.

Part of Labour Members' problem is their inability to answer the question of what will happen if the RSG settlement is top-sliced. We have 22 local authorities in Wales, and we have already seen—thanks to last week's announcement—a 12 per cent. council tax increase. The people of Wales will look back rather nostalgically at such increases if there is top slicing of the RSG, because the resulting shortage will be made up in only one way—in ever higher council taxes.

I should hate to fail to deal in my speech with the role of the Secretary of State. We already know that the current incumbent of that office moves in mysterious ways, but what will he do after the assembly is established? The Bill states only that he will transfer his powers to the assembly—

Mr. Ron Davies: Most of them.

Mr. Evans: Yes, most of his powers.

The Secretary of State will also be able to visit and speak in the assembly. But who will speak for Wales? Will it be the assembly's First Secretary, or will it be the Secretary of State—the First Secretary's secretary? If the new leader of the assembly is Russell Goodway, relations just might be strained. If it were the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), I predict that there would be some friction. Problems would result also if the position were held by many other people. As the botched job on siting the assembly has shown, embarrassment and stalemate are a likely result.

The House must probe more carefully who will do what in the assembly's operation and ascertain more carefully its relationship with Europe. Matters that are so important that they must receive careful scrutiny include the assembly's visiting rights to important meetings of the Council of Ministers, the Secretary of State's residual powers over money, and the role of the new regional committees.

All we know about the regional committees is that they will be established in north Wales and in other areas. If such a device is supposed to calm the people of north Wales, heaven help them. The south Wales-dominated assembly will draw up the boundaries; it will determine how it is advised by the committee; and it may then ignore that advice. The committees sound like a sop, and Conservative Members will press for greater clarification in Committee.

What about clause 47, which deals in

"equality of opportunity for all people"?

It is fine to pay lip service to that goal, but, as our reasoned amendment states, Conservative Members are not satisfied that the assembly will provide an opportunity for all the people of Wales to be properly represented and protected.

Conservative Members will be looking for assurances on the £500-million question: what type of loan will it be? Will it be a recipe for the assembly to borrow on the never-never to fund its raison d'etre, buying instant popularity that will disappear in a flash as the bill lands on people's mats? We still hear concerns expressed by businesses in Wales, which are represented by the Confederation of British Industry, the North Wales Business Club and the Federation of Wales Small Businesses.

Another strong aspect of the Union from which people have benefited is the Welsh Development Agency's achievement in attracting inward investment. The fact is that 20 per cent. of all UK inward investment goes to Wales. Will Wales and the battle to channel inward projects through the President of the Board of Trade be disadvantaged by her new concordat? How will we control nationalist fervour for increased regionalisation in the United Kingdom, breaking the bond that unites us?

The assembly's merits will have to be sold to a rightly suspicious and sceptical public. Will the assembly help Welsh farmers in their crisis? No. Will it stop the £1,000 fee for students—which has resulted in an estimated 9 per cent. drop in student numbers attending university next year? No. Will the assembly safeguard a single inward investment project, reduce class sizes or put an extra bobby on the beat? No, no and no.

Conservative Members have genuine fears about the experiment, as do three out of four Welsh voters. We have a right to voice our concerns and fears, because, after all, it is our country, too. Britain has become a melting pot, in which the English, Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish live in each other's pocket. Each of us is proud of our culture, but we are respectful of the differences that help to make Britain great. We must resist and fight anything that throws away what we have achieved or damages the cement that bonds us together.

We are the party of the Union. We remain the party of the Union. We will not let Wales and Britain down.

5.28 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I tell the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) that anyone with a sense of the history of this century should be impressed by the amazing role, function and achievements of the Conservative and Unionist party. Because of those achievements, I should have thought that, from that Dispatch Box, the House would have heard expressed a huge amount of humility about the way in which that party has reduced a great institution to the rump it has become over the past 18 years.

The Conservative and Unionist party is no longer a party of the Union. It does not have one seat representing a Welsh or a Scottish constituency. How can it possibly claim still to be the Conservative and Unionist party? The Conservative party—a great traditional unionist party—has managed its affairs in such a way that it has been driven out of two of the three parts of the Union. I should have thought that, if nothing else, there should have come from the hon. Member for Ribble Valley at the Dispatch Box a sense of humility, a degree of modesty and a realisation that, wherever we stand and whatever criticisms we might make of the Bill—I intend to make one or two myself—the Conservatives were totally rejected at the last election in Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): In view of the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Conservatives' lack of representation in Wales and Scotland and our ability to be the party of the Union in those areas, is he saying that the Labour party is the party of the Union in Northern Ireland? If so, which party in Northern Ireland represents its views most closely?

Mr. Rowlands: I understand that the Labour party does not fight elections formally as the Labour party in Northern Ireland and that the other parties follow the same policy, but that is not relevant to the point that from the Conservatives' Front-Bench spokesman should have come rather more humility than we heard today. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley contributed little, either to his party's cause, or to the debate on the Bill.

I have no wish to revisit the referendum result, save to say to hon. Members on both sides of the House that we should be as concerned about the fact that 50 per cent. of the population did not vote as about the 49 per cent. of those who did vote who voted no. If I heard this remark once, I heard it dozens of times during the campaign: "We did not really know enough about it—we did not understand the implications." We should all accept that, during the referendum campaign and in the preceding months, we failed collectively to get across to the public the issues and the implications of the proposals. Now, with the Bill before us, we have a chance to do just that. We should take this opportunity not only to explore the implications ourselves, but to communicate them to a wider audience—the Welsh public.

I hope that, in my next remarks, I am not treading on contentious territory for Labour, although I am happy to tread on it as far as the Conservatives are concerned. I hope to gain some measure of, if not consensus, at least understanding. I suspect that, among the 50 per cent. who did not vote and the 49 per cent. of voters who voted no, people were saying—albeit not coherently—that they were uneasy about what was going to happen. There was an air of queasiness surrounding the relationship between Wales and Britain.

The Welsh-British relationship is an enduring and important relationship—one that is felt strongly, no matter how Welsh we are. In constituencies such as mine and in other parts of the country, people were worried that that relationship would be influenced or affected negatively. During our debates on the Bill, we should hold that concern centrally in our minds. I did not hear it from the lips of any of my constituents, but I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) uttered a memorable phrase when he talked about the unbundling of the constitution. In some curious way, that was what people were trying to say—they wanted devolution, but did not want the constitution to be unbundled. It is that careful balance of devolution and remaining part of the United Kingdom that is central to our debates.

I intend to address on Second Reading two central relationships arising from the Bill: first, the assembly-Whitehall-Secretary of State relationship and, secondly, the assembly-Westminster relationship. There are other issues I care about in the Bill, but they can be dealt with in Committee.

In respect of the first relationship, I read with great interest the latest document from the Institute of Welsh Affairs. I am astonished that Conservative Members have not read the documents produced by the institute and thought about the arguments presented in them. I find that, when reading many of the institute's documents about devolution, all I can hear is the sound of axes grinding. I heard them when reading "Making the Assembly work", but I also heard the sound of a large number of pennies dropping.

The document, produced by a traditionally pro-devolution organisation, posed several questions about the relationships between Whitehall, the Secretary of State and the assembly. It asked:

> "To what extent will the Assembly in practice be permitted to examine policy proposals which are still being formulated by a Ministry, since it will have no formal institutional links?"

The document continued:

> "Are all Assembly members to be treated as in the same position vis à vis the Government machine as Ministers who are expected to keep confidential the discussions that precede the decisions as to the exact contents of a Bill?"

[Mr. Rowlands]

Those are not nit-picking Committee points; they are questions that go to the heart of a vital issue—the relationships between an assembly and Whitehall and an assembly and central Government.

The document went further, stating:

"Against this background the Secretary of State may be drawn into the role of becoming the main link between the Assembly and Whitehall, with a consequent weakening of the direct role of the Assembly and its civil servants in negotiating on policy matters with Whitehall departments."

I shall dwell later on that serious and fundamental issue of how the assembly is to relate to the Whitehall and Westminster machinery of government. It is little wonder that the section concluded:

"With all these issues and questions we are operating in uncharted territory involving constitutional innovations that will need clarification and perhaps certain statutory guarantees."

The issue is of fundamental concern to us all: how is the assembly to relate to central Government?

When those questions are asked, and when I hear references such as I heard yesterday to concordats between the assembly and Whitehall Departments, I ask myself whether it is intended that assembly officials and possibly assembly members—who will owe an allegiance to the very different political organisation that is to be known as the national assembly for Wales—are somehow to become enmeshed in Whitehall policy making. If so, how are Whitehall officials to relate to assembly officials?

For example, if members or officials of the assembly enmeshed in the process of confidential discussions on the preparation of a Bill or a major policy decision discover things they feel are not to the best advantage to the membership of the Welsh Assembly, is it to be their duty immediately to break whatever confidentiality applies and report back to the assembly? What is the relationship to be? It is indeed uncharted territory, and it has not yet been explained in this Second Reading debate how the system is to work. I assume that it will be explained in the form of the concordats. If so, the quicker we see them, the better. This is not a marginal issue—it is a matter of fundamental and central concern.

I have been doing some thinking about the practical and political problems that might give rise to anxieties about the relationships between the assembly and Whitehall, and the assembly and central Government. My worries may seem at first sight rather prosaic.

There is, first, the question of standards in health and food safety. Section 16 of the Food Safety Act 1990 is a case in point. The statutory instruments made under that section could scarcely be called politically sexy, one might think. Hon. Members may not feel that they are the meat and drink of British politics—yet it will be under section 16 of the Food Safety Act 1990 that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will, on 16 December, ban beef on the bone.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: That is meat and drink.

Mr. Rowlands: It certainly is.

We need to know, therefore, how such an issue would be dealt with if it were re-enacted in a few years' time. What, in that event, will be the function and role of the assembly? My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli fastened on this point during an exchange late yesterday evening, which I read with particular interest since I was meaning to raise it myself. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intervened to say:

"matters relating to animal or human health are likely to be reserved."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 755.]

I have seen no such statement anywhere else. What else will be reserved to the Secretary of State? These arguments are not marginal: they are central to the relationship between the Government and the assembly.

Many of the supporters of devolution tend to oversell it. It may be thought that the difficulties facing Welsh farmers at the moment could be dealt with by powers that the assembly will have, but it turns out that certain decisions on food will not belong to the assembly but will remain to be made by the Secretary of State jointly with the Agriculture Minister. So it appears that there will be limitations to the assembly's ability to help farming communities.

Mr. Ron Davies: My hon. Friend's last assertion is right: no one would claim that the Welsh Assembly will have the ability to deal with matters such as BSE; at least, not by statutory action. I would, however, draw to my hon. Friend's attention two important principles. First, the whole devolution construct is based on the premise that the powers that I exercise will be transferred to the assembly. My hon. Friend, on the other hand, is referring to powers that I exercise jointly with other Ministers. We have always made it clear that certain elements, especially to do with human and animal health, will have to be examined carefully.

The second principle concerns the fact that the powers that I exercise jointly, or retain to be exercised jointly or to transfer back to another Department, will be specified in a transfer order. In Committee, the House will have the opportunity to see exactly how the powers are divided up, during discussion of the transfer order.

Mr. Rowlands: I am glad of that statement, but these are not matters of mere detail. They are fundamental, as they define the functions of the Secretary of State for Wales at Westminster and in Whitehall and the functions that are to be devolved. That means that we shall need a list or schedule of reserved powers as soon as possible.

Let me test my right hon. Friend with a couple of other examples. The National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Admission Charges) Order 1988 may not sound like the stuff of high politics, but it determines who will be exempt from prescription charges. Is that a United Kingdom responsibility or will it be the subject of devolution? If the assembly wanted to be more generous in this regard, could it be? I assume not, but we need clarification.

Clause 41 is one of the most complicated clauses in the Bill, yet it concerns the role of the assembly in secondary legislation. I see that the Secretary of State would like to intervene again. I certainly hope for a clear statement, soon, on exactly which reserved powers will be taken by the Secretary of State and which will be transferred to the assembly.

Mr. Davies: There will be no statement on reserved powers, because the scheme that we envisage works on a transfer of powers. Before the Committee stage begins,

a draft order will be prepared so that anyone who wants to see the detail can do so. It will be a hefty document, I can assure my hon. Friend, and it will describe the powers that are being transferred to the assembly.

As for my hon. Friend's example, if my recollection is correct these are powers that the Secretary of State exercises jointly. That being so, it will be a matter of judgment as to whether the powers can be transferred. In the case of national health service charges, we would want conformity between England and Wales, so it is most unlikely that such powers will appear in the transfer order.

Mr. Rowlands: We clearly need the list as quickly as possible. It is important to define the various roles of the Secretary of State, central Government and the assembly.

Mr. Morgan: The administrative devolution that we have had in Wales for 33 years has permitted Secretaries of State for Wales to deviate substantially from UK policy, even in international treaty obligations. There was, for instance, the well known example of "Redwooditis", as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), called it. During his period of office, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) declared a free-for-all on out-of-town shopping stores in Wales, even though the Secretary of State for the Environment, whose policy had tremendous commercial importance for all planning inspectors and inquiries, believed, following the previous Prime Minister's signing of the Rio treaty on biodiversity and global warming, that we should be against out-of-town shopping centres on principle. I would not like my hon. Friend to give the impression that none of these fudged areas are to be found under administrative devolution—things can only improve under democratic devolution.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend prompts me to move on to a fundamental point. Nonconformity is generally to be encouraged. When I had the privilege of serving in the Welsh Office, my Secretary of State told me never to conform and always to force Whitehall to make the case for conformity. That was a wonderful remit for a junior Welsh Office Minister. Subsequently, we handled the Community Land Act 1975 completely differently and created a land authority for Wales which has survived the test of time and is now to be incorporated in the new economic powerhouse—so I have always been a great supporter of the idea of nonconformity.

A rewritten constitution has to be defined much more closely than is normal in a cohesive political administrative structure. It is much easier for Welsh civil servants to attend meetings in Whitehall because they derive their authority from the same source—they are civil servants of a set of home Government Departments and they are answerable to Ministers, at the apex of whom is a Cabinet. That will be transformed. We have to redefine the relationship that is to exist between an assembly and central Government.

I think that that is what the discussion about concordats is all about. These are not marginal issues; these are points made by the Institute of Welsh Affairs. I hope that we can be told in the winding-up speech whether the concordats envisage enmeshing assembly civil servants, who are answerable and accountable to a completely different political institution, into the policy-making processes of Whitehall Departments. If that is to be the case, I have a feeling that it will be a horrible recipe for confusion and difficulty over who will owe allegiance to what, in all respects. That is a fundamental point in the working of a constitution. It has worked well up to now because it has been part of a single whole. The Welsh Office and the Secretary of State are part of the collective of Government.

Mr. Morgan: What about the former Secretary of State and international law?

Mr. Rowlands: I assume that the former Secretary of State did not breach international treaty law. I do not know whether anybody sued him, but he must have managed either to persuade his colleagues or to operate the policy off his own bat without anybody complaining.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Rowlands: I shall give way in a moment.

We are saying that a constitution has to be clarified in a way that was not necessary hitherto. The issues raised by the document from the Institute of Welsh Affairs—I have been thinking about them myself—are very serious. Are we saying that civil servants from the assembly will be embedded in the policy-making process of Whitehall? That is the demand, and I assume that that is what the concordats will be about.

I will not weary the House now, but the Institute of Welsh Affairs makes a number of recommendations about a series of rights for the assembly and says that the civil servants of the assembly should have rights in the policy-making process of Whitehall. There is the potential for confusion of responsibility and accountability.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Surely the hon. Gentleman's perusal of what has been proposed for Wales drives him to the same inescapable conclusion as the Northern Ireland Government in Stormont was driven to many years ago. If a devolved system is to work in a unitary state, it must be run by Unionists. In that context, will the Labour party in the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament be a Unionist party?

Mr. Rowlands: I believe that in a devolved system, which I support, Wales will be run by Welsh men and women who have been elected by the Welsh electorate. That is the simple and basic criterion.

Mr. Dalyell: From his experience of ministerial office over a period of years, can my hon. Friend tell me to whom civil servants owe their career under these proposals? Is it to the Welsh Office or to Whitehall? Every civil servant is human and must have in their mind where their career is coming from.

Mr. Rowlands: It is to the home civil service, and that is a collective. One cannot say that Welsh Office civil servants do not admirably fulfil their functions in Wales, and many might see most of their career structure to be within Welsh administration, but some people come and go. Some of the most distinguished permanent secretaries that we have had and still have come from other Departments. That will change fundamentally. The new civil service of the assembly will be accountable and

[Mr. Rowlands]

answerable to a different organisation. I can see why all these problems will arise and why we need to address them. I do not believe that they are niggling Committee points; they are fundamental and central issues.

Mr. Jenkin: May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that schedule 2 is even more misleading than he suggests? Schedule 2 refers to clause 22 only in respect of the initial powers of the assembly. Clauses 105 to 107 can be used to grab back some or all of those powers as they are deemed to be international obligations as interpreted by the Secretary of State. Clause 22(1)(a) provides

"for the transfer to the Assembly of any function so far as exercisable by a Minister of the Crown in relation to Wales".

Does not that mean that some external policy that relates to Wales or tax-raising policy could be transferred to Wales? Does not that accord with what the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning was saying in an interview last week in *The Scotsman*? If the regions in England can become tax-raising authorities, is not that the route for Wales?

Mr. Rowlands: I would not interpret it in that way. There are other clauses in the Bill which make it quite clear that the Secretary of State or Ministers will reserve all their rights over international relations and external relations. We can check that out in Committee, but I would not reach the same conclusion as the hon. Gentleman.

I shall move on, because I know that many of my colleagues want to speak. I touched on this issue because it fundamentally affects the role of a future Secretary of State. There is one area about which I feel passionately and in respect of which I believe total devolution would be wrong. One of the great success stories of the past 20 years and more has been inward investment. The powerful combination of the Secretary of State with a budget, power and the full authority of a Minister in a British Cabinet alongside the Welsh Development Agency has achieved much in inward investment.

I agree with the critique of a number of my hon. Friends and Ministers that perhaps more should have been done to generate indigenous economic development of the character often mentioned by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Neath. It would be extremely damaging if we gave a future Secretary of State for Wales no money and no power in relation to inward investment. I do not believe that the transfer of all his functions—and the budget that goes with them—to an assembly is a good idea. I believe that it would damage the powerful mixture of the WDA and the Secretary of State. I am thinking of the problems we have now with some aspects of our inward investment.

I am passionately grateful for the interest and concern shown by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The fact that he is a British Cabinet Minister and has the powers that go with it allows him to resolve some issues. I do not think that an assembly is a substitute for that combination. If there is any room for manoeuvre, I hope that my right hon. Friend will think again about the functions and role of the Secretary of State in relation to inward investment in budgetary and functional terms. I do not want a future Secretary of State to be moneyless and powerless.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend's speech is, as always, telling and eloquent. It is a welcome change from what we have heard so far from Conservative Members. I hope that this will meet my hon. Friend's point: if there were to be a dispute between a Whitehall Department and the Welsh Assembly, it would be for the Secretary of State to talk to his Cabinet colleagues and to represent the interests of Wales and the assembly in the Cabinet. That is one of the important residual functions that will remain.

Mr. Rowlands: I hate to tell my hon. Friend that, in all my understanding and experience of government, without Executive functions and a budget, one is pretty well ignored. It was interesting that the Institute of Welsh Affairs mentioned this, and I can remind my hon. Friend about it. I do not usually agree with the institute on these matters, but the penny is dropping in this document. It says:

"It must be borne in mind that after devolution the Secretary of State will be left with little more administrative support than a central secretariat of perhaps 20 or 30 civil servants. In the longer run too, it is questionable whether there is room for two politicians who both claim to represent and speak for the interests of Wales—the leader of the Assembly and the Secretary of State. And in any case, after devolution the Secretary of State will have lost those direct responsibilities over such matters as health and education that currently give him much of his influence in the Cabinet."

That has come from an organisation that is heavily pro-devolution.

I accept that health and education functions will be transferred—they are the heart of devolution—but I believe in the needs of the external economy of Wales, especially inward investment, where the function and budget responsibilities should remain with the Secretary of State. He, alongside the Welsh Development Agency and the assembly, can continue to play the role that has been so important to the development of inward investment in Wales during the past 25 years. I beg him to ensure that those responsibilities remain with him.

I want to touch on another relationship—that of the assembly with Westminster. It is interesting how little we have debated it. Have the House authorities told us, for example, what questions on Welsh affairs will be allowed here after devolution? When the Secretary of State's functions are transferred, his responsibilities will also be transferred from this House to the assembly. That is what devolution is all about. What will be the character and nature of arrangement that Welsh Members will have at Westminster to probe and ask questions of the Secretary of State? Will the Table Office say, "This is no longer the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales, so your question is not allowable"?

I am willing to accept that limitation because I support devolution, but we should know what will happen. We need a clear statement on the matter. I envisage a fundamental role for Welsh Members at Westminster. In a curious way, post-devolution, the reserved powers and the interesting relationship between the Secretary of State and Whitehall and central Government will mean that Welsh Members will have a vital role to play. Anything that impinges or impacts on Welsh affairs at central Government level will become the responsibility of and a matter for scrutiny by Welsh Members.

We should no longer rest on convention. We should not be told that these matters are automatic because this House is all-powerful. If concordats are to be written about the relationship between Whitehall and the assembly, there must also be a Westminster concordat. We should be told what will be the future function of Welsh Members at Westminster.

I had not intended to detain the House for so long, but the number of interventions have prolonged my remarks. I am a great believer in representative democracy and I shall take pleasure in voting for the Bill tonight. However, we cannot and must not suspend our critical judgment on its character and nature and the problems and implications in its broader sense.

Those of us who have to explain this Bill to the public want to ensure that we do not sell it in the wrong way. My plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends is that we should not claim more for the Bill and for devolution than is deserved. Disappointment and disillusionment is as dangerous to democracy as remoteness and lack of accountability. If we keep saying that the Bill will dramatically improve the social and economic inequalities from which Wales now suffers, we could disillusion and disappoint. The central case for devolution is democratic—that the whole range of administration and public life currently devolved in a variety of ways to the Welsh Office and to quangos will become more democratically accountable to a Welsh Assembly.

I have to tell my hon. Friend the Minister that the case is not economic. Democratic assemblies can make terrible decisions and do things that are wrong. At times, they can make an economic mess of matters. No one says that democracy produces perfect government. However, the quality and joy of a representative democracy is that we can sack those who make the mistakes. I do not look forward to sacking members of a future Welsh Assembly, but instead hope that a combination of Members at Westminster and assembly members will ensure that Wales is truly democratic.

6.4 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) made a distinguished speech. I say that with diffidence because to praise a Welsh Member from a different tradition often causes some difficulty. Encapsulated in the hon. Gentleman's arguments were many of the genuine concerns about the proposal for devolved government for Wales.

I contrast the hon. Gentleman's speech with that of the Under-Secretary. In the months since he first argued for the White Paper, I have come to regard him as the witch hunter of Wales. He turns on people who have been elected by Welsh constituencies, and perhaps stood for the Labour party for many years, as though they are enemies of their party. I cannot conceive why trying to unpick and reason the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal should be a matter for criticism. It is a matter of pride that Wales produces fine Members of Parliament, who have brought Wales to the centre of the union in our national history.

The Under-Secretary's speech was so trivial it was shocking. He was an illusionist, as the proposal has the backing of just 25 per cent. of the vote in Wales. Those are all the people who turned out to vote for his proposals in the White Paper—*[Interruption.]* We must get to the bottom of this. The hon. Gentleman criticises anyone who recognises that 25 per cent. is only 25 per cent. After all, 25 per cent. voted against his proposals—and hanging over that is the 50 per cent. of the electorate who, given the opportunity to support his proposals, did not do so. There is no democratic system on earth with a written constitution that would accept that 75 per cent. of an electorate not supporting a proposal is the basis for going ahead with that proposal.

Of course, a referendum did not have to be held, except that it was included in the Labour party manifesto. It was described as strengthening the union, no less. The referendum went ahead on that basis, but by any ordinary valued judgment it failed. It is a miserable situation for the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary—that is, if he understands the weight of vote against his proposal. He did not achieve consent, but his manner tried to undermine consensus.

The Conservative party is not isolated in this matter. As has been pointed out yesterday and today, 250,000 more people than voted for the Conservatives at the general election voted against the Government's proposal. By any process of deduction, that must mean that a large number of Labour party supporters voted against the proposal. The witch hunter of Wales will have his work cut out in seeking out those who defied the manifesto that he holds up as the only authority in the matter.

What about the consensus of Plaid Cymru, which at least has the decency to admit that it is a separatist party? What was the language of its leader, the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)? How did he seek consensus as he attacked the Conservative party? He said:

> "What is sauce for the backward-looking, scaremongering, no-voting neanderthals is also sauce for the forward-looking, yes-voting alliance, which believes in democracy in Wales."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1997; Vol.302, c. 703.]

No one is seeking consensus, and the truth is that the Labour Government are being ridden by the separatists.

In his trivial speech, the Under-Secretary attacked everyone who does not share his view. The process that this place is that of debate. We have heard the careful and rational trying to consider the various elements of the Bill. Will it work? That is what is being asked. Wales is very suspicious, and why would it not be? Suddenly it is going to be landed with large capital costs for the assembly which was valiantly rejected by the electorate of Cardiff, although I note that one of its leading Members, the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Public Administration, is already announcing that he is leaving the House to stand for the assembly should it come into existence. The hon. Gentleman's own electorate rejected the proposal, but it is to be pursued as if it is a done and settled deal.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: On what evidence does the hon. Gentleman say that my electorate rejected the proposals for a Welsh Assembly?

Mr. Shepherd: I base it on the turnout in the city that the hon. Gentleman represents.

Mr. Morgan: There are four constituencies in Cardiff, which means that there are many possibilities as to the

[Mr. Morgan]

results in Cardiff, West. My belief, based on having seen some of the boxes being unloaded, is that Cardiff, West in no way rejected the proposals.

Mr. Shepherd: I am told that 55.6 per cent. voted no, so it is difficult to reach that conclusion. *[Interruption.]* I can see that the hon. Gentleman is sensitive: his own city rejected the proposals, and it is likely that his own electorate rejected them. Notwithstanding that, he feels that the result was an endorsement for the march forward of the elected assembly.

Mr. Evans: In Cardiff, where the gravy train was expected to stop, 53 per cent. of the people did not even turn out to vote.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: You were not there.

Mr. Shepherd: I quite understand that Labour Members are enormously sensitive about this. They have to get over the fact that only 25 per cent. voted for the proposals.

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Gentleman is talking rubbish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) spoke for 36 minutes yesterday, and has made two long interventions today; sedentary interventions on top of that are not acceptable.

Mr. Shepherd: I merely postulate that perhaps the Welsh electorate are rather wise. We are told that the start-up costs will be considerable, and that the annual running costs might be between £15 million and £20 million. I think that most people can see that, to use a phrase that has already been used by a Labour Member and which stuck in my mind, we are talking about a class that is trying to get its bottom on the Consolidated Fund.

The by-product of the proposals will be the creation or extension of a political class, and I am not sure what that accomplishes for Wales. All I know is that, despite the information provided by the Government in the form of a most massive campaign in favour, the proposals failed by any recognisable democratic process to achieve validation.

My concern is not based only on the particulars of the Bill or of the referendum campaign, however magnificently it failed.

Mr. Hain: As the hon. Gentleman was elected by only 36 per cent. of his electorate, does he consider that he was validly elected?

Mr. Shepherd: The Under-Secretary must have heard four or five interventions by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) who tried to point out—I realise that the distinction might be too fine for the hon. Gentleman—the difference between a constitutional settlement, or a validation of what is attempting to be a constitutional settlement, and the ordinary processes of democracy and the election of Members of Parliament.

Most of us can perceive a distinction, but the Under-Secretary does not. That is not a surprise. I have listened to his abuse of almost all Opposition Members as neanderthal, backward-looking and not pro-democracy—

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): The leader of Plaid Cymru said that.

Mr. Shepherd: The language is common. I pick on Plaid Cymru only because it launched into that attack. I just know that there is nothing consensual.

We need to stand back. Wales might have rejected the proposals because they are not on an equal footing with those for any other part of the United Kingdom. They certainly do not echo the proposals for Scotland. In a sense, they marginalise Wales; or are they a statement to the effect that the Welsh people are incapable of exercising powers and functions deemed appropriate for Scotland? Does the Secretary of State for Wales think that the Welsh population are lesser in their abilities or reasoning, and could not maintain a form of government for themselves?

There is a distinction between the two proposed systems of government which has to be explained more appropriately than Labour Front Benchers have managed so far. I am concerned about the Scots and the Welsh, as they are incorporating an alien system of electing Members of Parliament. I say "alien", because it is unusual. My fear is that these great developments will reduce turnouts at elections until they lack authority and we end up like the United States, where so few people voted for the president—which is extraordinary in such a major democracy. I am worried about the unbalanced nature of the constitutional changes.

Labour Front Benchers talk about regional assemblies for England, but will not deal with how to balance the Union's constitution. It is now unequal. The fact is that neither the Welsh nor the English elector will be on equal terms with the Scottish elector. Let us imagine that the Labour party wins the next general election but that its majority is formed only by Welsh Members of Parliament or, worst of all, by Scottish Members of Parliament. How can it be sustainable in those circumstances, when the inequality of citizenship is so rawly and prominently presented to us?

This is a terribly unbalanced way to go about making constitutions. It does not seek consent and has not achieved consensus, two elements that are usually deemed to be important. It has not reached out and tried to embrace the political structures of our country. There has been no attempt to form a constitutional convention to see whether we can recognise the genuine needs of our island and its form of union. The proposals are nothing but the flaunting of a political class and a Labour party in power, owing its allegiance to whom—to Charter 88? The proposals are so piecemeal that their very lack of stability will do us down. In the end, this will be Labour's undoing.

People will come to realise the inequality and the unstated, and almost unstateable, English element in this. I am Scottish-born, and represent an English constituency. I have always been a Conservative. My fear is that so many of those who now exercise power are only political activists and do not have a broad enough vision of stability and what brings us together as a Union.

None of the proposals before us reflects those things. I am terribly fearful of a brand new Parliament that has had such a change of membership and which has so many

new Members who do not value the House or the system we have, partly, perhaps, because they have been genuinely disillusioned by 18 years of Conservative government. Much is made of that, and there may be some truth in it. However, we should not throw the baby out with the bath water.

As it happens, I have always believed in devolution. I believe that Westminster is a national expression, and that local government should flourish. Are the proposals for Wales a local government measure, or something more important? They have taken a local government route but, in the end, people who wish to spend money must be able to raise it. That is the element of the proposals that will do down Wales.

The Government maintain that they can for ever support the Barnett formula, which is already under attack from hon. Members representing constituencies in the north of England, who are well aware that there are inequalities in the distribution of central finance. No Government can say that, for ever and a day, they will distribute money on the basis of such a formula when circumstances have changed. As Lord Barnett has pointed out, when his rule of thumb formula—which has worked well for nearly 20 years—was devised, Scotland was at an economic disadvantage in the Union in gross domestic product per head. Now the figure is said to be comparable with that for the south-east.

How can the formula be maintained on any rational basis when Wales is at a disadvantage compared with the rest of the Union? Of course it must be up for grabs and a subject of dissection, argument or bidding every so often. The best that the Government can do is guarantee it until the end of the Parliament. The best that the Prime Minister can do is guarantee it for as long as he is Prime Minister. Anyone who looks at the formula knows that even a change of leadership in the party presently in government may result in a rebalancing of the formula to the disadvantage of those who think that they are to be advantaged.

I did not intend to attack the gallant Under-Secretary, whose extraordinary career is an inspiration to many of us. As an aside, I am appalled that a career solely as a political activist can be the basis for haranguing—haranguing—lifelong members of the Labour party who do not support the Bill or do not think that it is necessary.

I do not know whether people in Wales listen to debates in this House any more, but they know that the dissent on the Bill goes beyond the Conservative party. Some 250,000 of those who voted no—25 per cent. of those who voted in the referendum—clearly did not vote for the Conservatives in May. That 25 per cent. includes Labour voters, Liberal Democrats, or even—dare I say it?—Plaid Cymru supporters, who felt that there was not enough separatism in the measure.

I have no hesitation in supporting the arguments of those on the Conservative Front Bench. I cheer when I hear intelligent, argued, thoughtful questions about what my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) called a dog's breakfast. The Bill is incoherent and unbalanced. The proposals are not equal to those for Scotland, and they leave England in a peculiar situation. The elements for constitutional stability are missing.

6.22 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who, like me, is a member of the Modernisation Committee. I applaud many of the suggestions that he has made on the rights of Back Benchers, the scrutiny of the Government, open government and freedom of information. However, I do not agree with his speech, which included many speculative comments. We shall have to see what happens. We cannot simply predict the failure of the measure. It is up to the people of Wales and the democratically elected members of the Assembly to ensure that it is a success.

The Bill is part of the Government's programme to modernise our democracy. It must be seen in the context of the wider programme of constitutional reform to which the new Labour Government are committed, bringing decision making closer to the people who are affected. The wider programme will include reform of the other place, which has the capacity, without a democratic mandate, to delay legislation from this House. The introduction of a freedom of information Bill has been announced. The European Convention on Human Rights is to be incorporated into British law. A Scottish Parliament is to be established, following the recent referendum.

The package of reform will also include the re-establishment of a democratic authority for London. This fine capital city needs a structure for strategic decision making. Regional development agencies will be established, as well as regional assemblies in England, if that is the wish of the people in those regions. The Government will also establish a commission on the electoral system to ensure fair representation. I welcome that.

The House is also being modernised. It cannot reasonably fulfil all its functions. In addition to its role as the legislature for the United Kingdom, it has to scrutinise the Executive over a wide range of Departments. How many Select Committee reports are not debated? We need to be able to give more scrutiny to the Government. I share the commitment of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills to giving Back Benchers more powers of scrutiny, but this House cannot do that, particularly given its increasing role on European legislation. That is why there is a natural momentum towards devolution, which the hon. Gentleman commended.

The House is incapable of giving adequate consideration to Welsh affairs. Welsh Question Time has been reduced to just half an hour a month, and is largely monopolised by Conservative Members who have no real interest in Wales, but are simply trying to spike the Government's proposals for democratic devolution. The Welsh Grand Committee—which does not have to be entirely Welsh, is not particularly grand and is not even a committee—is not an adequate forum for debating Welsh affairs, never mind running the executive functions of Wales, as the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills has suggested.

The Bill is part of a wide-ranging programme of constitutional reform that will help to prepare Britain for the next century. It is before us because the people of Wales supported it in the recent referendum, albeit by

[Mr. Huw Edwards]

only a small margin. Had it been defeated by a small margin, I am sure that Conservative Members would not have said that there was no mandate for not implementing the measure. The Conservatives are inconsistent—

Mr. Evans: Does the hon. Gentleman feel that he is fully reflecting the views of his constituents, who, as I recall, voted no by a very large majority on 18 September?

Mr. Edwards: I am coming to that point right now.

My constituency recorded the highest no vote in the referendum. My constituency and the local authority of Monmouthshire are not entirely conterminous. My constituency does not include Caldicott—a largish town in the south-east—

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I am enjoying my hon. Friend's speech, but I hope that he will not respond to the silly remarks by the Conservatives. There are more important things to discuss than who voted for what. If the Conservatives cannot accept the workings of democracy, there is no point in responding to their silly childishness. The sooner they get to grips with examining the problems, such as those raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), the better they will serve the people of Wales, although they do not represent them.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend makes some reasonable remarks. However, I feel that I have a responsibility to talk about the mandate in my constituency.

My constituency and the local authority are not conterminous, as I have said. Croes y Ceiliog is a major part of the Torfaen area, where the vote was pretty even. If figures had been produced for my constituency alone, they might have shown slightly more support—I put it no more strongly than that.

I must accept that there are people in my constituency who have an instinctive hostility to the proposals. However, I feel that they have an instinctive hostility to democracy. I do not have a duty to represent that. I also accept that some Labour supporters voted no. However, it was most significant that 50 per cent. of the electorate did not vote at all.

We cannot assume that people did not vote because they did or did not support the proposals. In that respect, they are the most interesting part of the electorate. I believe that many people did not vote because they did not fully understand the proposals. We have a responsibility to make our system of government more understandable.

I must therefore convey to the House and to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench some of the reservations that my constituents had about the proposals.

Mr. Evans: Did they?

Mr. Edwards: Indeed they did, and I shall outline some of them. Although I do not agree with them all, I understand why some people had reservations.

Many people felt that they did not know enough about the proposals for a Welsh Assembly. That is related to the fact that many people do not adequately understand the present system of government, especially in Wales, where so much power rests in the hands of one Government Department and one Secretary of State.

I represent a border constituency, where people often do not feel part of the debate and the information system that involve those who live further into Wales. Many of my constituents work over the water in the Bristol area. Their background may be from the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire or south-west England. Many of them cannot pick up Welsh-medium television or even Welsh television in general. They receive television coverage transmitted from the south-west or the midlands.

Many of my constituents are newcomers to Wales who have been attracted to south-east Wales because of the success of our inward investment. They come to the M4 corridor having been relocated to south-east Wales with companies and public bodies. In my experience, they have considerable appreciation of Monmouthshire and Gwent when they discover it. They live in south-east Wales, they bring up their families there, they work there, and they serve Wales. However, quite reasonably, they do not share a culturally Welsh identity, and we must respect that. Nor do they want to be excluded from that identity.

Essentially, the Bill is not about cultural identity; it is about democracy. We talk about having a strategic elected body for London. It is not to celebrate the cultural identity of Londoners, but to provide a democratic forum for strategic policy making. The idea that the Welsh Assembly is a celebration of Welshness or the Welsh language needs to be corrected. It is essentially about democracy.

There is a feeling that the Welsh Assembly will replicate the monopoly control that the Labour party has in local government in some areas of Wales. It is to the credit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Welsh Office that the Bill includes an electoral system to ensure that there is fair representation. I disagree with some of my hon. Friends about that.

We have an unfair electoral system, whereby the Labour party attracts 50 or 60 per cent. of the votes in Wales but gets 75 per cent. of the seats. It is equally unfair in parts of south and south-west England, where the Labour party gained a significant minority of votes but very few seats. There is a fundamental unfairness in our electoral system. First past the post is ideal for a two-party system.

Mr. Rogers: Part of the reason for my reticence about supporting my hon. Friend on that argument relates to our experience in the south Wales valleys. On one or two occasions, the Welsh nationalists have taken control and totally excluded every other political party from the democratic process. The Liberals and the nationalists talk about exclusiveness because they are in a minority, but when they get a majority, they put the screws on: there is no talk of inclusiveness then.

Mr. Edwards: The phenomenon of Welsh politics is how little progress the Welsh nationalists have made in south Wales. For many of us, the Conservatives are the Opposition. I do not expect or anticipate much inclusiveness or co-operation from them, but we are used to that.

I have some sympathy with people who have reservations about the proposals. However, I do not feel that I have to represent the no campaigners who based

their views on anti-democratic and anti-Welsh prejudices. If there had been a referendum in 1920 about giving women the vote, and the majority of the electorate had voted against, I would still reserve the right to represent the minority, as I believe that democratic advance must be achieved through principles.

I turn to some of the parts of the Bill that have caused concern. Sensible people—even those who opposed it—recognise that there will be a Welsh Assembly. Some of those who had reservations before 18 September are now looking forward to it. For example, the business community does not feel that it will be adequately represented in a Welsh Assembly.

This morning, the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs met representatives of the Federation of Small Business and the South Wales Chamber of Commerce. According to the chairman of the Newport and Gwent Chamber of Commerce:

"There is a fervent wish to see the Assembly work."

In their evidence to the Select Committee, the representatives said:

"The people of Wales, having voted in favour of the establishment of a Welsh Assembly, require those involved in the process of economic development to work together to ensure that it delivers the best for Wales for the future prosperity of the country."

There is some concern that the small business community will not be adequately represented, and I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will examine that issue.

There is a crisis in the farming community. I can understand those in the farming community thinking that the present system is not adequate. They need an assurance that the farming interest will be adequately represented in the Welsh Assembly. At least the Welsh Assembly will give the farming community a stronger voice in Brussels.

Mr. Dalyell: How will the farmers get a stronger voice in Brussels?

Mr. Edwards: There will be more direct representation. At present, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) is not involved in negotiations in Brussels in the same way as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture. The Welsh Assembly will provide stronger representation in Europe. *[Interruption.]* It is clearly a matter of dispute. I hope that my hon. Friend is in favour of stronger representation, and will support any amendments to that end.

There are important challenges. I support the principle of a more democratic Wales through a Welsh Assembly. May I draw attention to one or two key aspects in which I have a particular interest?

First, the Welsh Assembly should have an all-Wales anti-poverty strategy. That offers a rich opportunity. Recently, I attended an excellent conference at Swansea arranged by the city and county of Swansea, which has played a leading role in the development of a local anti-poverty strategy. I hope that it will be a responsibility of the Welsh Assembly to develop an all-Wales anti-poverty strategy, and perhaps a social exclusion unit for Wales, to co-ordinate policy across the assembly's departmental responsibilities, to monitor the implementation of the minimum wage and to develop social and economic policies to attack poverty in Wales.

Secondly, there will be the important challenge of co-ordinating a more effective strategy for care in the community. Like Scotland, Wales is in a distinct position to develop a more co-ordinated strategy for long-term care and support for people with physical and learning disabilities. There has been an effective all-Wales mental handicap strategy, which was widely commended outside Wales. I hope that, under the Welsh Assembly, there will be more co-ordinated all-Wales strategies. They would be the envy of England.

There will and must be safeguards in the Bill. We must expect high standards of public conduct under the Nolan recommendations. We must have—it is in the Bill—an auditor-general for Wales to ensure efficient discharge of public resources. There will be an electoral system to give fair representation. The proposal for an electoral system with an element of proportionality is one of the radical innovations in Britain that has come about as a result of the Bill. True democrats will support the principle of fair representation. The element of proportionality will ensure that the assembly broadly reflects the popular vote for the respective parties in Wales.

A national assembly for Wales provides a new beginning, a new strategic approach, which will be inclusive and will ensure that Wales is a more democratic and better place.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that an awful lot of hon. Members want to speak. Extremely long speeches are being made, and it would be very helpful if they were a little shorter.

6.40 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) on his speech. We very much welcome him back to the House. We are grateful for the contribution that he has already made to the debate and the cause of Wales.

I want to refer to the speech of the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—although I see that he is about to leave the Chamber. Joseph Chamberlain would have been proud of him. It was a good speech, although I profoundly disagreed with his analysis. It was the kind of speech that Chamberlain would have made in the House just over 100 years ago. It was a classic speech in defence of the Union.

The hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills must remember why there is a growing demand in Wales for greater democracy and greater accountability. There have been occasions on which the Conservative party has not been kind to Wales. The 18 years of Conservative rule separated the votes in 1979 and 1997. During those 18 years, the kind of principles that the hon. Gentleman enunciated unfortunately meant the centralisation of power, the gradual taking away of powers from local authorities—which he applauded—and their transfer to unelected people, rather than the kind of devolution that he advocated. The then Secretary of State for Wales invariably appointed Conservatives who had been rejected by the Welsh electorate—thrown out by the Welsh people,

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

but imposed on Wales by the Secretary of State to throw down our throats some of the things that happened over those years.

Although the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills made a classic speech in defence of the Union, he must recognise that there is a mood in Wales for change, which was reflected in the vote on 18 September. It was not the ringing endorsement that those in favour of the proposals wanted, but the difference between the votes in Wales in 1979 and 1997 was substantially greater than the difference in the votes in Scotland.

In his very interesting speech, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills criticised the proposals for being piecemeal and not part of a coherent approach. That has always been the problem with this House of Commons. It has always approached constitutional change in such a piecemeal way and never really addressed the issue throughout the United Kingdom. One of the reasons why the Liberal party split at the end of the last century was because it failed to grasp that nettle. I ask the hon. Gentleman not to agree with what many of us in Wales are saying but to recognise that things have changed and that the people of Wales want to move forward—although there was a certain reticence among some of them on 18 September.

I recognise that I have spent a little time dealing with the speech of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, but I want to deal with one more of his points. I did not take kindly to his referring to us as a bunch of separatists. If he looks back over the 23 or 24 years of Plaid Cymru Members of Parliament, he will realise the extremely valuable contribution that they have made in the Chamber, in Committees and in representing their constituents, especially since 1974. We have been part of the great change in Wales over the past quarter of a century or so. I am sorry to have detained the hon. Gentleman, but it was important to put some of the facts on the record.

The Under-Secretary of State will be aware that we have always maintained a very constructive and positive approach to the proposals that the Government have enshrined in the Bill. We all recognise that, following the result of the referendum, we have a responsibility to all those in Wales—those who voted yes and those who voted no—to ensure that the national assembly begins its work with as much good will and support as we can collectively generate.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) outlined some of the recent history of the battle to secure greater democracy in Wales and Scotland. That battle has gone on for about 120 years. In the 1880s, we saw the beginning of some of the debates that have culminated in the Bill. I will concentrate on three aspects of the Bill. I recognise that there are ways in which the measure can be improved, and I make my comments in that spirit.

The Bill's main weakness, as Plaid Cymru sees it, is its lack of legislative proposals. Many of the points addressed by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) could have been solved had the Welsh Assembly been given legislative powers. I recognise that there are debates about the relationship between the assembly and Westminster and the Whitehall machine. They are well understood. If one reads the White Paper and the Bill, one clearly sees that that matter needs to be addressed.

Although there are no legislative powers in the White Paper and the Bill, there are very limited powers to amend or repeal legislation under the Henry VIII reserve powers. The problem is that the Welsh Assembly will be restricted in some ways in developing policy initiatives. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the assembly wants to do things a little differently in education, health or other areas. It will not have the powers to do so. It will have only limited power through secondary legislation. The way in which we can develop legislation depends on how the primary legislative framework is prepared. It could be narrowly or widely defined. There are certain areas where we could do a great deal and others where we would be very restricted.

Recognising that the assembly will not have legislative powers, Plaid Cymru has put forward what I think many people regard as an interesting suggestion. If the assembly considers that it might be necessary for minor legislative changes, all that would happen under the Bill is that the proposal would go to the back of the queue in Westminster. We all know how difficult it is to get Bills through the Queen's Speech and into the legislative programme. Might it not be possible to accept a minor amendment to enable some fast-track procedure in Whitehall to deal with such a problem—if there were, say, a clear wish of a two-thirds majority in the assembly?

Why not revamp the Welsh Grand Committee? That proposal might find favour with some hon. Members who might have difficulty understanding the correct relationship between Westminster and the assembly. Under such a fast-track procedure, the Grand Committee could deal with Second Reading and Committee stages of legislation, and later stages could be taken in the Chamber. By that means, the assembly would not be frustrated in carrying out some of its work. Negotiations would still need to be held between the Secretary of State, the Government and the assembly about which Bills would be appropriate for that procedure, but I ask the Minister seriously to consider that proposal.

My second point is related to the debate about cabinet-style government and committee-style government. I raised that point in an intervention in the speech by the Secretary of State yesterday and he implied that the commission that he is setting up will consider the point. I have read the White Paper and the Bill again, and committee-style government is contained in the Bill virtually unchanged from the proposals in the White Paper.

The Bill states clearly that the leader of each subject committee will be appointed or elected by that committee. The leader—or secretary, as he will be called—will be the creature of the committee. Therefore, the structure will follow the local government model. That might have been appropriate when the local government model was introduced a century ago, but it does not meet the needs of a situation which requires quick decision making. If we moved towards more cabinet-style government, would that require an amendment to the Bill?

Mr. Hain: No, it would not. It would be open to the advisory committee, and subsequently the Standing Orders Commission, to make recommendations in the

standing orders of the assembly which could alter the nature of decision making in favour of a cabinet-style model within the framework of the Bill. Members of the executive committee, albeit elected by the individual policy committees, could have decision-making powers equivalent to those of Ministers.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for intervening, and I hope that he is right. One of the aspects of the drafting of the Bill that surprised me was that the chairpersons of the subject committees will be chosen from a panel elected by the assembly, but the leader or secretary will be elected by the individual subject committee. I would have preferred that both positions were the subject of elections by the whole assembly, which would confirm that the assembly will have cabinet-style, not committee-style, government. I ask the Minister to reflect on that point, and I am sure that we will come back to it in Committee.

My third point is connected with the relationship between the assembly and Europe. None of us could claim that the provisions for the assembly will revolutionise the relationship between Wales and Europe. Some of the proposals are modest and I accept that. Nevertheless, they are very important. I wish to cover three basic aspects.

First, it was specified in the White Paper that one of the powers of the Secretary of State that would be transferred to the assembly was the right to control the dispersal of European structural funds in Wales. I can find no reference to the transfer of that power in the Bill. It may be implicit in some of the provisions; I hope that the Minister, when he winds up, will confirm that it is. In other words, does the Bill give the assembly the right to distribute structural funds in Wales? That was in the White Paper, but it is not in the Bill; it is important that that point is clarified.

Incidentally, the assembly will wish to maintain an office in Brussels. Votes in the Council of Ministers are important, but so are the negotiations that lead to the decisions. The discussion with Commission officials is part of the work of the negotiating team that goes to the Council of Ministers, and the assembly will need a strong office in Brussels.

Secondly, the assembly should have direct access to the United Kingdom Permanent Representation office in Brussels. UKREP has always had an official from the Scottish Office, and will continue to do so. On occasions, Welsh Office staff have worked there and have done an excellent job. However, we need an assurance that, once the assembly is established, one official in UKREP will always look after the interests of Wales. Whether that is through the Secretary of State's office or the assembly office does not really matter, but it is important that we have a representative.

Thirdly, the Scottish White Paper contains a provision that will allow the leader of the Scottish Parliament to represent the UK in the Council of Ministers—in other words, to exercise the UK's vote. We are told that a representative from the Welsh Assembly might have an opportunity to attend the Council of Ministers as part of the team. The Secretary of State has told us that there will be no difference in the way Scotland and Wales are treated in terms of the relationship with Europe, but there is an obvious difference in the White Paper. The Secretary of State has commented subsequently, but the House should be told whether the First Secretary of the assembly will ever have the opportunity to exercise the UK's vote in the Council of Ministers.

That important point should be clarified, because the Maastricht treaty makes provision for regional governments to represent member states on occasions, and that has happened in Germany and Belgium. We need to know whether that will happen in the case of the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Jenkin: When has a Minister from one of the German lauder ever exercised the vote in the Council of Ministers? The White Paper is brutal about the influence on the conduct of Council business that the Government envisage for the Welsh First Secretary. It states:

"the Assembly should be able to keep the delegation advised of its views."

It says nothing about attending the Council of Ministers, although it will be possible for the Welsh First Secretary to attend—by invitation from the UK Government and, presumably, long so the UK position is being supported.

Mr. Jones: Representatives of the German lauder and some of the states in Belgium have represented their member state in the Council of Ministers under article 146 of the Maastricht treaty. That is confirmed in a research paper that the Library prepared before this debate. We need the issue of representation in the Council of Ministers to be clarified, because—as we understand it—the leader of the relevant subject committee would have the right to attend the Council of Ministers as part of the delegation.

Mr. Jenkin: By invitation.

Mr. Jones: I will clarify that point. At the invitation of the relevant Secretary of State, the leader of the subject committee would be allowed to participate. We would prefer that to be a right, and I hope that the Minister will tell us in what circumstances that would happen.

I am conscious of your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will finish now. We should like the issues that I have raised to be clarified in Committee, but I assure the Minister that we shall approach those subjects in a constructive manner.

6.59 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me in what I consider to be a most historic debate in the House tonight. Every Welsh person will be looking to us tonight to vote for this radical Bill that will devolve power to our country and to our people.

For me personally, it is a privilege to be called to speak in this debate. In 1989, I was the chair of the Wales Labour party when we first decided to consult the Welsh people and parties—not just the Wales Labour party—on the need to reform government. It has been a long process of seven or eight years, but we have arrived tonight at that moment and I look forward to voting for the Bill later.

Today, it was brought home to me just why we need a voice for Wales and why we need to vote for the Bill. This morning, at the request of local farmers, I attended the famous Christmas market in the market town of

[Mr. John Smith]

Cowbridge in my constituency. It is usually a time of great festivity and Christmas cheer. Today, there was very little cheer, given the situation in which many farmers find themselves.

I have been politically active in my constituency for more than 25 years, and never did I think I would see the day when my local farmers would be carrying banners. They are doing so because of the debacle that the previous Government made of the beef industry—and agriculture in general—through the BSE fiasco in particular. It is not just the mess that has been created in this great industry of ours; it is the fact that the Welsh farmers did not have a direct voice because Wales has been denuded of power during the past 18 years, following the centralisation of responsibilities which were once those of local government.

It is no accident that it was Welsh farmers in Holyhead who demonstrated last week. It was a clear manifestation of the power that has been taken away from our country, systematically, in the past 20 years. If this Bill had been proposed a couple of years ago—and if we had had an assembly for our nation—those demonstrations would not have taken place.

The situation was brought home to me this morning by Bill Bassett, one of the oldest farmers in my constituency. He is a great character in the local community, and he approached me this morning and said that the industry had not been in a similar situation since the 1930s. That is what BSE and the crisis of two years ago has done to that community. We owe it to that community to ensure two things; first, that confidence is restored to the beef market in particular and to agricultural markets in general; and, secondly, in the longer term, that our farmers compete on a level playing field in Europe.

I wish in the short time available to me to refer to three small but important parts of the Bill. First, clause 6 refers to payments and salaries to assembly members. It is right that that responsibility should go to a senior salary review body. The Welsh people believe that salaries and allowances should be modest. However, if we are to attract the best in Wales—we have a duty to make the assembly work at its best—we should consider the options available to us. We should recommend a system which protects salaries so that we can invite industrialists, great academics and senior people from the voluntary sector, the trade unions and the wider community, and give them an inducement to put their names forward to enter politics in a way that they may not have considered before.

We could offer some form of protected salary, such as the Germans have; a system that British civil servants introduced to them at the end of the second world war. We should consider a voluntary code of practice for employers in the private and public sectors in Wales to allow them to consider sabbaticals and keeping positions open for employees to allow them to go forward to be considered for election.

The second point was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) and relates to the concerns of the business community. I share those concerns, and I wonder whether clauses 110 and 111 could extend the partnerships being considered by the assembly beyond local government and the voluntary sector to incorporate the business community. The business community in Wales could be our greatest ally in taking our country forward in terms of economic development when we have a voice and an assembly of our own.

It has been my experience in recent years, working in the inward investment field in Wales, that the business community has so much to offer the Welsh people. Within that community, we found that it was specifically English investors in Wales who were our greatest allies. Is there not a way of facilitating that through the assembly by creating private sector partnerships, conterminous with the regional economic committees, the training and enterprise councils and the four regions of the Welsh Development Agency? If we involve the business community, we can create a synergy to produce the best and give us access to the talent and skill that could act as a driving motor to take our economy forward.

It is true, and I do not wish to take anything away from the fact, that the WDA's track record in attracting direct foreign investment into Wales has been second to none, but our country's record in attracting our fair share of United Kingdom investment—the lion's share of all investment; more than two thirds of investment in the Principality—has been appalling. We have under-performed in attracting UK investment into Wales; we have out-performed every other region in attracting overseas investment. The closer to Wales one gets, the greater the difficulty in securing footloose investment and expansion investment.

It is easier to get investment from South Korea than it is from south Kensington. It is easier for the Welsh people to get investment from Tokyo than from Tunbridge Wells. It is easy to get investment from the other side of the world, but we cannot get investment from the other side of the Severn bridge. The assembly has a unique opportunity to ensure that people within the United Kingdom and Europe are attracted to Wales.

In a recent survey in *Wales on Sunday*, the senior industrial correspondents of all the major European countries were asked what they thought of Wales as an investment location. What did we see? We saw a London-centric—a Hampstead dinner party set—view of south Wales; coal mines and slag heaps. That view has been fed through from London and the south-east of England. The assembly could turn that around quickly and economically, and we should address that. It is a challenge that we in Wales look forward to.

Mr. Ancram: I have been interested by the hon. Gentleman's glowing idea of what the assembly will achieve. I presume, on that basis, that he will be standing for the assembly and will be leaving this House.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. My role in this House is precious. I support this United Kingdom, and the assembly will not contradict its unity and the Union. If I have any say in it, I will try to sustain my role in the defence of this nation for some time; it is a role that I am proud to have. I see no contradiction. *[Interruption.]* I hear the laughter, the jibes and the quick points of Opposition Members, but I can stand here and speak on behalf of my people and my nation. I cannot see anyone on the Opposition Benches who is in a position to do so.

My final point is on the location of the assembly, which comes within the ambit of the Bill and the financial memorandum. I represent a seat that geographically is

placed between the cities of Cardiff and Swansea. I have had the great pleasure of living and working in Swansea for some years and there is no finer and more beautiful city. The final decision as to location must be taken on the basis of what is in the best interests of our country and our nation.

I cannot conceive of an assembly outside the capital city doing anything other than detracting from the needs of our country. When that decision is taken we must be objective. If the assembly is to have the greatest effect—providing a voice for Wales and a new and modern image of Wales, which reflects the country as it is and not as people on the other side of the Severn bridge sometimes think it is—it must be in the administrative and commercial centre and the heart of Wales. It has to be in our capital city. I do not have any great desires as to where in that city it should go, but everyone in Wales would appreciate it if the building could be got under way in the not too distant future.

Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must thank you for calling me to speak. It is certainly a proud moment for me. The quicker that we get to 10 o'clock, go through the Lobby and vote yes for Wales, the better.

7.11 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), especially as I come from the wrong side of the Severn, as he would describe it. I am not Welsh and do not represent a Welsh constituency, although I am not that far off, but I wanted to take part in this debate to do my bit—it is only my bit—to try to preserve the United Kingdom and to protect it from sliding towards the great danger of becoming a set of regions within a federal Europe.

By and large, I object to the Bill for two main and broad reasons—first, because of some of the details and secondly, because I object to the general principles of devolution as they are being applied.

On the details, the introduction of a new voting system on the back of devolution concerns me. Two new things are coming in at once. Such voting systems have not been explained to or endorsed by the electorate. That form of proportional representation is alien to Britain. Under our constitution, voters vote for people and not for parties. It could be said that they vote Conservative, Labour or, occasionally, Liberal Democrat, but by and large, under our constitution, they vote for people. Also, parties have not previously had to register. Under the Bill, they will have to.

Obviously, that represents a significant and confusing shift in the way we elect the people who run our country. We are moving not to one simple system of proportional representation—if there is such a thing—but to a dual system with all the confusion that that will bring. The Welsh Assembly will have a two-tier membership: some members will have constituents and some will not; some will have constituencies and some will not; some will receive many letters and have much work to do each week, but some will not; some will be in touch with the electorate and some will not; and, some will be serving their constituents, while others will serve those who compile the lists. I do not want that system to be introduced into this country.

Such a dual system might benefit the Conservative party at the moment. We might win some seats that we would not otherwise win, but the principle is the important thing. In this Bill, the principle is confusing and very wrong.

The assembly itself is also a matter of some confusion. The Bill does not make it clear whether it will be powerful or weak. For example, the Secretary of State will be able to overrule the assembly, direct it and revoke its decisions. Does that make this new assembly nothing more than an expensive talking shop? Or will it be concerned with the government of Wales? Will it be a powerful body? Which is it? The Bill certainly does not make that clear.

We have heard much comment on the referendum. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) pointed out, the turnout for the referendum was somewhat less than when one was held in 1978. Then, 58.3 per cent. of the electorate voted. This time, it was 50.1 per cent.

The Bill is being rushed through. The referendum was rushed through while it is fair to say that the Labour Government were enjoying a fair degree of popularity. It was rushed through before the Bill was published and there was a small turnout. Even given all that, only a tiny majority was in favour of the Bill.

Is that a full mandate—a mandate sufficiently strong to break up the United Kingdom? Is it a mandate sufficiently strong to move the United Kingdom towards the Labour Government's real aim, which is a Europe of regions? If another referendum were held in 12 months, say, it could well give a different result. It is safe to assume that by then the gloss will have gone off the Labour Government. The Bill is now published and by then we will have debated it in full, and that referendum would not be influenced by the Scottish vote.

Mr. Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman feel that the United States has been broken up in some way by the existence of a federal system?

Mr. Robertson: The United States is a completely different country. Some areas of the United States experience many problems that I would not want us to experience. It is not comparable.

If another referendum on the issue were held, when circumstances were different—even in 12 months' time—the outcome would be very different, especially given the closeness of the vote at a time when the Government had everything on their side.

As we have heard from Opposition Members, in most countries major constitutional change requires a minimum mandate—a threshold. When the previous referendum was held, the Labour Government required such a threshold. If they had not, Scotland would have had its own Parliament then. The fact that it was not given a Parliament then caused certain Members to bring down that Labour Government. Perhaps that is what concerns this Government—not that they are likely to be brought down in the House, but that they are conscious of the fact that they need to win the next election, and that may be worrying them very much.

Virtually every club, society and association in the land has to achieve a two-thirds vote at a special meeting to change its constitution. If that is good enough for them and for many other countries, why is it not good enough

[Mr. Robertson]

for devolution votes in this country, especially as the Bill is, I understand, to be considered in Standing Committee, not on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Did the Conservative Government have a mandate, or a two-thirds majority, to change the system of government in Wales from a democracy to a quangocracy?

Mr. Robertson: The Conservative Government were elected by the legitimate electoral means, as indeed were the present Labour Government, who achieved about 45 per cent. of the vote and are moving towards breaking up the United Kingdom and taking us headlong into a federal Europe. Do they intend to consult the electorate on that? I very much doubt it.

Mr. Dalyell: I want to put a different historical point of view on two brief points. First, those to whom the hon. Gentleman referred, of whom I would be one, did not bring down the Labour Government, as it was not we who persuaded James Callaghan to delay the election from October 1978 until March 1979. Secondly, as I have told George Cunningham, I greatly regret ever having introduced a threshold, because it was seen as moving the goalposts and changing the rules, and the referendum result would have been much more decisive for the noes—at that time—had it not been introduced. That is the history as I see it.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that history lesson and bow to his great authority in the matter. As the United Kingdom is being broken up without any consultation of the English people, there should be some certainty before the Labour Government proceed down the road that they have chosen.

As I was saying, I regret the fact that the Bill will not be considered in Committee of the whole House. That prevents many hon. Members from taking part, including many Labour Members who may be critical of the Government's plans. Perhaps that is part of the Labour plan: silence the critics, ride roughshod over the House of Commons and introduce referendums before legislation.

That is no way to go about breaking up the United Kingdom, which as far as I can see is what this is all about. We are to have a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, and regional government in England. If that is not about fracturing the United Kingdom, I do not know what is. I do not believe that the measures can strengthen the Union; they can only weaken it.

I recognise some of the problems under the Union, but I believe that Wales and Scotland have done well and that their future cannot be guaranteed under the proposals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley said, Wales received £4,352 per head to England's £3,743. If we go down the devolution road, that difference could give rise to English nationalism, which I would regret.

There could be a demand to reduce that allocation and the Welsh representation in Parliament. There could also be—indeed, there is—a demand for an English parliament. Some of those demands are acceptable and understandable, but I do not want a rise in English nationalism. I do not want there to be an English parliament, first because I am elected to represent constituents in the United Kingdom Parliament and secondly because I am against devolution.

I see no reason to prevent decisions from being made on a more local basis—for example, I am all in favour of strengthening the role of councils in Northern Ireland—but I see no need for bodies to be set up that create a potential for conflict. Two parliaments and one assembly in one country must give rise to conflict, as well as to duplication and confusion, not only constitutionally, in Government circles, but in the minds of the electorate.

Whom will the electorate blame if things go wrong, or credit if they go right? Whom will they contact—their constituency Member of Parliament; their constituency member of the Welsh Assembly; or their regional member of the Welsh Assembly? What on earth will they do? Will they not experience some gridlock if the Welsh Assembly, or indeed the Scottish Parliament, is of a different political persuasion from the House of Commons?

I am concerned about the Labour Government's master plan—if such it be—to create a federal Europe of regions. Do they really plan the end of the nation state in Europe? We have already had Scottish and Welsh devolution, we are to have a Greater London authority, and proposals are already being drawn up for English regional government.

Some might accuse me of alarmism, but when I hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer saying that there is no constitutional bar to a single currency, I am greatly concerned and I want to alert the public to what is going on, because I really believe that the United Kingdom is being broken up into small regions and that each of those regions will form part of a federal Europe. The British electorate have never consented to that, and would never do so. This is a slippery slope to something that the people of this country simply do not want.

It is often suggested that the Conservative party should not engage in this debate, as we have no representation in Wales; as if that meant that we had no interest in Wales. This debate is not about Wales but about the United Kingdom. Not only are we entitled to take part in such debates: it is incumbent on us to do so, and to speak out against the Bill so that we may preserve the Union and the United Kingdom and resist moves towards a federal Europe of regions.

7.26 pm

Ms Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): This is an historic occasion, as it is extremely rare for politicians to be in on the making of a new political institution, and Labour Members are enthusiastic and excited about it. It is good to have the chance to get on with the job of bringing democracy to Wales, bringing power closer to people in Wales, and trying to bring prosperity to people who have been excluded for far too long. I propose to touch on three matters relating to the Bill: the committee structure; equal opportunities; and the location of the assembly.

The committee structure will be considered in detail by the advisory committee and then by the Standing Orders Commission, but I want to make some general points at this stage. Schedule 2 lists 18 wide-ranging fields of responsibility for the assembly, including agriculture, health, social services, education and the Welsh language.

It would be unwise if those subject fields were translated into individual committees, plus any other committees that the assembly may choose to set up.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), I believe that the assembly should have integrated strategies that cross all the fields of responsibility. One of the big difficulties with local government, central Government and the Welsh Office stems from the division between their various departments, which makes it hard to implement strategies that cover them all.

That is especially problematic in a field such as child care, responsibility for which is shared by education, health and social services, and which is also important to economic development. In the Welsh Office, the division is between two Ministers. In every layer of government, the division causes difficulties, and it is essential that we have strategies in the Welsh Assembly to draw together all the different threads.

It was thought that a great advantage of the new unitary authorities would be the bringing together of, for example, health and social services. However, we do not bring things together by putting them in separate committees in one body. The key to success for the assembly is to have integrated strategies for the environment, sustainable economic development, and social and economic regeneration.

We should be thinking of working in the assembly in those sorts of ways, which will tackle the particular problems of Wales. We need an imaginative, innovative structure. We need to learn from the problems that we have experienced in central and local government and in the Welsh Office in implementing such strategies.

We should consider setting up mechanisms to consider groups such as children—a children's committee. Compared with the rest of Great Britain, Wales has special problems. We have the lowest gross domestic product per head and the highest poverty rate. We have major transport problems and fewer child care places. Low pay is an issue. We have more lone parents who are not working than the rest of Britain. We need policies to which the whole assembly subscribes, and fewer, more powerful, committees that can meet the objectives of the assembly.

It is essential to establish good working structures with Government Departments. The success of the welfare-to-work policy, for instance, depends on the Employment Service and the Department of Social Security working with the assembly, which will provide the child care strategy that is essential for that policy to succeed.

I am pleased that two clauses, clauses 47 and 113, refer to equal opportunities. Clause 47 states that the assembly's business must be

"conducted with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all".

Clause 113 states that the assembly's functions are to be

"exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people."

Starting afresh, with a new body, we should be able to make certain that those principles lie at the heart of the assembly.

One of the most important ways of ensuring equal opportunity for all people is to have members who represent the range of people in Wales. That means that women should be there in equal numbers. I believe that I am the first woman to speak in this debate, which is well into its second day. We do not want to mirror that in a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: My hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) spoke yesterday.

Ms Morgan: I am sorry—one female Member spoke yesterday.

The women of Wales appreciate the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell), who strongly backed the principle of equal representation in his speech yesterday. The Bill leaves the means of getting equal representation to the political parties.

I welcome the element of proportionality in the Bill. If the Conservatives get 20 per cent. of the vote in Wales, it is right that they should be represented in the Welsh Assembly. That makes for a better assembly and better government. Now that an 80-member assembly, with one man and one woman for each seat, is no longer an option, it may be difficult to achieve equal representation. Is it possible to put something in the Bill to allow political parties to take positive action to ensure that women are present in equal numbers?

The Labour party has had a drive to find how many women would be prepared to stand for the assembly. We now have more than 200 women who are interested in standing. No one will ever be able to say that women do not want to put themselves forward, as has been often said in the past. It would be tragic if the enthusiasm of those women was not translated into reality. The weight of history is against us, against women being represented in political institutions. In Wales, we have only four women out of 40 Members. The process would be helped if we could include in the Bill a mechanism for positive action to get women into the assembly.

Ensuring that the assembly's business is conducted in a way that is conducive to equal opportunities, both for members and for the public, means that the needs of men and women with children and dependents should be taken into account. All evidence shows that black people tend to be excluded from political and other activities. The last census in Cardiff showed that Afro-Caribbean people were more likely to be unemployed, to live in sub-standard housing, and not to own a car than the general population, as well as suffering from racism.

We must make specific efforts to ensure that black people have access to the assembly. As we are starting afresh, we can try to do such things. Wales is a multicultural, cosmopolitan country, especially in the towns and cities of the south. It has been strongly argued already that the assembly is for everyone in Wales, for people with every accent, whose first language may be Welsh, Urdu, Bengali or English.

The Bill is an opportunity for more open government, which we hope will involve many more people than in the past. Meetings should be as accessible to the public as possible. The assembly should able to co-opt people on to committees. It should be able to co-opt people who have experience of being disabled or of being black in a mainly white country. I respect the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) about trying to attract people from business, industry and academia, but, equally, we want to attract people who have had day-to-day experience of living in the particular circumstances of Wales.

[Ms Morgan]

The public should be able to put items on the agendas of committees. I strongly welcome the commitment to work with community groups and the voluntary sector, which is a huge constituency in Wales, ranging from big national organisations to the small community groups that make life in Wales function. Engaging with the voluntary sector, not only as a grant-giving and monitoring body but in consultations and as partners, is important and will enhance the assembly.

It is important to engage with young people. I support a youth assembly. There should be mechanisms, such as a children's committee, for feeding in the views of children. Many schools have schools councils. We should encourage them to look at what is going on in the assembly.

There should be no question of locating the assembly anywhere but in the capital of Wales. To start it anywhere else would cause confusion and weaken it. We need dispersed, devolved methods of communicating with people, but that is a back-up, not a substitute.

The main point is to get the strongest possible assembly with the greatest ability to take decisions and thereby earn the respect of the people of Wales. I believe strongly that it must be located where the civil servants are and where decisions can be made quickly. It should be in the capital. There is a clear message from trade unions, business, international politics, Europe and the voluntary sector that there is no alternative to Cardiff. It is the one institution that cannot be devolved or go anywhere else. Many institutions can be dispersed, but the headquarters of the assembly must be in the capital.

7.39 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan), who made a thoughtful speech, full of good, common sense and some important points. It was very much in contrast with the speech by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who opened the debate on behalf of the official Opposition.

Mr. Jenkin: Go on, have a go.

Mr. Llwyd: Yes, I shall have a go. It is time that someone had a go from this Bench, lest someone lump us in with your lot.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley spent a lot of time pouring out vitriol about this, that and the other. He said that the Bill had more holes than a Swiss cheese, yet he spent 10 seconds talking about them. Perhaps the Swiss cheese available in Ribble Valley is different from that which is available elsewhere in Europe. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was right to describe the hon. Gentleman's bluster as badly lacking in humility. So it was.

That there is a lack of scrutiny of Welsh issues in this Parliament goes without saying. The Committees that consider Welsh Bills such as the Welsh Language Bill and the Local Government (Wales) Bill are packed with people from outside Wales who have no interest in what is going on in Wales, and often are there only to vote against any useful amendments. That cannot be the essence of good government. We have half an hour of Welsh questions every five weeks or so, and one day a year there is a one-day debate on Wales. That does not make for satisfactory governance in Wales.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) referred with high passion to the break-up of the United Kingdom that he says is inherent in the Bill. Those words were cheering to me, but I have to admit that, despite reading the Bill three or four times, I do not have the same impression. I should be delighted if he were right and I were wrong.

Yesterday's debate was rather an anti-climax, probably because the three political parties that have representation in Wales believe that devolution is a good thing. The so-called opposition came from Tory Members, whose party has no representation in Wales. Worse still, some Tory Members' speeches showed that they had little or no knowledge of Wales, its needs or the real nature of the devolutionary process. The quality of the speeches of official Opposition Members rendered the debate a non-event.

It is all very well for the little Englander, Eurosceptic tendency to churn out the old drivel, but it is an unedifying spectacle that does no credit to the Tory party. I believe that it would be deprecated by many sincere members of the Welsh Conservative party, who take a far more positive, proactive and sensible long-term view of the matter. I believe that it is possible to oppose a measure and remain constructive; but that view is not universally shared in the Chamber.

I shall not get into a debate about figures. We have learnt enough about the mandate or lack of mandate, and the yes-no, and so on. Suffice it to say that there was a majority in favour on 19 September.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): A narrow majority.

Mr. Llwyd: Yes, it was. The hon. Gentleman is so predictable. Before I am interrupted again and subjected to the mantra about the thinness of the majority, I must simply say that it ill behoves a party which was in power twice for a total of 10 years on the vote of a minority of the United Kingdom electorate to try to score points in that way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), in his wide-ranging and interesting speech yesterday, touched on many important points. We in Plaid Cymru make no secret of the fact that we want a full legislative and tax-raising Parliament in Wales. The Bill falls considerably short of that goal, but we shall continue to argue and debate and, we hope, persuade in order to achieve that end.

Lest I damn the Assembly with too faint praise, let me say that it is a welcome development. It brings government nearer to the people, and that has to be good. It also provides for rationalisation of the myriad Welsh quangos. Many will disappear, and I have little doubt that the taxpayers' money will be saved. It provides an opportunity to close the democratic deficit, and that must be welcomed by any democrat.

Furthermore, the vexed question of accountability has been a great problem in the governance of Wales. When placemen are put in places of power and authority and make a hash of things, the people of Wales want to get rid of them, but in the current situation they cannot.

That is utterly repugnant and intolerable. I am sure that the Bill will tackle that aspect urgently, as it states it will and as the White Paper stated it would.

Several hon. Members who spoke in yesterday's debate stressed the need for the national assembly to be accepted by all of Wales, whether it be the populous south-east, the sparsely populated Pembrokeshire coast or wherever. We must all strive to make the Assembly fully national for all in Wales. I agree with the words of the hon. Member for Cardiff, North about involving minorities and so on to make the Assembly truly representative. Of course we must have a proper gender balance, too. That is all evident good sense, and I hope that we will see it in action in the coming months and years.

We must work to dispel the untruths perpetrated by the constructive and reactionary no campaign. We must build an assembly which is worthy of the title "national". So, while I acknowledge the need to deal with the concerns of Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham, I stress the need to deal urgently with the needs of rural Wales.

I do not say that any part of Wales deserves special pleading, but it is a plain fact that rural Wales is in decline. Given the depth of the current crisis in agriculture, the very existence of large parts of Wales is called into sharp focus. One has to ask whether an assembly would have allowed the crisis in the beef and sheep sectors to happen. I have no doubt that the assembly's sympathies would lie with the industry, but sympathy does not pay the bank interest.

Will the assembly be hamstrung and bound and gagged by the Ministry of Agriculture? The present Minister, unlike the Secretary of State for Wales, is breathtakingly complacent about the crisis in agriculture. I hope that he will wake up to the crisis sooner or later and certainly before it is too late.

Mr. Dalyell: Is there not a genuine problem in that the very real difficulties of Welsh agriculture, which we all know about and some of us entirely accept, will be solved only by action by the Council of Ministers? The Welsh Assembly will not be represented in the Council of Ministers. When it comes to a question of power, how are the problems to which the hon. Gentleman rightly refers going to be solved?

Mr. Llwyd: I know that the hon. Gentleman is an expert in these matters, but it is my understanding that a representative of the Welsh Assembly will be able to attend the Agriculture Council with any delegation. I am sure that Welsh needs can be dealt with in that way. I fully accept that there will not be official ministerial representation, and I regret that. That is one aspect that my party will seek to redress as the Bill proceeds. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point, but there will be some voice, albeit that of a delegation.

Many members of the farming fraternity have asked about the powers and obligations of the assembly towards agriculture. Agriculture in Wales is quite different from that in England, with 80 per cent. of the land mass classified as less favoured. The assembly must be able to take real decisions about agriculture and make and amend policy as it is received from the European Union. I accept what the hon. Member for Linlithgow has said about that.

I sincerely believe that the problems facing agriculture and their knock-on effect on the rural economy strengthen the call for an agricultural and rural affairs committee of the assembly. Those matters are inextricably linked, as the current crisis has shown.

The National Farmers Union has taken a constructive approach to the Bill. In its short but helpful briefing, it refers to clause 33, which places a duty on the assembly to support and enhance aspects of Welsh cultural life. The NFU points out that the duty to enhance rural life is extremely important. I am pleased to note that the Bill includes a duty on the assembly to protect the Welsh culture and its language.

I also agree that there should be an explicit duty on the assembly to promote and sustain the interests of rural areas. That is not without precedent. For example, the Environment Act 1995 places a duty on the national park authorities to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities, and to co-operate with public agencies whose functions include the promotion of economic and social development in rural areas. Furthermore, the English Countryside Commission does a great deal of valuable work in co-ordinating efforts to sustain rural areas. Therefore, there are lessons to be learned from over the border.

Given the current disastrous state of agriculture and the need for urgent action given the forthcoming changes to the common agricultural policy, there has never been such an urgent need for a strategic all-Wales approach to rural life and matters rural. I believe that the assembly could be just the vehicle for that.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Stormont parliamentary system had control of agriculture in Northern Ireland. If it was still in existence, does he believe that Northern Ireland would have got out of the mess created by BSE, or would it have been caught by the general ban on United Kingdom beef products?

Mr. Llwyd: I am not sure about that particular aspect, but, with great respect, the Welsh Assembly will be based on good will. For historical reasons, the hon. Member's country is different from mine—

Mr. Ross: There was plenty of good will.

Mr. Llwyd: That may be the case, but probably the answer is no. That is the answer he is looking for. I believe that there will be a far greater spirit of co-operation in the assembly and when those who were previously doubtful have been persuaded to support it, we will make it a strong powerhouse for Wales.

When adequately planning any strategy for rural areas, one must consider the infrastructure and the remoteness. Any solutions will have to consider matters such as the sparsity factor. We in parts of north and mid-Wales feel particularly vulnerable at the present time given the announcement that the Development Board for Rural Wales will be subsumed into the new powerhouse.

We must ensure that the decades of experience and expertise built up by the board are not dissipated, and that the rural affairs do not become an small adjunct of that new powerhouse. I am sure that the Secretary of State has already received many representations about that and I am sure he will bear them in mind during the passage of the Bill.

[Mr. Llwyd]

Hon. Members will be aware that I have campaigned with other right hon. and hon. Members across the House to ensure that the lion's share of inward investment is not always tempted to the east of Wales. The announcement of a moiety of spending to be assured to the west of Wales is most welcome. I hope that the new body will pick up where the DBRW and the Welsh Development Agency left off. I also trust that its progress will be closely monitored by the national assembly.

I hope that the new powerhouse will actively assist the rural areas and that its remit will be extended to assist agriculture and related projects. That is extremely important, bearing in mind the future for the industry.

I reiterate the concerns about health that I expressed at the most recent sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee. With the greatest respect, I cannot understand why there is such an unseemly rush to reconfigure the health trusts before the assembly is up and running. To do that a matter of days before the establishment of that assembly is almost bizarre.

In the Grand Committee, in answer to a specific question about that, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), said that it would be right for the Welsh Office to

"start that agenda, to get the changes under way, and then to give the Welsh Assembly the opportunity review matters."—[*Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee*, 18 November 1997; c. 3.]

Exactly what will it review? Will it review something that had been reviewed a few days before? That does not make a great deal of sense, and that decision should be reconsidered. If the assembly were perverse, it could reverse everything that had been done a few days previously. What would happen then, I wonder?

I support everything that the hon. Member for Cardiff, North said about the voluntary sector. She is absolutely right. I am pleased that the Bill lays a responsibility on the assembly to launch a scheme to promote the interests of all those voluntary organisations that are so important in everyday Welsh life.

As I understand it, the scheme will specify how the assembly proposes to provide assistance to and monitor and consult with the voluntary agencies. In due course, the assembly will provide financial assistance for such voluntary organisations in Wales. The role of such organisations is becoming more and more important in the delivery of core services, and I trust that their voice will be heard loudly and clearly and that their views will be brought into the heart of Government decision making. I welcome the fact that that is referred to in the Bill.

The importance of links with the European mainland have been highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). It is vital that those links should be strengthened. I should like them to include observer status in the Council of Agricultural Ministers. I would prefer to follow the Scottish model, and I am sure that there will be a considerable debate about that in due course. As the benefits accrue to Wales from having a regional voice in Europe, there is no doubt that that will make it far easier for us to be heard in Brussels on a particular matter, and to have the right to hear early on about what is proposed there.

The lander have benefited greatly from such an arrangement, as I witnessed a few years ago when I visited the lander parliaments and Catalonia with the Welsh Grand Committee.

It is equally important that Wales is seen for what it really is—a nation, or region in Eurospeak. An enhanced presence in Brussels is extremely important. An expanded Wales-European centre would be most welcome so that Wales enjoys a level playing field when encouraging inward investment from other parts of the European Union.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn has flagged up the idea of the fast track legislative system. That could be of great assistance to the workings of the assembly. I hope that it will be accepted by the Committee which will discuss the Bill.

As the Bill receives its Second Reading and proceeds into Committee, I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will look upon it as an opportunity to deliver a better form of government for Wales, which is more accountable and which will, ultimately, stand it in good stead as we approach the millennium and beyond.

7.58 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I am proud to speak in a debate on such a truly historic and momentous occasion, because we have the ability to vote for a national assembly for Wales. As a Labour Member, I should like to devote my speech to putting the cultural, patriotic and national case for a national Welsh Assembly. I realise also that there is a very strong, even overwhelming, democratic case and even—on this I differ from my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands—an economic case for establishing an assembly. It is essential that we develop a class of politicians and civil servants who will concentrate on developing a strategy for economic regeneration in Wales.

I will confine my remarks to the cultural case for a Welsh Assembly. Putting the Bill into its historical perspective, it bears comparison with such momentous dates in Welsh history as the statute of Rhuddlan, in 1286; the Act of Union of 1536; such developments in Welsh culture as the Bible's translation into Welsh—an act that has some geographical significance for my constituency; developments in the 18th and 19th centuries leading to administrative devolution; and, in recent years, establishment of the Welsh Office.

The Bill is part of a sequence of events and marks a change in the relationship between Wales and Britain. Given the unitary nature of the British state and the fact that we do not have a written constitution, it would be idle to pretend that the work of reforming the relationship between Wales, Britain and the other countries of the United Kingdom will not be a difficult task. Awkward issues will be raised.

In the right spirit—a spirit of confidence which the assembly will engender—there is no reason why we cannot overcome the practical difficulties and awkward questions that were so eloquently asked, in such a penetrating manner, by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies).

If I have a quarrel with my two distinguished hon. Friends—bearing in mind that I share with my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli experience of the

legal profession, as we are both barristers—it is that I normally confine my worst points until after the jury delivers the verdict. Surely there was a case for confining comments on awkward and perhaps intractable questions until after the verdict had been delivered by the Welsh people. Nevertheless, I accept that they have promoted a principled debate, and the questions that they and others have asked will have to be answered in Committee.

Devolution has been an important aspect of Labour party policy for many years. Keir Hardie himself promoted the idea of home rule. We have heard in this debate that the Liberal party and David Lloyd-George progressed the idea of home rule through the ill-fated Cymru Fydd movement. In recent years, S. O. Davies and Jim Griffiths—Labour Members' predecessors—were proponents of devolution.

It is essential that a national assembly is established so that Wales is recognised as a distinctive cultural and historical community. A nationalist and patriotic case can be made for an assembly, but it is nationalism that is positive and not mutually exclusive. Establishing an assembly is a recognition that different nations inhabit this island, and that Britain is a state, not a nation.

Establishing an assembly is part of a move towards a decentralised model of Europe. Is it not heartening that Wales will have the opportunity to be in the vanguard of that movement? Wales—the cradle of the industrial revolution, the Labour party and the national health service—will now be in the vanguard of the movement towards democratic decentralised government. The Welsh national assembly will be established one whole year before a similar body is established in Scotland.

We will have a magnificent opportunity to raise both Wales's profile and our confidence as a nation. Much has been made of the prosperity gap between Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom, and one of the assembly's great priorities will be to address that disparity. There is also a confidence gap. The historical fact, however, is that we will soon have a Welsh Assembly—the ultimate symbol of Welsh national identity.

I should like the national assembly to foster a self-confidence that is not elitist or based on language. There is also much room for improvement in Wales—I speak as a Welsh speaker—in democratising some Welsh institutions which are too beholden to the vested interests of the Welsh-speaking elite. I should like the assembly to attack that type of democratic deficit in Wales. We have an opportunity to forge a new sense of citizenship, in partnership not only with local authorities but with the people of Wales.

Cardiff is a truly European city. We also have a magnificent university, which is unique in its federal structure and its history. It was built by the workers of Wales, over many years, on the basis of voluntary contribution. We also have a language that is among the oldest in Europe. We must create a culture of bilingualism which is not exclusive, and a sense of ownership—in both English-speaking and Welsh-speaking communities—of our language.

Our film and television industry is flourishing, as is our popular music. In Mold, we have Theatr Clwyd, a national theatre of Wales, which I hope will go from strength to strength. Culture in Wales is flowering, and the symbolic act of establishing the assembly can only assist in continuing the process.

It is significant that, a few weeks ago, no less a person than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport addressed a London conference on the importance of culture—in its widest sense—in fostering a creative economy and a sense of citizenship. Many aspects of national life depend not on material well-being but on a feel-good factor in its broader sense. Ability to participate in the arts should be available across the board. Much can be done, and a great opportunity is before us.

On a point of detail, clause 22 and schedule 2 do not provide for responsibility for broadcasting to be transferred to the Welsh Assembly. Although there are undoubtedly practical difficulties in such a transfer, I should like S4C to be made the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly. We should be moving in Wales towards becoming a more mature democracy and a truly bilingual society, in which people are not oversensitive to the prospect of such institutions—which many would say hold an advantageous position—being the responsibility of our national assembly. I do not believe that there is anything to lose from opening the process of democracy, even in Welsh language broadcasting.

Wales has had some great sporting achievements. Glamorgan won the county championship this year, for example, and the rugby world cup will soon be held in Wales.

I have not yet mentioned the more traditional aspects of Welsh culture—such as our eisteddfodau and our magnificent literature, in both Welsh and English. Welsh literature dates back to the 6th and 7th centuries, predating Chaucer. Although those aspects of Wales and Welsh culture have not received much prominence in this debate, they should be mentioned. We have a strong patriotic and cultural case for a Welsh Assembly.

I shall conclude on two personal notes. Like many Welsh people, I was brought up in England, and I salute the work of the Welsh communities in Liverpool and London who have for so many years kept alive the flame of Welsh culture and political identity. Together with millions of Welsh people, many involved in extractive industries such as coal mining and slate quarrying—that was my family's background—my family moved over the border to England. We had to—we had no choice. Surely the assembly will sound the death knell of the old saying, "If you want to get on, you have to get out."

Finally, I, like many people, was very emotional on the night of the referendum. We knew that it was going to be close and it was. I accept that the groundwork had not been done: we should have had a constitutional convention like the Scottish one to iron out the difficulties. That was not done, but the Government are doing the best that they can in a spirit of pragmatism and reason to overcome the awkward practical questions, and I feel confident that they will succeed. Around 3 am, my seven-year-old daughter, on her way to bed, asked "Ydi'r bobol na am ennill?", which means "Are the no people going to win?" At that stage, the fate of Wales hung in the balance, because it was not clear whether or not we were going to win.

There is room for saying that, if we had lost that vote, the future of Wales as a distinct cultural entity would have been in doubt. When my daughter awoke the following morning, I was pleased to be able to announce that there was a new dawn—the yes people had won. Wales has for the first time

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

in its history an opportunity to have an elected body—a truly Welsh national assembly. I welcome the Bill and, together with my right hon. and hon. Friends, I shall vote yes in the Lobby tonight with alacrity.

8.11 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): There will be those who are somewhat surprised to find an Ulster Unionist Member of Parliament taking part in this debate, but I speak as a United Kingdom Member of Parliament. I also speak as a Member of Parliament representing the one part of the United Kingdom that has experience of a devolved institution.

I was further incited to take part in the debate by the comments of the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). I trust that the Welshmen here will excuse my pronunciation of the hon. Gentleman's constituency—I am inclined to get Welsh pronunciations as far wrong as they get the Irish ones. I try occasionally to pronounce Welsh place names, but I fear that all I do is send the Welsh people listening into gales of laughter. I hope that I will be excused if my pronunciation never gets quite up to the mark.

The Minister of State said in a recent speech in Northern Ireland that he believed that

"the new context created by devolution in Scotland and Wales can be very helpful to us. We need to take account of the new institutions there in our thinking. We have a great deal to learn from what is happening there.

Given that it was a chap from Pembroke called Strongbow who did a great deal to set off some of the problems in Ireland, it is always welcome to have another Welshman—albeit one of Irish extraction—offering us advice in the modern age.

The whole question whether it is possible to have devolved government in a unitary state is not new, and we in the Ulster Unionist party have a strong attachment to devolution. However, judging by some of the remarks made this evening, there seems to be some confusion as to the difference between a devolved parliamentary or administrative system within a unitary state and a federal system. The two are poles apart. I have often thought that if we had had a more equitable distribution of the population between the four component parts of the United Kingdom, we might have considered a federal structure. It is, unfortunately, an historical fact that England's population is so overwhelmingly large in relation to that of the rest of the UK that it is not possible to create a sensible federal structure in this country.

We have made various efforts to have devolution in Ireland and elsewhere, but it is interesting to note that each of those efforts has had a different basis. The Government of Ireland Act 1920 kept a few powers and devolved everything else, whereas the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 devolved some powers and kept the rest and as a result very different sets of powers were devolved on each occasion. I am always surprised at how those who debate matters such as this appear to be adamantly opposed to looking across the Irish sea to the experiences and lessons lying open and evident to all. I sometimes wonder whether people are not deliberately closing their eyes; if they opened them, they might become more clearly aware of the consequences of their policies.

In the island of Ireland, we have had both devolved institutions and complete separation. I appreciate that the UK Government have always been concerned about the western seaboard of Great Britain—the geopolitical needs of this country were such that they always wanted to keep a toehold in Ireland. That is a consideration of centuries-old standing and I do not believe that it has changed to this very day. Eventually, however, they failed to keep all of the island within the UK, and the Republic became a separate state.

Far too many people forget that originally the 1920 Act set up two devolved institutions—one in Dublin and the other in Belfast. The Dublin one met but once; it never came back because it was taken over by the revolutionary Dail Eireann, which has existed from that day to this. The way in which the Republic gained self-governance was totally different from what happened in Belfast. Belfast was intent on remaining within the kingdom, and the Unionists there made it their business to ensure that they used the devolved institution to keep themselves within the kingdom.

Despite all the glowing remarks about devolved institutions and about separation bringing prosperity, the Republic of Ireland failed socially and economically. Anyone who looks at it cold-bloodedly will accept that. Only in recent years, when its Government were able to get a large amount of money on an annual basis from the Common Market did the Republic improve its social and economic position. The Republic made good use of the money that it received—of that there is no doubt. It is no part of the Unionist creed to want an impoverished Irish Republic—we would prefer to see it prosperous and wealthy, because then some of the difficulties we have experienced might disappear.

I believe that when we look at how devolved institutions were used in Northern Ireland to keep it within the United Kingdom, we can only assume that we will see a steady development towards a time when politics in both Scotland and Wales will become more constitutional in nature than has hitherto been the case. That is the fundamental division in Northern Ireland—the question asked is, "Which nation do you belong to?" Eventually, we will see unionist and nationalist politics in both Scotland and Wales.

In those circumstances, the remarks of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) will become more relevant, because he described the sorts of fistfuls of grit and filings that can be tossed into the machinery. No one need think that this is going to be an easy passage.

I bear no ill will towards Plaid Cymru or the Scottish nationalists; indeed, I get on well with both groups. I am under no illusions but that they are nationalist parties, just as I am under no illusions but that the sister party of the Labour movement, the SDLP, is a nationalist party. The long-term objectives of all these parties are very different from mine. We should clearly understand where these people are coming from and to what they aspire. They will use every weapon put in their hands to gain their objectives.

That is why I have asked three times in the House—once of a Welsh Office Minister, once of the Secretary of State for Scotland, and again today—a question that has not yet received an answer, but which must be answered by word or by deed. It is a simple question: in these

devolved institutions, will Labour members believe in the unionist cause? Will they put the Union first, just as the people of Northern Ireland, no matter what their social class, have had to put the Union first? To do that, they have had to submerge the social and economic divisions in their communities.

The Minister may think he can escape that question; the Labour party may think that it can escape it. Labour may do so during the passage of this Bill, but once Labour members are elected to the assemblies, they will not be able to escape the question. What they are will rapidly become apparent to those who elected them.

Mr. Dalyell: The same will be true of all party members, including Conservative party members.

Mr. Ross: There would be no devolved assemblies if there were no nationalists demanding them.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: That is quite unhistorical. The first demands for an all-Wales collective body were made back in the 1880s by Joseph Chamberlain, a Birmingham Member of Parliament and a prominent Liberal. Surely the hon. Gentleman realises—the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) will correct me if I am wrong—that the Welsh nationalist party was not even founded until the 1920s, some 40 years later. His proposition is therefore absurdly unfactual.

Mr. Ross: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman, given the Liberals' reputation for supporting nationalism in Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. By responding to nationalism in Ireland, the Liberals were attempting to square the constitutional circle. They realised that, to make logical sense of their proposals for Ireland, they would have to offer assemblies also to other parts of the UK. The hon. Gentleman's initial assertion was thus perfectly correct.

Mr. Ross: This is rapidly turning into a "one man against the rest" type of debate—possibly with one exception.

Mr. Livsey: The Liberal party has an honourable record of democracy. The Liberals were not just pursuing the Irish question in the 1880s and 1890s. They wanted home rule for Scotland and Wales too, albeit in the context of the United Kingdom. Had those policies been pushed through, and had Gladstone not been thwarted at the time, these islands would have been far more peaceful than they have been.

Mr. Ross: It is evident that the Liberal party has learnt nothing from the passage of time. Liberals have never really understood the driving force behind Irish nationalism and republicanism.

The Labour party, by contrast, has at least learnt one or two lessons from Ireland. The electoral system that Labour is setting up makes it quite clear that there will be majority rule, notwithstanding the checks and balances being built into the system. Labour is also making it impossible for those completely opposed to the continued existence of the UK to sit in the assembly, by means of the oath that is to be introduced. I was glad that Madam Speaker took a strong line recently with the two gentlemen who were elected to this place but who have chosen not to come to here. I am glad to note that the Labour party supports Madam Speaker's decision.

Labour Members should, however, remember that there are also those who have been prepared to take the oath, or to affirm, in Northern Ireland bodies with what they have described as mental reservations. I dare say that there will be others in coming years who will have similar mental reservations.

Neither the Government nor this House has fully absorbed the implications of proportional representation. Minor groups—which will use the iron filings I mentioned before—will get elected and will grow in size as time goes on.

It seems that the Labour party is intent on keeping firm control over who gets elected. The list system is an excellent way of keeping people firmly in line. The problem is that we will end up with assembly members carrying completely different sets of responsibilities, regional and individual. That will lead to difficulties.

Many questions remain unanswered, not least why the Conservative party is so much against devolution for Wales and Scotland and so much in favour of a disruptive and divisive form of devolution for Northern Ireland.

We need to discuss how this devolved body will fit into the economic union with Westminster. Will it be possible for the assembly to be dissolved or dismissed? After all, 75 per cent. of the Welsh population are either not in favour or did not think it worth voting. Has the House considered the possibility of an elected majority in the assembly deciding to vote it out of existence, or just resigning, as happened in Northern Ireland in 1972? The whole subject needs debating on the Floor of the House.

I shall have great pleasure in supporting the motion that calls for that to happen, but given the Ulster Unionist party's long history of attachment to devolution, we will not go along with the amendment this evening. There remains much to be discussed, and I favour a long period of discussion on the Floor of the House. We can all learn a great deal from each other and from our experiences. The more we learn, the more likely we are to come to sensible conclusions.

8.26 pm

Ms Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I take great exception to any suggestion that I support the break-up of the Union. I am sure that all Labour Members agree that that is not our intention at all. The Bill will strengthen the Union, by virtue of the fact that one of the main threats to democracy in our country has been the feeling that people have been disfranchised for the past 20 years in Wales. Consequently, they have failed to turn out at elections, except for general elections, because they have felt that their voice has not been heard. This Bill will redress that grievance and give them a real chance to feel that they are part of government.

I want to reinforce the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) for culture. It tends to get forgotten in these debates. I was born in England but have gone to live in Wales. In sixth-century Britain, in a place called Cartraeth, the Welsh poet Aneurin wrote about a family of 24 brothers who went to war while their one sister stayed at home waiting for her

[Ms Jackie Lawrence]

brothers to return. It is all described in a famous Welsh poem. When I learned Welsh, it was brought home to me that Welsh history is also part of my history as an English person. The place is now known as Catterick, in Yorkshire; in the sixth-century, everyone in Britain spoke Welsh. It is the Brythonic language from which the very word Britain comes. It may be that Opposition Members feel that that gives their contributions to the debate more substance since none of them represents a Welsh constituency. Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty, was born in Wales. That may come as a shock to Conservative Members.

I want to refer to the comments of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: May I add to the Britishness of the issue raised by my hon. Friend? She has been talking about the first recorded Welsh poem, "The Song of Aneurin", which dates from about 600 AD. There are two curious facts about it. First, not only were England and Wales Welsh-speaking at that time—so was lowland Scotland. Aneurin was born and based in Edinburgh. The court he had left in order to fight the invading Anglo-Saxons at Catterick was in Edinburgh, because, as I have said, southern Scotland was Welsh-speaking. It is that Aneurin after whom Aneurin Bevan is named because David Bevan, Aneurin Bevan's father, was interested in early Welsh poetry.

Ms Lawrence: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution.

Mr. Morgan: Not a lot of people know that.

Ms Lawrence: In the approaches to the Pennines, which is the area from which I originally come, farmers have a system for counting sheep which uses specific words. Those words are almost identical to mediaeval Welsh, lending support to the fact that much of Britain owes a great deal to Wales.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills was rather scathing in his comments on the Minister's lifelong commitment to political action. I became politically active 25 years ago when I was a parent with three young children. I was tired of seeing middle-aged men in pinstripe suits making decisions that had absolutely no bearing on what I wanted for myself or my family. Looking at the Opposition Benches today, one could be forgiven for thinking that nothing has really changed.

Mr. Jenkin: It seems that the hon. Lady is lamenting the fact that, over the centuries, most of Britain has been swamped by a European culture of one sort or another—the Saxons, the Romans, the Danes, the Flemings and the French. I am afraid that Britain is a multicultural society, but Wales is a welcome part of it.

Ms Lawrence: Indeed, we are a multicultural society. I was not referring at any stage to invasion from abroad; I was simply trying to impress upon Conservative Members the debt that they owe to the Welsh nation for what England, and Britain generally, has become.

On a more serious note, among the submissions that I have received about this Bill, the one from the Welsh Local Government Association makes a fundamental point. It says:

"Let there be no doubt, the success of Wales depends on the vitality of its local democracy. It is only through democracy that people in Wales gain the experience of sharing in the control of all those circumstances that affect them as individuals and as communities."

I am pleased to say that clauses 110 to 114, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan), will go a long way to address those fears, but there can be no greater condemnation of what has happened in Wales during the 18 years of Conservative government than the fact that local democracy was whittled away and powers were centralised or handed over to unelected bodies full of Secretary of State appointees.

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Lawrence: I will not give way at this stage.

Many appointments made by the Secretary of State were of people who had been firmly rejected by the Welsh electorate in local and parliamentary elections. A prime example was the appointment of a former Member for Cardiff, Central almost immediately after his defeat at the 1992 election as chairman of the local health authority. One might say that that is jobs for the boyos. Such action demonstrated a blatant disregard for the will and opinion of the people of Wales. The establishment of the assembly will, at last, provide the means for those opinions to be translated into open and accountable action.

The Welsh people have always shown a great commitment to public service and to public services. For example, community hospitals have been established throughout Wales, libraries have been set up in mining communities and local education authorities provide nursery places for more than 90 per cent. of four-year-olds. No special funding from the Government has been allocated to nursery provision; provision has been made because of a local commitment to education. That local choice and prioritisation was ignored and overruled centrally by the previous Government in their determination to put in place nursery vouchers throughout the United Kingdom—robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Under the current Government plans for the Welsh Assembly, the £7 billion allocated to Wales from central Government will be distributed by the people of Wales for the benefit of the people of Wales, according to their priorities. It will not be the same as under the former Government, when it was distributed by a Secretary of State for Wales who did not even represent a Welsh constituency. It was done behind closed doors according to criteria set by the Government, often ignoring the wishes and aspirations of the 2 million-plus people who live in Wales.

It has been accepted by everyone in the House—and it was acknowledged in yesterday's debate—that there has already been significant administrative devolution to Wales. When Welsh Members ask about health, education, agriculture, roads, planning and the environment and employment and economic development initiatives, they are directed to Ministers at the Welsh Office rather than to their centralised departmental counterparts at Westminster. However, Opposition Members may not be fully aware of that, since none of them represents a Welsh constituency—or a Scottish constituency for that matter.

There is a specific Welsh dimension to all those policy areas, not least because we are a bilingual society. That is acknowledged in the administrative devolution.

What is lacking—the Bill will finally establish this—is democratic devolution to accompany that administrative devolution. That is important to address the concerns of organisations such as the Welsh Local Government Association and to meet the needs of areas such as mine in Pembrokeshire where, often, we feel peripheral and forgotten.

That peripherality has been accentuated during the past two decades with the former Government's dogmatic insistence on market forces ruling the day. During the past few years, different areas of the United Kingdom have, within the context of unregulated markets, been effectively like hyenas round a carcase. Those nearest the carcase get the largest bite, while those on the outside are left with the remnants, if anything. The establishment of the assembly and the restoration of democracy to Welsh decision making at strategic level will address that deficit for Wales in general and for rural areas such as Preseli, which I represent.

At the beginning of my speech, I quoted from the Welsh Local Government Association which said:

"The success of Wales depends on the vitality of its local democracy."

Nowhere is that more evident than in employment and job creation. As democracy has been removed during the past 18 years, so there has been a slide in Wales's gross domestic product as a percentage of the UK average. Pembrokeshire provides, yet again, a graphic example. In 1984, Pembrokeshire's GDP per head was 84 per cent. of the UK average; in 1994, it was just under 72 per cent.

In practical terms, that means that one in four males of working age in the town of Milford Haven is without work. Oil refineries and Ministry of Defence establishments have closed. We have had to watch the impact of a catalogue of disasters for farmers, including BSE and unfair treatment by the former Government compared with that given to farmers in England. Admittedly the former Government put in place a west Wales task force to attempt to address the Ministry of Defence closures. That body was given a title but, unfortunately, it had no significant funds to tackle the unemployment problem. Despite the noble efforts of its director, it was labelled the west Wales task farce.

For west Wales, the assembly offers the chance for a real voice and positive action. The new economic powerhouse, under the auspices of the assembly, will have a remit to address our specific problems. Not only will it finally give our area the benefit of the expertise of the former Development Board for Rural Wales—which, unfortunately, did not cover Pembrokeshire—the new body will have a greater remit to assist indigenous businesses. That is vital, as it is those indigenous businesses which provide real hope for sustainable economic development and the resulting job creation.

The Country Landowners Association has made clear its view that the Assembly offers

"great opportunity to provide better government in Wales and a strong voice for Wales in Britain and in Europe."

That reinforces my point that there are more microbusinesses in rural than in urban areas. There is evidence that, until now, those businesses have been, as the CLA put it, ill served by the bodies set up by the previous Administration. The CLA has 6,000 members in Wales, the majority of whom own 100 acres or less, but they account for more than half of the rural area of Wales and they are active participants in the economy of rural areas.

In January, a group called the business forum on devolution—whose members include the chairman of an independent television company, the chief executive of a large construction company and the head of one of Wales's largest international haulage companies—came out firmly in support of devolution. It campaigned for a yes vote in the referendum on the basis that a Welsh Assembly would offer real hope for improving Wales's economic position, which has suffered such a decline during the past two decades.

Those examples—from local government, small rural businesses and the larger business sector—demonstrate the considered opinion that a Welsh Assembly will give Wales a necessary economic boost, prepare it for the future and ensure that it is not trapped in a time warp.

Talking of time warps, I remember listening to the radio when the date of the general election was announced and hearing, with some amusement, that Scottish Members remained Members for a couple of days longer than either Welsh or English Members once the writ was moved. I recall being told that it was because time had to be allowed for a messenger on horseback to ride from Westminster to Edinburgh to deliver the writ—a rather amusing parliamentary example of a time warp, which there may or may not be moves afoot to change.

Mr. Morgan: It did not do the Tories any good, did it?

Ms Lawrence: Whatever, the process of government evolved. It did so in the past and will continue to do so in future.

Mr. Dalyell: I want to put on the record the fact that we were not paid any more.

Ms Lawrence: That is reassuring.

The process of government will continue to evolve if it is to meet the changing needs of the people of Britain. Unfortunately, Conservative Members have demonstrated their reluctance to remove themselves from their own particular time warp and work positively and practicably towards meeting the needs of all the people of Britain.

For the people of Wales, the establishment of a Welsh Assembly will provide the means finally to get up off our knees after 18 years of deprivation and marginalisation. It will prepare us to tackle the demands of the 21st century.

8.43 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I shall enjoy this opportunity to put the Conservative party's case, as we have been vilified for two days. I am part Welsh: my mother's family comes from Wrexham, my house looks across the border and I cross into Wales every day.

I do not recognise the Wales that has been described by Labour Members. I have known the town of Wrexham since I was four. It has been transformed in the past 20 years. The simple truth is that the last Labour Government and the following four Conservative Governments were faced with the fact that the two main pillars of the economy—coal and steel—had collapsed.

The institutions brought in by the Conservative Government and especially by a decisive, strong Secretary of State have produced huge dividends. It is ironic that

[Mr. Owen Paterson]

President Chirac has today welcomed the largest automobile investment into Europe since the Labour Government came to office, but it has gone to Valenciennes, not Britain. Last time Toyota was looking at this country, David Hunt went in person to Tokyo and met Dr. Toyoda himself; he played a crucial role in bringing Japanese investment to this country. That should not be dismissed.

Wrexham has been transformed, new industries have developed and prosperity will follow. It will take time, considering the very low depths to which Wales fell following the collapse of its old industries. There is no public support—no general feeling in the parts that I know in north-east Wales and on the border—for devolution to a distant talking house, probably somewhere in south Wales.

Shropshire, Powys, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire have similar economies. There is commonality in the activities of those areas. It seems to be the nationalist areas and the great and the good of Wales who are driving the devolution project. If hon. Members went to Oswestry market they would not find anyone who wanted a far away assembly; they want lower taxes and lower business rates, as we have heard today. That was reflected in the referendum.

I know that raising this point grieves Labour Members, but the referendum was a fiddle. It is outrageous that a move that will irrevocably alter the United Kingdom's constitution should be pushed through without consulting 85 per cent. of the population.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, Parliament being sovereign, it did not dictate that there should be a threshold for the referendum? In those circumstances, is it not a case of put up or shut up?

Mr. Paterson: No, it is not. The constitution of the United Kingdom belongs to all the people of the United Kingdom. Labour is desperately hanging on to the tiddly widdly majority it achieved and ignoring the real result. The eastern side of Wales voted overwhelmingly against an assembly—for example, Monmouthshire at 67.9 per cent. and Vale of Glamorgan at 63.3 per cent. I will not list all the areas, but I cannot resist mentioning Cardiff—the capital city where the gravy train will spill forth even though the negotiations have gone wrong—where there is not overwhelming support for an assembly.

I declare an interest as I sit on the Welsh Affairs Committee. We have interesting meetings. The consensus appears to be that those who are in public life in Wales and those who are involved with the great public institutions are in favour of an assembly, but the nearer we get to the coal face—the people in the real world trying to earn a living—the more different is the view.

The chairman of the Welsh Confederation of British Industry, Mr. Ian Spratling, said:

"Devolution will overburden business with costly bureaucracy, which will slow down and politicise important economic decisions."

That quotation appeared in *The Guardian* in August. Last week, Dr. Elizabeth Haywood, the regional director of the CBI, said:

"There is no economic imperative for establishing a Welsh Assembly."

Mr. Livsey: Does the hon. Gentleman recollect that, during the referendum campaign, the CBI was split over whether to support a Welsh Assembly? It therefore decided to take no specific line. That is a matter of record and he should take account of that.

Mr. Paterson: That is a pretty feeble endorsement.

When I asked Dr. Haywood whether a Welsh Assembly would be good value, she said:

"It has not been proven to us that it is good value."

Ms Lawrence: As a colleague on the Welsh Affairs Committee, I remind the hon. Gentleman that I pointed out that part of the evidence given in public by Dr. Haywood was incorrect. She raised the issue of planning permission for a new power station in the Pembroke area and said that she believed it to be a planning issue. If fact, the matter would have been determined by the Department of Trade and Industry under the Electricity Acts. I found that disconcerting and said so. If that is her level of understanding of the responsibility of an assembly, it is difficult to take account of opinion based on that misunderstanding.

Mr. Paterson: As the hon. Lady's constituents voted no, I shall speak for them. I also speak for business, having spent my whole career in business.

Dr. Haywood continued:

"It has not been proven to us that it is good value . . . Many businesses see it as an overgrown local authority, a large county council. It is very difficult to see why that is going to be beneficial."

We have heard much about quangos today. Dr. Haywood also said that quangos

"delivered very good value for money in most instances".

The recent history of western Europe shows that we need less government, thus fewer politicians and bureaucrats, which would mean less tax and less interference. One of the biggest blasts of fresh air on the Welsh Affairs Committee was a visit from the Federation of Small Businesses. They made it clear that the federation did not see salvation in another tier of government or in more interference. The federation wants less government and less tax.

The assembly will present the average constituent with a problem. If he has a grievance, to whom should he go? Should he write to his district councillor, his directly elected assembly man, or one of the party hacks who is in post because of proportional representation, which has been exposed for what it is by Conservative Members? Should he go to his Member of Parliament who, apparently, will have plenty of time on his hands? He could even go to his Member of the European Parliament. There is going to be a muddle. The proposals have not been thought out. It is not even clear what the great panjandrum himself—the Secretary of State for Wales—will get up to. That is sad, because the past few years have shown that having a decisive Secretary of State has worked well and provided real advantages.

Clauses 39, 80 and 107 contain real grounds for conflict. Let us move away from the starry world that we are now in—a world where there is a Government formed by one party with a large majority, who will probably also get a majority in the assembly. Let us read those clauses again, imagining a coalition in this Parliament and a hostile assembly—possibly a nationalist-dominated assembly, with one of the members of the coalition as Secretary of State. Those clauses do not make good

reading in such circumstances. When one makes major changes in business, one has a duty to exercise due diligence and to consider the worst case. I do not believe that the Bill takes account of the worst case.

Quangos have been much criticised. They were created by Parliament and could have been reformed by Parliament. There is no reason why the nature of the quangos could not be brought back to the House for reform.

I must mention the English, who have not been much discussed. I used to go to Czechoslovakia a great deal just after the wall came down. Whenever I went, the Slovaks were pushing for more from the Czechs and in the end the Czechs' patience snapped. It would be tragic if that happened in this case.

Looking at the issue from Shropshire, I believe that the Barnett formula is beneficial for Wales. There is a fiscal deficit in Wales: according to the Library, £15.6 billion has been spent and £9.9 billion is raised locally, which gives a deficit of £5.7 billion. However, £609 more is spent on every Welshman than on every English person. That is accepted as long as the Union continues, but I already detect rumblings in England.

In Shropshire, the council tax for a band D property was £665.69 last year. Over the border in Powys—a similarly sparsely populated rural county—it was only £426.29, or nearly £240 less, yet spending on education in Shropshire was £331.35 per head compared with a massive £474 in Powys.

I am genuinely worried that the talk on the Labour Benches is divisive and will hype up English nationalism, which is currently dormant. This exercise depends on the acquiescence of the English. I urge Labour Front Benchers to be very careful, because everything will come tumbling down if the English do not acquiesce.

There is a starry-eyed belief that 60 new assembly men, who will probably be former county councillors, will have wonderful powers. The powers of the assembly have been grossly exaggerated; for example, it has been suggested that the problems of the health service will be sorted out.

I submit that the £100 million that it will cost to set up and run the assembly in the first four years could be spent in other ways. You could buy a district general hospital, fully equipped; you could buy 25,000 hip replacements; you could buy 2,000 ambulances; and with the £20 million annual running cost, you could pay for another 285 consultants or for 1,000 nurses. There has been much talk about improving care for the elderly. Suddenly, the 60 wonder men—this is the panto season—will come with their magic wands and sort out care in the community. I would rather see the £20 million annual running costs spent as follows: you could keep 1,130 people in a nursing home or 1,750 people in a residential home—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The term "you" refers to the occupant of the Chair and implies that the hon. Gentleman is drawing me into his argument. Perhaps he could refrain from doing so.

Mr. Paterson: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Finally, farming is in crisis in Wales. Surely the £100 million could be spent on farming rather than on what I believe will be a talking shop. I think the assembly will be divisive and begin to break up the United Kingdom. It will be a distinct disadvantage to my constituents in that secondary legislation in the assembly will have a direct effect on them but I will have absolutely no influence on having it changed. I believe that we are creating a Europe of regions. I shall vote against the Bill.

8.56 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), I can claim no Welsh connections, but the part of Cornwall that my family comes from yields to no Welsh valley in the depth and strength of its Celtic roots. I have lived in Cornwall long enough to know how people on the periphery of our United Kingdom can feel neglected and misunderstood by central Government, whatever the reality of their situation. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) spoke of the Unionist perspective, and I speak from the perspective of another region of the United Kingdom. The Bill is about more than Wales. With respect to some hon. Members who have spoken, I have to say that the Bill is about how we represent every part of this great Union of ours.

Shortly after I was elected to Parliament this spring, I received a timely reminder of the damage that can be done if the representation of the far reaches of our country is mishandled. In 1497, a Cornish smith called An Goff roused his fellows and marched all the way to London to protest about the treatment of the Cornish tin miners and others. On the way, they made a strategic stop at Guildford. This summer, 500 years later, we re-enacted the skirmish that took place in Guildford between An Goff's men and the horse of Henry VII, in which, I am glad to say, the Cornish were victorious, as they were this summer. To commemorate the event, we unveiled a granite monument. As a result, there is a corner of Guildford that will be for ever Cornwall.

Sadly, after their successful skirmish in Guildford, Goff's Cornishmen went on to London to take on the Government, where they were hanged, drawn and quartered. After my political skirmish in Guildford this spring, it was with some trepidation that I came here to take on the Government. However, times have changed and we do not resort to such violent methods.

That march had a political message. I cannot fail to notice that at no time during the past 18 years did we see anyone marching from Wales to demand that the previous Government give them a Welsh Assembly. We have not seen a single banner unfurled in Hyde park saying, "Give Wales gender balance in politics." Some people have marched from Wales to Hyde park this summer. They were there to say, "Listen to us," because the new Government are not listening to people from Wales or any of the more distant regions.

Mr. Ainger: Parliament is sovereign.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Indeed. If people had felt strongly about devolution during those 18 years, they would have marched to Parliament to protest. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger) knows better.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

There has been little evidence of support for the Bill. We can tell even more from the apathy that was shown in the referendum on 18 September. As has been pointed out, it was in many ways a false vote. It is fair to say that the new Government bought the result. They refused to provide money for both sides to put their case, as has always been customary in elections. The disparity between the spending of the yes and no campaigns was accentuated to the point of invalidating the result. Some £170,000 was spent on sending propaganda putting the Government's case to every household in Wales. The Government were frit at the prospect of the no campaign also having a chance to put its case to every household in Wales.

I am glad that the Secretary of State has discovered that not everyone can be bought. Cardiff city council cannot be bought. That is a good lesson for him. I understand that he is offering it only £3.5 million. We should keep that in perspective. The Government are renowned for their extravagance. The wallpaper in the Lord Chancellor's apartments is to cost £60,000. That £3.5 million would barely cover the wallpaper bill when the new crowd came to redecorate Cardiff city hall. I do not blame the burgers of Cardiff city council for treating it as a piffling offer. I wish them well in their efforts.

There is a more sinister way in which we fear that the Secretary of State plans to buy the future government of Wales, as he tried to buy the result of the referendum. I refer to clause 16, which provides that in the first instance the Secretary of State will set the level of salary for the new Assemblymen, many of whom will have been selected under the invidious party list system. There has been some debate about whether we should have a part-time or a full-time Assembly. With respect to our Welsh cousins, judging from the length of speeches that we have had in this debate, there will be no possibility of a part-time Assembly: debating in the new Assembly will definitely be a full-time occupation.

I now turn to a worrying aspect. We heard from the Secretary of State that the party list system will be open and that the candidature selection will be open handed on the part of the Labour party. No doubt it will be as open-handed as the manner in which the right hon. Gentleman treated the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) when they had a famous disagreement. The truth is that it will not be a people's assembly, but a party assembly. It is very much the intention of the Labour party that it should be a Labour party assembly.

In case that does not work, the powers of the assembly are very restricted. Clause 107 says quite explicitly:

"If the Secretary of State considers that any action proposed to be taken by the Assembly would be incompatible with"

certain obligations,

"he may by order direct that the proposed action shall not be taken."

It continues:

"he may by order direct the Assembly to take . . . action"

that he feels is required by other obligations of government and

"he may by order revoke . . . legislation."

So much for devolution—the Secretary of State is not elected by the people of Wales. He is an unelected head of Wales and he is verily the viceroy of the valleys.

I predict that the Secretary of State will build himself not an assembly, but a veritable viceregal palace. When he has ordered the wallpaper, I hope that when he orders the fabric he will consider the textile industry in Wales. I know a little about the textile industry in Wales as I used to order products from it. I have a very strong fear that the introduction of the minimum wage will cause severe job losses in that industry.

Mr. Paterson: There are rumours in Oswestry that the carpet will cost £125 per foot. Is that good value?

Mr. St. Aubyn: It is not good value in Oswestry. I have been to Shropshire and the people there have a savvy sense of good value. Nor will it be good value in Wales, particularly for those who lose their jobs. Earlier this year, when I asked the Minister about the effects of the minimum wage on employment in the clothing industry in Wales, he could not give me a single figure. Perhaps he will be able to do a little better tonight.

If the people of Wales object to the level of the minimum wage, they will be able to do nothing about it in the Welsh Assembly. They will have to march on London to make their protest. We can well imagine the frustration that that will cause.

We have heard many complaints about the previous Government, but we should not forget that a Conservative Home Secretary—the former Member for Penrith, Lord Whitelaw—instigated Welsh language television. The previous Government did not ignore Welsh culture.

Having moved to a system of unitary authorities, the real effect of the Bill is to reinstate a second layer of local government. Let me make a point on behalf of the people I know in Cornwall and the people I represent in Guildford. If the people of Wales choose to have a super county council instead of county councils, that is their decision, but I ask the Government not to impose regional government on England as a result. People in Cornwall do not want to be dominated by Devon and Dorset, and people in Surrey do not want to be dominated by the much larger counties of Sussex and Kent.

9.8 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): I am grateful for the chance to take part in what is undoubtedly an historic debate. There is no doubt that anyone glancing through "A Voice for Wales" will find it superficially attractive. The Prime Minister talks eloquently about the opportunity for the people of Wales to have control back over their own lives. The Secretary of State waxes lyrical about it being an opportunity. The rhetoric in the document is high, but its reality is low and its logic is deeply flawed.

For members of my party, after not an astounding victory on 1 May, a little humility becomes us. After 18 years, it took us quite a long time to get quite so arrogant and quite so out of touch. Those qualities have come in just a few weeks to Labour Members. None the less, we should acknowledge that no constitution is perfect. Our own is far from perfect. Change is something that we should always acknowledge. Our constitution should continue to evolve.

If we look at our nation state, we can recognise instantly that it is no natural phenomenon. It has arisen over hundreds of years; it is an historical achievement.

The sadness that I feel today is due to the fact that in a few moments we shall almost certainly begin to unravel that great historical achievement.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) spoke of the relevance of the United States. There is indeed such relevance in remembering how our constitution has evolved and the historic achievement. It was a row in the 18th century about a legal framework—a reaction to Britain's centralising authority—that led to the separation of the colonies of the United States from Britain. We are now two very different countries. I fear that today we are beginning on a path that may lead to the separation of England from Wales in the distant—or even not too distant—future.

The purpose of the assembly, it is claimed, is somewhat symbolic: to give Wales a national identity. Although I do not agree with that, why not go the whole hog and give Wales the same as the Labour Government would give to Scotland? Where is the logic in denying to Wales what the Government are giving to Scotland?

We could discuss such matters in greater detail if they were to be taken in Committee on the Floor of the House, but that has been denied to hon. Members. We might ask why. I suggest one reason: if one begins to examine the Bill in detail, one begins to realise that the Bill, like the White Paper, wants to look both ways. It wants to say to the people of Wales, "Yes, you may have a voice," but it provides no meaningful mechanism by which that voice can be delivered.

At the same time, the Secretary of State for Wales said only yesterday:

"This United Kingdom Parliament is sovereign. The provisions of the Bill do not challenge that sovereignty in any way—nor could they."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 671.]

How can he say that? How can the Bill on the one hand be a voice for Wales and yet on the other not affect the sovereignty of the House? We find a clue to resolving that question in the Bill. We find the power for a Secretary of State to dismiss the voice of Wales at the behest of an English house in Downing street when the Prime Minister so demands.

If the assembly is a voice for Wales, what right should Westminster have to question that voice? If Wales is to have a voice on its economy, should it not be allowed to decide its own economic policy? If Wales is to be allowed to decide its economic policy, why should it not be allowed to set its own level of minimum wage? After all, inward investment is directly related to the idea of a minimum wage. Yet it seems that Wales will be denied that, even though rhetorically it is told that it will have a voice.

If Wales so wishes, why should it not be allowed to maintain the maintenance grant for students? Will the students of Wales be allowed such a voice? No, they will not. Will Wales be allowed to set its own level of taxation, as in Scotland? No, it will not. Where is the logic and consistency? Where is the argument that will convince the people of Wales that the Bill is workable and fair?

Many hon. Members have mentioned Europe. The Bill and the White Paper talk about the people of Wales sharing the benefits. However, the people of Wales will not be invited to the table to decide how those benefits will be constructed. They can come to the table only by special invitation from Ministers. Are the people of Wales not good enough to come to the table? Why will they not be allowed a proper representative voice that is enshrined constitutionally in the Bill? What is wrong with the people of Wales?

The Bill has an inherent flaw. It contains the idea of taxation without representation, and we know where that will end. It is an end that I do not wish to see. The Bill is dangerous. It weakens—it does not strengthen. It offers a prospect, as the Secretary of State said yesterday, but it offers no mechanism to deliver that prospect. The Bill will breed, along with discontent, dissent.

What will happen in the future when a Labour Government at Westminster make decisions about resources for the Welsh Assembly? What will happen when the Welsh Assembly is not controlled by a Labour majority? Will the people of Wales still be sure of getting the same resources that they have at the moment—20 per cent. more on average than the people of England have enjoyed for the past few years?

The Bill raises questions about resources, but the people of Wales will find no comfort in clause 80. The Secretary of State is obliged only to make payments to the assembly

"from time to time . . . as he may determine."

The White Paper speaks of the Barnett formula; yet it is only mentioned in the explanatory and financial memorandum of the Bill. Why? The people of Wales have a right to know today why the Barnett formula is not enshrined in the Bill.

I am not against change—a state without change has no ability to conserve itself. However, I am against fraudulent claims and damage, and the Bill is wilfully damaging to our constitution. It is disingenuous. It will weaken us and undermine the strength of our country, our institutions and our sovereignty. It will dissolve the bonds of our Union. It promises a better tomorrow, but it does not provide the means to deliver it.

The Bill will nurture discontent and dissent. It will lead, as hon. Members have said, to demand from some for separatism. If we vote for the Bill today, we shall encourage a canker in our constitution. The sadness of this historic night is that we shall begin to unravel the sovereignty of this great institution. We shall begin to separate the bonds of our Union and if the Bill receives a Second Reading we shall transfer the sovereignty of our country from certainty to a short-term lease.

9.18 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): We have enjoyed several excellent speeches in the debate, including that from my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward). He spoke with passion, and it has been striking that passionate defences of our constitution have been greeted with derision and contempt by the supporters of the Bill. Never let it be said that there is no place for adversarial politics in post-Marxist Britain, because there is a deep divide between the pros and the antis in the devolution debate in Wales.

Two speeches will live most in my mind. One was that of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who made an outstanding speech today. The other was that of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), who asked a prophetic question: will the members of the assembly put the Union first? That is at the heart of the debate. The present constitutional arrangements have provided Wales with stability, and everyone must fear instability above all.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

In the Bill, the Government have failed to provide a framework for the future stability of Wales, for stability within Wales, which has been left so divided on devolution, for the stability of Welsh finances, upon which public services, the Welsh Development Agency and reasonable levels of local taxation depend, and above all for the stability of Wales within the UK rather than as one of many regions of a federal Europe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) mentioned in his thoughtful comments.

The Secretary of State referred to the supremacy of this Parliament, and said that it was sovereign. When he says that everyone recognises the sovereignty of this Parliament, he is not correct. During his speech yesterday, the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) sidestepped the issue of the sovereignty of this Parliament. He says that sovereignty rests with the people in a democracy. It is true that, if the people wanted to overthrow the sovereignty of Parliament, they could do so, but it should not be our purpose to enable that to happen by mistake or by constitutional sleight of hand.

The Government are technically correct in saying that the legal supremacy of Parliament is not affected by the Bill, but it may be affected by the events which follow as a result of the legislation. Sovereignty has a political quality. At a time when the Government are pressing through legislation that could pave the way for the separation of Wales from the rest of the United Kingdom, a clause reinforcing the ultimate supremacy of Parliament would cost nothing but would make the intentions of Parliament absolutely clear. If the Government believe so strongly in the Union, why should they be reticent about having that expressed in the Bill?

As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) pointed out, we can only surmise from the Government's reluctance that the Secretary of State dares not confront the nationalists to whom he has sold his political soul in this endeavour. I agree with the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell), who told the House that he could not understand why his Government had got into bed with the nationalists. The Government are laying the foundations for confusion about the very basis of the United Kingdom's constitution.

That confusion will not be the least resolved by loose comparisons with other nations. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) invoked the example of Spain. Spain should be a cautionary tale to reckless constitutional reformers. It is a seductive comparison for British regionalisers, because in Spain powers have been devolved progressively since 1978 to varying degrees and to different regions, as proposed in the United Kingdom.

Spain is not a federation, but this rolling decentralisation has taken on its own momentum, with different entities seeking to reassert their differences from other provinces. Eight regions have established autonomous departments to conduct their own external policy. The Catalans, the Basques and even the Galicians have become ever more demanding of more autonomy. The lesson of Spain is clear: a rolling programme of devolution generates a process of inter-regional competition, leading to precisely the instability that we should all fear. Yet such a rolling programme is the very essence of the Government's devolution policy. The Secretary of State confirmed this when he said yesterday:

"devolution is not an event, but a process."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 677.]

What is most striking about this debate is how many speakers have referred to—or made varying interpretations of—the referendum. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West intervened several times with force to explain that there is a difference between an ordinary election and a decision about a major change in our constitutional settlement. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) also spoke with eloquence and passion on this issue.

Many hon. Members who support the Bill seem touchy on the subject. None of the supporters seems to want to acknowledge that many of the people who elected them probably voted no. The hon. Members for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence) and for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) all consign the half a million no voters to the status of non-persons in their Orwellian world of pro-assembly political correctness.

Even Ministers should feel some pangs that the enthusiasm of Welsh people for this Bill is less than convincing. For the Secretary of State to say, as he did yesterday, that the referendum

"did not produce a decisive decision, but the people of Wales gave a clear decision"—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 672.]

suggests that he has a shaky grasp of the English language as well as of the principles of democratic consent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) was right to describe the vote as false. The Secretary of State is fond of assuring us, as he did last week at Question Time:

"75 per cent. of the people of Wales did not oppose the creation of the Assembly".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 338.]

I invite the House to consider how much happier he would have been had the turnout been, say, only 40 per cent. with only 20 per cent. of the electorate voting yes. Using the sort of democratic logic of which Saddam Hussein would be proud, the right hon. Gentleman would cheerfully claim a yet bigger mandate for his plans—that 80 per cent. of the people did not oppose the creation of an assembly.

Now that the text of the Bill is before us, nothing can detract from the brutal realities to which our reasoned amendment refers. The morning after the referendum, the Prime Minister promised

"to allay the fears that were expressed by people."

Why did he bother? Nothing in the Bill and nothing that we have heard in the last two days' debate has provided a crumb of comfort to those who declined to support the Government's proposals for a Welsh Assembly on 18 September. That is the basis of our reasoned amendment. Our contention remains that Wales has little or nothing to gain from devolution, but everything to lose.

We heard much about money in the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) described, each of the assembly's enthusiasts has the same

idea—that money will become available for their priority. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, is determined that the assembly should put right what he describes as the third-world road communications system in Wales. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) rightly asks where all the money is to come from. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) ably demonstrated how, when it comes to money, the assembly will be the poodle of Westminster. Money is likely to be at the heart of the disagreements between the majorities and the minorities in Wales, as well as a constant bone of contention between Whitehall and the assembly.

Let us look again at Spain to see how they argue about money. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and others pointed out, the security of Welsh public spending so lavishly advertised in the White Paper is simply and altogether lacking in the Bill. Only now that the Bill has finally been published are the people of Wales allowed to know that, contrary to the assurances of the White Paper, the totality of the assembly's financing will be at the complete discretion of Whitehall.

What does that mean in practice? It means that every spending programme and decision can be second-guessed by Whitehall. As now, public services in Wales will depend on an annual public spending settlement—a round negotiated in the Cabinet—but with one crucial difference: whereas today the Secretary of State sits at the Cabinet table as an equal, he will be but a cipher of his former self once he has devolved all his powers to the assembly. It is one thing for the Treasury to negotiate with a Minister who has all the levers of policy at his disposal—he can adjust his departmental priorities as a concession to the Treasury in return for securing the funding that he needs—but it is quite another for the Secretary of State for Wales to be faced with the new and unparalleled challenge of negotiating with the Treasury as a spending Minister with no policies under his control, and therefore no concessions to make.

Money for any programme that does not meet the Treasury's requirement can be held hostage: a particular inward investment project, a new hospital or school, a road scheme will have to be bartered for, without any effective final appeal to the Cabinet where real Ministers with real jobs will be able to argue their case so much more effectively than the spending eunuchs from Scotland and Wales.

Herein lies the most potent danger for Wales and its economic stability: as Wales loses its voice when it matters most, at the very moment when expectations have been so raised by the illusory prospects of devolution, what Furies will be unleashed in consequence and what plots will be hatched by nationalists eager to exploit the discontent? They will be the ultimate beneficiaries of any consequent disappointment or despair.

Against that background, it is quite something to produce a Bill which provides for a national assembly for Wales and yet neither specifies precisely which powers are to be devolved nor does anything to reaffirm the supremacy of Parliament. The Bill makes no reference whatever to any means of restoring constitutional order in the event of breakdown. It appears to represent the reverse.

The Bill provides for the transfer of any—I emphasise any—function exercisable by Ministers of the Crown in relation to Wales. Is that devolution without boundaries? Will the Minister confirm that the Bill establishes a one-way street for such transfers? There appears to be no balancing power in the Bill to restore the powers of Westminster if necessary.

Mr. Ron Davies: It is not needed.

Mr. Jenkin: That bears out the foreboding of Government Members who have spoken of devolution in terms of the Balkanisation or unbundling of Britain, and have warned that we are embarking on a constitutional magical mystery tour. Their prescience before seeing the terms of the Bill was admirable. The chill of their words is now all the more striking.

If there is to be devolved government for Wales, we want a scheme that will work. To achieve that, it must be clear, practical, have some prospect of stability and enjoy the broad and informed consent of the people. The Bill satisfies none of those criteria. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) was right to say that it was the start, not the end, of many years of argument.

Far from giving Wales a voice in Britain and in Europe, where so many of the key decisions affecting the future of Wales are made, the Bill looks set to cut Wales off from the main stream of European and British politics, leaving the Welsh to voice the concerns of their now divided nation to nobody but themselves. Look what happened when Northern Ireland was given Stormont: the long tradition of politicians such as Castlereagh, who played a leading role in the governance of the United Kingdom, was directly ended. Northern Irish politics drew in upon itself, and the parties and politics ceased to have much to do with Westminster. Is that the new destiny for Wales? The Conservatives in Wales are determined to avert such a disaster.

We shall fight for sense and certainty in Wales, whatever constitutional contraptions the Labour party is determined to create in pursuit of its sectional interests. Wales has played a long and vital role in the history of the United Kingdom, and it has benefited accordingly. That must continue. I should have thought that Ministers would assent to that proposition.

We shall argue long and hard for the improvements that the Bill needs in the interests of Wales. We hope that the Government may yet find the humility to listen and to accept that their creations are not beyond perfection. Then we shall once again put our shoulder to the wheel of elections in Wales, to ensure that sensible voices are raised in the assembly for the benefit of Wales. That is our pledge to the House, to Wales and to the United Kingdom as a whole.

We have set out our concerns and sought reassurances. The Prime Minister said that those reassurances would be forthcoming in the Bill, but none has emerged. That is why I invite right hon. and hon. Members to support the reasoned amendment and to decline to give the Bill a Second Reading.

9.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): We have had another day of wide-ranging, interesting debate. It is striking that the

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

Opposition have played the same old gramophone, which does not enable them to face reality. The reality is that there is not a single person on the Conservative Benches who can stand up as an elected Member from Wales. All we had was a diatribe against the general election result in May and the referendum result on 18 September. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There must be no interruptions from Front Benchers.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank Labour Members for their contributions. I also thank the hon. Members for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). While I see little prospect of the fast-track procedure becoming reality, it is at least something that can be considered, a constructive contribution to the debate. All we have had from the Tories is a look back to the old British empire and the way in which the Union was organised in the 19th century.

The turnout argument was repeated. We must consider it in the context of the fact that 80 per cent. of the people who voted in the general election voted for parties committed to a referendum on a Welsh Assembly. In the referendum, it is true that almost 50 per cent. of the people did not vote. It can be argued that those people were content and did not feel the need to take part, that they were bemused and did not feel they had enough knowledge to vote, or that they had full confidence in the Labour Government to deliver an assembly. The overall impact is that only 25 per cent. of people voted against having one.

It is the job of this Parliament to carry through the White Paper, which had a majority, and to take account of the issues that have been raised. I am pleased that my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan), for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) and for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence) all tried to advance positive proposals to improve the Bill.

Mr. Shepherd: The Welsh electorate were directly asked whether they supported the Government's proposals. Only 25 per cent. said yes and 25 per cent. said no. As for the 50 per cent. who did not vote, every constitutional arrangement from that in ancient Greece onwards has accepted that that does not represent support for a proposition. That is the reality.

Mr. Griffiths: The reality is that the House enacted a referendum Bill that set the rules. Those rules were met, and however much the hon. Gentleman may be disconcerted by the result, and upset that we did not set the sort of thresholds that he recalls from ancient Greece or wherever, the fact is that this House enacted a Bill to which the Welsh people responded positively. We are now moving forward.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Griffiths: The point is that the Bill will give the people of Wales what they have lacked for so long. They will have proper controls over matters that closely affect their lives. It is about giving the assembly the wide-ranging powers of the Welsh Office, which have up to now all too often—this is what upsets Conservative Members—enabled a Secretary of State who has not been elected by Welsh constituents and who represents a minority party in Wales to have his way with the Welsh electorate. We have seen how Conservatives have abused their position. As my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence) pointed out, all too often they stuffed those people who had been defeated in elections in Wales on to Welsh quangos that ran Wales when they had no mandate to do so. So let us remember these things and let Conservative Members, who do not have a single Welsh Member, approach the subject with a little humility and recognise the result of the election.

We want to make sure that the power which was previously concentrated in London and Cardiff is given to the Welsh people and that the Government are responsive to their needs through the elected assembly. The assembly is about bringing the pervasive network of Welsh quangos under democratic control for the first time. It is about ensuring that they work efficiently to serve the needs of Wales—the whole of Wales. The assembly will replace secrecy and the threat of corruption with openness and transparency. It is about creating a national assembly for Wales and for all its people, whatever their background, whatever their views, and wherever they live in Wales.

The assembly is a new form of government, which will draw the best practice from both national and local government, but it will also innovate where there is a need for greater accountability and greater ownership by the people of Wales.

Mr. St. Aubyn: If the Minister is so confident of the case for the proposal, why did his Government not provide any money for the alternative argument put by the no campaign, so that the result of the referendum was accepted as fair by everyone?

Mr. Griffiths: Because we gave no money for the yes campaign, either. The truth of the matter is that each campaign had to provide its own resources.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Griffiths: In a moment. I want to deal with another point.

Some interesting points were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). He dealt with a number of details on constitutional relationships, transfer orders, concordats, where the sympathies of civil servants would lie, and so on. The civil servants in the assembly will serve the elected members of the assembly. They will not be servants of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will have his own small office of civil servants to provide for his role at Westminster and in Cardiff. Nor will they be servants of other Ministers in Whitehall, any more than the Welsh Office civil servants owe their loyalty to another Department now.

As for concordats, they will be voluntary matters. It will be for the Departments and the assembly to determine and agree them, but they will both have an

interest in good communications. The implementation of primary legislation will depend heavily on the secondary legislation and administrative action of the assembly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney raised several issues in the context of the Institute of Welsh Affairs report and its concerns about the relationship between civil servants, the assembly and Whitehall, which, I have to confess, rest on a rather old-fashioned view of policy-making. In the past, the influence of Wales was confined to a secret world. We know that, in future, such influence will not be exercised solely by the Secretary of State at the Cabinet table, as used to be the case, when Welsh Office civil servants were confined to confidential meetings in Whitehall.

That is not the Government's view of policy making. Unfortunately, there were leaks in the press today about the way in which we hope to open up government. It is the Government's view of policy making that, although concordats will provide for good communication and consultation, they are not the whole story. The assembly will not be bound by the Cabinet's collective responsibility. Frankly, if there are differences between Wales and London, they can be discussed openly.

The civil servants of the assembly and the Scottish Parliament will owe their allegiance to their elected members just as civil servants in Government Departments owe their allegiance to the Government of the day. There is no difficulty in principle with that. Those officials cope today with disagreements and negotiations between Departments. In future, the difference will be that there will be no need for the fiction that such conflicts do not exist. Civil servants are used to serving different masters; after all, they did so before 1 May. Under the Bill, they will continue to be governed by the civil service Order in Council and accountable for maintaining traditional civil service standards and neutrality.

Mr. Jenkin: Would the hon. Gentleman confirm that a concordat for inward investment was never going to be necessary unless there was to be devolution of the nature proposed in the Bill? Will he also confirm that the WDA and Locate in Scotland are complaining bitterly about the new restrictions that that will mean for their activities? That concordat was specifically requested by the Prime Minister—Sir George Russell, the chairman of the Northern development corporation, must be extremely proud of one of his local Members. Does the Minister agree that it is likely that those restrictions will hamper the performance of the WDA because it will now have to work to explicit rules, outside the normal collective responsibility of Cabinet Government?

Mr. Griffiths: The WDA and any other regional development agency in the United Kingdom will be bound exactly by the same rules that cover everyone else. There will be no essential difference; everything that Wales and the WDA have done so far has been within the rules which exist at British Government and European Union level.

Mr. Jenkin: Why is it complaining?

Mr. Griffiths: It is not complaining. Let me make that absolutely clear.

Mr. Paterson: Why, then, does the Confederation of British Industry fear delay in decision making from the WDA?

Mr. Griffiths: One or two members of the CBI have said that, but let me make it clear that many other business people in Wales take exactly the opposite view. It is all right for one Member from north Shropshire to call in aid one or two members of the CBI, but there are dozens of others who take an opposite view. *[Interruption.]* I am quite confident—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise from both sides of the Chamber. Only one Member should be addressing the House.

Mr. Griffiths: Given the commitment in the Bill to consult business interests, I am quite confident that the Welsh Assembly will be able to help the WDA and other organisations committed to economic development in Wales to ensure that we are successful. Let there be no doubt about that.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. Would he care to comment on the recent remarks made by the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry? She told the House:

"but it is essential that devolution should not undermine the UK's position in the wider world."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 311-12.]

That was the reason she gave for the creation of the concordat, but it will inhibit the flexibility that the WDA has always enjoyed as part of the apparatus of government directly responsible to Cabinet.

Mr. Griffiths: The WDA will not be inhibited in its role, and it will continue—in the catching phrase used by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—to bat for Britain. Let us be clear that there will be no restrictions on the way in which the WDA works after an assembly is created.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Hon. Members are slightly intrigued by those concordats; undoubtedly we will see them in due course. Will there be a concordat between the Welsh Assembly and the Treasury? If there is such a concordat, will my hon. Friend give an undertaking that the Barnett formula will be written into it?

Mr. Griffiths: I am glad that my right hon. Friend raised that issue. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] It is all part of the same thing. We need to be quite clear about the Barnett formula. Concordats agreed between the assembly and any Department will be matters for them to decide, and there will be no compulsion about them. It will be a question of seeking agreement, to ensure that the machinery of government continues working smoothly.

The explanatory and financial memorandum clearly explains that the Barnett formula will continue to be used. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) did not even understand how the Barnett formula works, or that—

[Mr. Griffiths]

[Interruption.] I remind the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward), who is shouting from a sedentary position—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) to be shouting from a sedentary position; he must be quiet. He has made his speech.

Mr. Griffiths: I thought that perhaps he was one of the wild men of Witney. Nevertheless, I remind him that, although the Barnett formula has not been enshrined in any legislation or mentioned in the explanatory memorandum of any Bill, it has managed to survive both Conservative and Labour Administrations. The fact that we have gone out of our way to explain it in this Bill's explanatory memorandum rather indicates how strongly we feel that it will continue to play its part in determining the block grant for Wales.

Mr. Ancram: Does the Minister realise that the need for the Barnett formula, or a formula of words ensuring the Welsh people that their needs will be met, arises only because of devolution? Currently, there is no need for such an assurance. Why does the Bill therefore provide that expenditure available to the Welsh Assembly will be entirely at the discretion of the Secretary of State and no one else?

Mr. Griffiths: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to make a mountain out of what is not even a molehill. The Government are clearly committed to the Barnett formula. If he is saying that the Conservative party and a possible future Conservative Government are not committed to the Barnett formula, I invite him to tell the House. The Labour Government are committed to the Barnett formula, and, as far as I am concerned, the Conservative party has not only been committed to it but will continue to be so committed. If Conservative Members are not committed to it, perhaps they will tell us why in the Bill's Committee stage. Let us be clear about the matter.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn made some points on the executive and subject committees.

Mr. Ancram: As the Minister knows, today a paper on the Barnett formula was placed in the Library. Will he tell the House the meaning of point 8(b), which states:

"Adjustments may be made"

to the Barnett formula when

"action taken by the Scottish or Welsh administrations in a devolved area has knock-on costs for the UK Government or vice versa"?

Mr. Griffiths: Quite simply—perhaps the right hon. Gentleman did not realise this—the paper includes all the ground rules on which the Barnett formula operates.

Mr. Ancram: What does it mean?

Mr. Griffiths: I will give you an example if you promise that, when I have answered, you will give your commitment to the Barnett formula—I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the right hon. Gentleman will give his commitment to the Barnett formula. If, for example, the level of council tax were to rise significantly in Wales, that would have a knock-on effect on council tax benefit, which is drawn from the social security budget. Therefore, that could be taken into account, because it is another spending Department. It is quite simple.

Mr. Ancram *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Griffiths: It might not be simple for the right hon. Gentleman, but it is quite simple. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I have explained it to him, and that is all he needs—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must have good order in the House.

Mr. Griffiths: The right hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Who is paying the bill? The Minister should answer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for Devizes will have an opportunity to explore these issues in Committee.

Returning to the subject of the executive committee and the subject committees, it is not a traditional Cabinet model, but the Bill allows the assembly wide scope in its standing orders to delegate powers to the executive committee and to assembly secretaries. The Bill will allow account to be taken of issues arising from a more cabinet-style system of government.

Structural funds, although not on the face of the Bill, are a matter for the transfer order. We intend that the transfer order will transfer the Secretary of State's functions in respect of structural funds to the assembly. That means that the assembly will be able to determine, in agreement with the European Commission, what should be the priorities for the structural funds in Wales and how they will be administered. Assembly staff will be able to be part of UKREP—the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the European Union. They are members of the home civil service and will be able to be seconded to UKREP—that is one of the benefits of maintaining a unified civil service.

On the question of the assembly and the exercise of the UK vote in the Council of Ministers, yes, it will be possible by agreement with the UK lead Minister on the subject. If there is a specific Welsh issue being debated in the Council of Ministers, the Welsh Assembly will be able to take part in the meeting in that way. That might cover matters such as minority languages. Executive members of the assembly will be able to take part, by agreement, in relevant negotiations on policy at all levels, up to and including the Council of Ministers. That is exactly the same as what is proposed for Scotland.

I hope that we will be able to address issues relating to female representation, which were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan),

Because of European law, that is not a straightforward matter, but at least three of the four significant parties in Wales are committed to increasing representation from the women of Wales, and we can only hope that Her Majesty's Opposition will take a similar view.

In the Bill, we are delivering on our manifesto commitment, on pledges in the White Paper and the referendum mandate. It is now time to look to the future. I thought that I detected a slight note of conciliation in the speech of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) in that his party was now willing to take part in a constructive way in the debate on how the assembly should work. I hope that the Bill will ensure that there is a new voice and a new future for Wales. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 144, Noes 375.

Division No. 105] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Cran and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton

Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Lepper, David
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thompson, William
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McFall and
Mr. David Clelland.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 374, Noes 143.

Division No. 106] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*

Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thompson, William
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and Mr. James Cran.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I should inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the committal motion in the name of the Secretary of State for Wales.

10.29 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths: I beg to move,

That (1) Clause Nos. 1, 4, 22, 58, 80 and 118 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

(2) the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee; and

(3) when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.

From the outset, it was the Government's proposition that consideration of the Bill would be split between a Committee of the whole House and Standing Committee. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear yesterday that we intended that the clauses which raised key points of principle would be debated by a Committee of the whole House. That remains our position. *[Interruption.]*

We appreciate that a great number of technical matters were raised in yesterday's and today's debates. We believe that it is more appropriate that those matters are dealt with upstairs in Committee, where detailed scrutiny can be carried out. *[Interruption.]* Report and Third Reading will of course be taken on the Floor of the House.

None the less, the Government recognise the concerns raised by the official Opposition, and the motion responds to that. I regret, however, that it was not possible to reach agreement through the usual channels on a reasonable timetable to consider the Bill in its entirety on the Floor of the House—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must have silence in the Chamber.

Mr. Griffiths: The motion will allow key clauses to be debated in a Committee of the whole House. Those will be clause 1, on the assembly itself, which the Opposition specifically requested to be taken on the Floor of the House; clause 4, on the membership of and election to the assembly; clause 22, on the functions to be exercised by the assembly; clause 58, which deals with internal working procedures of the assembly; clause 80, on the assembly's financial arrangements; and clause 118, on the reform of the Welsh Development Agency.

We believe that, in selecting those clauses, we have taken account of views expressed during debates on matters of import by Members on both sides of the House. We have heard much about such matters already. We hope that the proposed motion will allow the House full and proper opportunity to subject the Bill to detailed scrutiny on the Floor of the House, in Committee, and back on the Floor of the House.

10.32 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): This motion is quite simply a disgrace. I am not surprised that the monkey rather than the organ grinder has moved it. I remind the House that, yesterday, the Secretary of State asked me whether I would

"give an undertaking that, if the Government were not minded to have the Bill considered in Committee upstairs, he would agree with the Government, through the usual channels, to have an agreed timetable to take the matter entirely on the Floor of the House".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 691.]

Today, I put forward a proposal for seven days in Committee on the Floor of the House and two days on Report—compared with 17 days in total on the equivalent Bill in 1978. That suggestion has just been brushed aside. The right hon. Gentleman never meant those weasel words yesterday, and that is why he has got his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to move the motion.

The Government of Wales Bill is the first constitutional Bill ever to be divided in such a way. Such division is a very serious breach of constitutional convention. It casts aside the main check that we have in this Parliament on constitutional legislation. Where other legislatures have weighted votes or referendums with thresholds, in this House we have always taken such Bills in Committee on the Floor of the House so that they could be properly scrutinised.

We are told that the only reason for moving the Bill Upstairs is administrative convenience. We should not use the procedures of the House for the administrative convenience of the Government, because the procedures of the House are here for the Members of the House.

The motion is also in breach of what the Secretary of State for Wales said in the press conference when he launched the Bill. He said:

"it is, of course, also open to any MP to put forward changes to the Bill, and to have these explored in detail through open debate".

How will that occur if the Bill is considered in Committee Upstairs?

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I shall not give way, because I do not have enough time. The motion is a contempt of Parliament, because it covers only six clauses out of 149 clauses and 14 schedules. Enormous areas of the Bill will not be considered on the Floor of the House, although they are of significant interest to all hon. Members.

The nuts and bolts of how the proportional representation list system will work will not be considered on the Floor of the House, because clauses 5, 6 and 7 will not be considered on the Floor of the House. The right of the members of the assembly to set their salaries—a matter of considerable interest to Hon. Members—will not be considered on the Floor of the House.

Provisions relating to cross-border regulations, which will affect England, will not be considered on the Floor of the House. The provision to allow the assembly to apply European law in a different way to that in which it is applied in the rest of the United Kingdom will not be considered on the Floor of the House. Most extraordinary of all, the schedules contain provisions that will affect England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and they also will not be considered on the Floor of the House.

The motion may appear innocuous, and our time for debate is short, but the impact on how the House undertakes constitutional reform is enormous. We well know the contempt that the Secretary of State of Wales and the Government have for the House, and the motion is another example.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: I am not going to give way, because I have only 10 minutes.

I seriously ask all hon. Members who value the procedures of the House as the means of checking the executive and safeguarding our constitution to realise that tonight they are being asked to breach a convention that has served the House and our constitution well. We shall oppose the motion. It is an act of constitutional vandalism, and I ask all those who cherish our rights in the House to join me in dividing the House on the motion.

Question put, That the motion be made—

The House divided: Ayes 359, Noes 139.

Division No. 107] **[10.36 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris

Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. James Cran.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Committee (clauses 1, 4, 22, 58, 80 and 118) tomorrow.

GOVERNMENT OF WALES BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Government of Wales Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by any Minister of the Crown or government department under or by virtue of the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment,

(2) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of—

(a) any sums required by a Minister of the Crown for making loans or other payments to the National Assembly for Wales in accordance with the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of that Fund under any other enactment, and

(3) the payment of sums into the National Loans Fund or the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Question agreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (1)(a) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates), put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on Estimates, 1997–98 (Air) Vote A.*

ESTIMATES, 1997–98 (AIR) VOTE A

That during the year ending on 31st March 1998 an additional number not exceeding 40 all ranks be maintained for Air Force Service and an additional number not exceeding 305 for Service in the Air Force Reserve Forces.

Question agreed to.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1997–98

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions required to be put, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates &c.), as applied by the Order of 2 December.*

Resolved,

That a supplementary sum, not exceeding £634,729,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1998, as set out in HC 278 of Session 1997–98.

ESTIMATES, 1998–99 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That a sum, not exceeding £97,354,245,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for civil and defence services for the year ending on 31st March 1999, as set out in HC 279, 280 and 281 of Session 1997–98.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Alistair Darling, Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson and Mrs. Helen Liddell.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Dawn Primarolo accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain funds out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on 31 March 1998; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time, and to be printed [Bill 100].

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Order [2 December] and Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): It will be for the convenience of the House to take motions 7 and 8 on European Communities together.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, we will take them separately.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing

EUROPEAN POLICE OFFICE (IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES)

That the draft European Communities (Immunities and Privileges of the European Police Office) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 19th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 60.

Division No. 108] **[10.53 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric

Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Willis, Norman
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Brazier, Julian
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorrie, Donald
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Livsey, Richard
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. James Gray.

Question accordingly agreed to.

EUROPEAN POLICE OFFICE (DEFINITION OF TREATIES)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European Police Office) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 19th November, be approved.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 31.

Division No. 109] **[11.5 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen

Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oliner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Brazier, Julian
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Robathan, Andrew

St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Steen, Anthony
Syms, Robert
Thompson, William
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. James Gray.

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

OSPAR Commission

That the draft OSPAR Commission (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 19th November, be approved.—*[Mrs. Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Child Support

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 18th November, be approved.—*[Mrs. Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Drugs and Medicines

That the Value Added Tax (Drugs, Medicines and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 2744), dated 18th November 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th November, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 57.

Division No. 110] **[11.18 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
[illegible]
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
[illegible]
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
[illegible]
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff

Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Brazier, Julian
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Öpik, Lembit
Prior, David
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. James Gray.

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Criminal Law (Northern Ireland)

That the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (Code of Practice) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, dated 12th November 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.—*[Mrs. Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

British Board of Film Classification

11.27 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I wish to present a petition for the reform of the British Board of Film Classification and the introduction of a system of classification for television programmes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Will hon. Members leave the Chamber as quickly and quietly as possible?

Mr. Brazier: The petition, which is signed by 27,000 people, states:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of residents of the United Kingdom sheweth—

The announcement by Her Majesty's Government of an intended review of its policy towards film and television signifies the growing acceptance that degrading and violent images can indeed desensitise and trigger acts of violence by both children and adults.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House will:

1) Reform the British Board of Film Classification, which is currently funded by the film industry and ipso facto not independent.

2) Establish, as part of such a reform a mechanism and office whereby specific film classifications might be routinely challenged by members of the public.

3) Establish a system of independent classification for films and other programmes shown on terrestrial and British-based cable television . . .

4) accept, on behalf of the British people, a responsibility to produce energetically, through European and international treaty, ways of enforcing publication of programme classification on satellite television companies . . .

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I thank the Movement for Christian Democracy, a non-party political group, for the work it did in gathering this petition of 27,000 names. I commend it to the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Motor Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Jane Kennedy.]*

11.30 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): If something is worth having, it is worth waiting for—and I suppose that that includes Adjournment debates.

It is true that the passage of time leads us to study with great interest the pronouncements of politicians. The previous Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), when speaking at the opening of the 1996 Society of Motor Manufacturers and Trades British international motor show, said:

"Over the last decade and a half the UK has once again become recognised as a major player in the global automotive industry. We now have the most diverse automotive industry in Europe."

Noting that that included in the total of 22 car and 10 truck and van manufacturers located in the United Kingdom were seven of the world's largest vehicle companies, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"More automotive companies are choosing to locate in the UK than anywhere else in Europe."

How revealing that is. It is not that they are British companies; it is not that we, who have a great engineering tradition, are creating a thriving and imaginative motor car industry—it is that more and more foreign companies are choosing to locate in the home of British manufacturing.

Why should that matter? Some will say, "Look at the figures; look at the way we have kept up production. We are still managing to export cars in large numbers, so why should we be concerned? As long as jobs are being created within the industry, we should be satisfied and the ownership of the assets is of no concern." I am afraid that that is not the case. Only 10 years ago, this country still maintained a very live and real interest in its British motor car industry; now, virtually every major manufacturer in this country that is an exporter of any sort of car is owned by foreign interests.

It does not matter whether we are talking about BMW, German-owned; Chrysler, American-owned; Fiat Auto, Italian-owned; Ford, American-owned; General Motors, American-owned; Nissan, Japanese-owned; Peugeot-Citroen, French-owned; Renault, French-owned; Toyota, Japanese-owned; or Volkswagen, German- owned—in each case the assets are controlled by a board of directors and, above all, by the interests of shareholders and profits in another country. That is tremendously important.

I raise this subject tonight because of what is happening to one of the oldest and certainly the most prestigious of motor car manufacturers, Rolls-Royce. Its factory in my constituency gave the name of its product to luxury and quality, but Vickers, its owner, is happily offering it to any company anywhere in the world on the basis that it cannot continue to manufacture high-quality cars. It is important to examine exactly why that is so.

Vickers took over Rolls-Royce when Rolls-Royce had made considerable profits. It is true that Vickers' timing was bad, in that it then had two rather bad years. Unfortunately, that meant that, when Sir Colin Chandler

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

get rid of the extraneous unit could not be fulfilled simply because the profits suddenly dipped. As I said, for the first two years, there were considerable profit problems.

The reality is that the car has continued to sell. It has not had the investment that it should have had; nevertheless, although a great deal of money has been required for the development of new motors and new models, Rolls-Royce continued to be not only one of the most successful expensive cars but one of this country's successful exports. Indeed, the figures are very interesting.

Let us consider the export figures for UK motor vehicle production between 1990 and 1997. In 1990, 72.4 per cent. of large cars were exported, rising to 76.6 per cent in 1991. The figure hovered between 70 and 78 per cent. until 1995, when it rose to 81.9 per cent. In 1996, 80.5 per cent. were exported and in January to September 1997 the figure was 78.6 per cent.

While production of the small/medium-sized range remained fairly constant over that period, the figure for the medium/large and large vehicles has grown. A substantial share of our large car sector is exported, which is clearly to our benefit. Rolls and Jaguar in particular form the major part of that export market. They are vital not only to my constituents, because of the jobs they bring, but to the country's economy. That is why I want the Government to consider carefully what is happening.

Indigenous UK producers account for a very tiny section of the industry's output. The largest UK producer is Carbodies, which makes taxi cabs. As we are already examining taxi legislation, it may be that even Carbodies will face considerable difficulties. One only has to see the names of other car producers—Lotus, TVR, Morgan and Caterham Cars—to realise what problems we will have if there are no longer any major British manufacturers.

I am delighted that any foreign firms should come to this country and provide jobs, but if we doubted whether we had control over that kind of inward investment and whether we were able to ensure that those firms were able to remain not only the creators of solid employment but the providers of considerable amounts of cash for the economy as a whole, we have only to consider what has happened today.

We are told today that there is a consolation—Britain has lost a car plant because the new Toyota small car is to be made in France, which means that the plant at Burnaston has missed out on thousands of new jobs, but the engines will possibly be built at the facility in Deeside in north Wales. Anyway, we are told, we should be reasonably content because we are all Europeans now, and the reason that the jobs are being exported is that the new small car is meant above all for the market in the south of Europe. That is the logic of moving a car factory and facility.

The situation is more serious. If a country consistently loses its manufacturing base in a product as important as motor cars or lorries, it has to import large numbers of small parts and become a fitter together of other people's work. If the situation is allowed to become even worse, it becomes simply an importer of manufactured goods from [illegible] Brazil and Latin America will result in Britain and other European countries increasingly importing motor cars from elsewhere.

That is absurd. The Transport Research Laboratory alone gives us a high-powered telematics industry, producing high-quality new science and ideas for new motor vehicles. We have scientists and research engineers. We have not only imagination and verve, but intelligence, constantly committed to the creation of new ideas, yet we are prepared to step quietly aside and let Rolls-Royce look for German masters because it does not want to put more money into new vehicles and it cannot afford the research on emissions that will be necessary for the American markets, so someone else must be found to take over the last real British motor manufacturer.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders is not happy about the situation. It does not regard it as intelligent or responsible economics. Anyone examining where our industry is going cannot have any confidence for the future.

I was told today that one of the engineering unions said that the problems were happening because we did not have a single currency. I dismiss that argument out of hand. It is rubbish, and it is important that we should say so. The situation has nothing to do with a single currency. It has far more to do with the attitude of British management, who, when faced with any circumstances in which they can sell the gold and run away somewhere else with their assets, are quite prepared to do so.

Vickers claims not to be like that, but to be a highly responsible defence firm that has given a long commitment to the United Kingdom, pouring money into defence jobs. Well, yes and no. Vickers has also taken over large numbers of state assets and closed down some of the jobs in the defence industry because it did not want competition in certain areas, such as tanks. It has also taken large amounts of money for research and development from this country.

When I said that before—you may find it difficult to believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am basically quite cruel—Vickers got very upset with me. I was told that what I had said was untrue, and that my views had been "noted with deep concern". Vickers claimed to be

"deeply committed to the British manufacturing industry. . . . Vickers has invested very significant sums of money to ensure the survival of the business. Since the low point of the last recession, we have invested heavily in both new products and much improved facilities".

If that is so, why is Vickers holding on to its new cars until February and doing its best to move out of its existing models? Presumably it wants to hand over to the new buyers not only a new fleet of cars, but a new, sparkling product that will make the firm attractive and a good buy for a German manufacturer.

Almost all the engineering facilities in my constituency have been handed over to foreign buyers in the past 10 years, some of whom walked away with large sweeteners.

There was the American who bought all the railway freight with £240 million of taxpayers' money, and there was the British Rail workshop that now depends on repair work and will be wiped out totally if we import American locomotives. Now Rolls-Royce is saying that only with BMW or Mercedes-Benz is there any future for what remains one of the best motor cars in the world. That is

The jobs belong in Crewe. They were first created by the high standards of workmanship, the commitment of the people on the shop floor and years of people working for lower wages than elsewhere in the engineering industry. The people working in the factory care about Rolls-Royce. They call it Royces. They care about engineering and the quality of their jobs. They are now less important to the firm that now owns them than a golf course tucked away somewhere that could be sold off to any passing itinerant buyer. That is the problem we are facing in Crewe.

If the Government are serious about using research and development facilities, creating jobs and not losing them and using taxpayers' money to look for new outlets, the first thing that my hon. Friend the Minister should do tomorrow is ask the management of Vickers what they think they are doing. He should ask them what prospects there are for the factory, and he should tell them not only that it is absurd for them to talk in such terms, but that we need to know what they are proposing.

The rumours are that BMW has already sewn up a deal, and that, irrespective of what is said in public, BMW engines are being used and BMW is the preferred company, irrespective of many other factors that should be taken into account.

When my hon. Friend has done that, he should talk to his colleagues in other Departments. He should talk to Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry and find out what Rolls-Royce represents in terms of exports, and what would happen if that specialised unit were moved, closed down or put at risk. When he has figured that out, he should sit down with his colleagues and say that the Government have a responsibility to maintain not only jobs but the manufacturing base of a very high-quality product that will move into the next century with innovative technology, imagination and, above all, such quality that people will be proud to identify Rolls-Royce as a British name.

In Crewe, we are proud of Rolls-Royce and those who work in it. We are proud of the men and women who have given their lives to it—although, from time to time, they have been treated with total contempt. Let me say to my hon. Friend the Minister tonight: "Do not tell me that you cannot subsidise Rolls-Royce—I have not asked for that. Do not say that the Government are not involved, because they are." Every time we lose a large manufacturer, we put all such units at risk. If my hon. Friend does not believe me, he has only to remember what happened in Derbyshire, and the effect of moving those jobs to France.

It may be that we are all such good Europeans that we can stand quietly by while our economy is devastated, until it is devoted entirely to service industries. I do not see the future of my constituency as a series of garages providing fuel for other people's Rolls-Royces, and I expect the Government to take the same view.

11.48 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) for initiating tonight's important Adjournment debate. I share her deep concern for the future of manufacturing, engineering and technology. The British manufacturing base has declined the economy. My own city of Leeds has depended on engineering for an entire century. In recent decades, the decline in engineering has been precisely in those supported manufacturing industries.

Although we are certainly watching what is happening, the Government strongly support the automotive industry, including the component sector. We want to see it grow and prosper.

We want to build and consolidate the manufacturing base to help it compete successfully in Europe and the rest of world. Our automotive sector is the largest manufacturing industry in the world. In the UK, it generates 3.4 per cent. of gross domestic product, and employs 310,000 people directly and a further 440,000 throughout the supply chain in very many small and medium-sized British enterprises. There is strength in depth in the industry.

There are diverse, large multinational companies in the UK, such as Vauxhall in Luton and Ellesmere Port, Ford in Dagenham and Halewood, the Rover Group in Longbridge, Nissan in Sunderland, Honda in Swindon, Toyota in Burnaston—which is still there—and Peugeot in Ryton. Between them they employ almost 100,000 British workers. We must take account of the fact that the industry is highly linked. Our share of car production in the European Union has risen from less than 9 per cent. to—in 1996—just over 12 per cent. British factories are exporting Nissans, Rovers and Jaguars to Japan, and, even now, Cadillac engines to Detroit.

I simply make those points because the industry operates in a global market. Competitors are no longer those in the next town or even in the same country. The automotive world is global. To compete globally, the industry must be competitive globally, which means we have to face the challenges of the new world. That means that vehicle manufacturers have to find innovative ways of working—perhaps even with competitors—to secure the economies which can result from joint engineering and design and common componentry, to ensure that they are able to meet the challenges of the world market.

As we said in the recent report "Benchmark for Britain", the UK automotive components industry has some world-class performers. It has made impressive strides in recent years. It is well placed in world terms. The Department of Trade and Industry is working closely with the UK components industry to help win new business and safeguard existing operations.

We are supporting the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders industry forum initiative, which is an ambitious and practical programme to help industry improve its ability to compete and win in a global marketplace. The industry forum is a good example of Government and industry working together, with industry taking the lead to raise quality and demonstrate that the UK can bridge the performance gaps that are starting to emerge.

I recently visited an automotive company with which the industry forum had been working to improve performance and productivity and reduce floor space to ensure that it is in a strong position to remain in the UK

[Mr. John Battle]

There are seven multinational car manufacturers with substantial production operations in Britain, and five truck manufacturers. Rover has invested in a £400 million plant in the west midlands. Jaguar is investing in another £400 million plant for the production of the new small saloon car. Vauxhall is investing £300 million in upgrading its Ellesmere Port facilities. Nissan is investing £200 million in the Sunderland plant. Although Toyota's announcement today is, of course, a disappointment, as we have spelt out, it has so far invested £1 billion, underpinning 3,000 jobs, backed up by 60 UK components manufacturers. So the story is not all bleak.

I do not apologise for listing those projects. That level of investment is not only of direct benefit to car manufacturing but permeates much deeper into the British manufacturing industry, which has a beneficial impact on the automotive components supply base.

My hon. Friend mentioned research and development. It is not true that the car industry in Britain consists only of manufacturing operations. In fact, the automotive sector in Britain came second only to pharmaceuticals in its share of civil research and development spend, and spending increased by 16 per cent. in real terms last year. Much of that is accounted for by substantial vehicle engineering operations. Nor should we overlook the highly skilled and dynamic independent engineering companies, such as Lotus, Ricardo and others.

As for foreign ownership, we ought to stress that we have a vibrant and increasingly successful automotive industry. That has been brought about largely by British companies and a British work force.

Ford and General Motors have both operated in Britain since the early part of the century, and that does not reflect a transient commitment to the UK. The additional investment that has continued to be brought to manufacturing operations is essential for the growth of industry and jobs here. We cannot be opposed to inward investment, because it underpins whole sectors of the industry.

Decisions on ownership and investment have to depend on sound commercial judgments. Any change in the ownership of a UK car company that might give rise to a qualifying merger would fall to be investigated under the Fair Trading Act 1973. In such cases, it would be for the Director General of Fair Trading to consider the merger in the first instance before giving his advice to Ministers.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has said that her policy will be to refer cases to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission primarily when there are competition concerns. Each case must be considered on its merits. The President of the Board of Trade may block a merger that is referred to the MMC only when the MMC finding is that it would act against the public interest.

Alternatively, any change in ownership may fall to the European Commission for a decision under the EC merger regulations. As a member state with a vital interest in such a merger, the UK would be involved in the decision. As a member of the European Union, we would have the right to go to the European

It is fair to say that Vickers has invested heavily in Rolls-Royce, and the company is not in difficulties. Inward investment in the UK automotive sector can have a positive effect, and the sale is not the end of the road for the 2,500 employed at Crewe. That is too pessimistic a prognosis at this stage, and the company could continue to stand for engineering excellence in Britain.

We face challenges in the future. We have a successful vehicle manufacturing industry in the UK, but it is dependent on having a strong, competitive supply chain. Although all the studies suggest that Britain has some of the best suppliers, work must be done to ensure that the British supply chain is improved and strengthened. We will work with that sector, through the industry forum, to ensure that that happens. By providing the right kind of environment to help the industry consolidate and thrive, we will bring together capacity in one location and locate new investment. The quality of our engineering, backed by a strong supply chain, will underpin jobs in the automotive industries.

We will go further. The environment must also be high on our list of priorities. The Government will work with the industry to introduce technologies that will bring further environmental benefits. Only last month, the Prime Minister announced a joint initiative between the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the DTI to set up the cleaner vehicles task force. The president of the SMMT, Ian McAllister, will chair the panel—and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport and I will sit on it—which will address the future issues for the automotive industry, to ensure that it has a future based on the skills and excellence that have been developed here.

We must try to ensure that quality of life, integrated transport strategies—my hon. Friend mentioned taxis—and the generation of wealth, which underpins jobs, can go hand in hand. Environmental pressures are becoming the major drivers of innovation and competitive advantage and we must be in a strong position to address those challenges.

By addressing such matters as the need to develop cleaner, more efficient and smarter vehicles—and building the partnerships with industry to enable such development—we can ensure a future for a strong automotive sector in Britain, supplied and supported by a back-up chain that employs many thousands of highly skilled and trained British workers and engineers. We must also ensure that such workers continue to emerge from the educational system to provide a ready supply of skilled workers for what is still one of our strongest economic sectors.

My hon. Friend may feel that the key question is that of ownership. I think that it is a question of strategic investment and ensuring that investment backs British jobs and engineering so that we can deliver the best from our traditions of skilled engineering and technology. Our track record is second to none in Europe. In the mid-1980s, less than 20 per cent of UK production was exported. Now, more than 50 per cent. is exported, much of it to the EU. Our trade is more locked in to the EU than it has been before, and that is not a disadvantage—it underpins the lock-in of jobs

The decisions of recent months—some of which have been disappointing—do not undermine the fact that there has been substantial investment in the automotive sector. We should welcome that, as it underpins the supply chain, which in turn underpins the quality of British jobs.

We will watch the situation carefully, but the sale of particular companies is a commercial matter for those companies and their shareholders. The Government are not a shareholder in the companies, and, if the sale proceeds, it will be considered by the appropriate regulatory authorities. That is the traditional system for checking these matters, and it will be a matter for the President of the Board of Trade—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 December 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Rural Economy

9.34 am

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the rural economy and to raise some rural issues that are specific to my constituency. The rural economy plays a very big part in my constituency. However, as the past week's developments have focused attention on one specific aspect of the rural economy, I shall keep my remarks brief, so that other hon. Members can speak on that topic.

I shall address wider issues in the rural economy before addressing the prevalent issue. I should like to hear the Government's philosophy on, and perception of their role in, supporting the rural economy. Is such support a priority for Ministers? Is maintaining a vital rural economy a priority, or are they happy for the drift towards purely urban environments to continue depleting the rural base? Specifically, I should like to hear the Government's views on the future of objective 5b funding—which affects part of my constituency—of structural funds, and of efforts to preserve the rural economy.

The oil industry dominates the city of Aberdeen and its outlying commuter areas, affecting especially house prices. How do the Government propose to encourage affordable housing in rural environments, so that families can stay in those areas? There is a crisis in the north-east of my constituency, because the only people who can live there are those in well-paid occupations who commute into the city.

At the heart of the housing problem is the need for the Government to confront capital funding for public sector housing. As Liberal Democrat Members have repeatedly said, it is farcical that money invested in housing that guarantees a return to the Exchequer is treated the same as money that brings no return. The Government must examine their accounting processes so that investment can be made again in council and other public sector housing in rural areas. The sale of council housing, and the general failure to build new housing, is creating a serious problem of keeping people and indigenous industries—which would stay when oil moves on—in rural areas.

Especially in the north of Scotland, there has traditionally been a recognition that, wherever one lives, one should be connected to society. The history of hydro-electric, particularly, demonstrates the belief that people should have equal access to electricity supplies regardless of where they live. Opening markets and a market-driven philosophy in running the economy have which provide all the quality public services. The worry is that rural areas will be left out of transport links and be less well connected to infrastructure.

There has been a proliferation of telecommunications masts in all the juicy spots in my constituency. Rival companies have been gaining access to the mobile telephone market, yet vast tracts of my constituency have no access to that network. Similarly, the BBC is developing new broadcasting technologies that will involve more people in the media, but parts of my constituency do not yet have access to current technology.

The fear is that, with less-regulated utilities, people in rural areas will become increasingly unable to obtain services, to stay in their community and to participate fully in society. I should like to hear the Government's assurances that they will encourage and sustain activity in rural environments, rather than encouraging people to move to urban environments.

Another important issue is the future of rural transport. As hon. Members on both sides know, bus deregulation led to a major downturn in the availability of bus services, and to a reduction in the quality and use of bus services. Significantly, on the same day that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions was encouraging people to get out of their cars and start using buses, the local bus service in Finzean in my constituency was completely cut. Will the Government explore more imaginative ways in which to encourage community buses? Perhaps community councils could provide minibus services so that people without cars can continue to live in the rural economy.

In the light of the present headlines, it is difficult to have a debate on the rural economy without turning to the most pressing problem affecting many of my constituents—the crisis in farming. I shall keep my remarks short so that other hon. Members can go into some of the detail.

I start with the underlying philosophical aspects of the problem. Since the war, there has been a tradition of the state being heavily involved in the agricultural economy. All parties have accepted that the state has that role. There has been an unwritten contract or partnership between the farming community and the state under which the state has interfered in and operated in the market. That has led the farming community to be dependent on the actions of the state.

The Government have recognised that the previous Government's handling of the beef crisis led to a delay in finding a solution and to even more burdens being placed on the farming community. Ministers recognise that the state has a responsibility, but they have failed to recognise that the Government should assist the farming community. I should declare an interest at this point. Although I am not active in farming, I own a farm.

The crucial point that my constituents make to me is that the Government have a chance to compensate farmers for the fluctuations in the green pound. So far, the Government have failed to make their intentions clear. They have implied that they will not compensate farmers, but they have not ruled it out. The easiest way in which to boost the farming economy would be for the Government to give farmers access to funds.

The rules of the European Union allow Governments to compensate farmers for fluctuations in currency. If the

[Sir Robert Smith]

forcing them to operate with one hand tied behind their back in an open market. If the Government believe that the rules should be changed, they should change them. The rules should be changed not as a result of Treasury decisions, but after negotiations in the European Union. That is fundamental.

The beef crisis has not affected only farmers. It has also affected the hauliers who take the cattle to market, the abattoirs, the markets themselves and the whole food processing industry, which is vital to the north-east of Scotland. One farmer said to me, "I may be very green, but I always thought that we grew beef for our own consumption." Farmers see farming not as a business, but as a way of life. The Government have failed to take that on board. If the Government withdraw economic support, there is no escape route for farmers. That is why there are high rates of depression and high suicide rates.

I hope that the Minister will give us some answers on the wider issues of the rural economy. I also hope that he will give us not just a message of sympathy—the Government are quite good at that—but some hope of concrete action and a commitment that they will use the powers available to them to compensate farmers for the crisis in farming, which was of the previous Government's making.

9.44 am

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am grateful for being called, Madam Speaker. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) for initiating this debate on a Wednesday morning, when there is an opportunity for a number of hon. Members to make a contribution.

The hon. Member talked about Government interference, a point which needs greater investigation. I talked to a farmer in my constituency on Friday about the history of farming. Between the wars, there was such a severe and prolonged agricultural depression that, in parts of East Anglia, it was possible to have a series of fields for three years before being expected to pay rent. The plight of farmers matched the plight of those who worked in heavy industry in the north-east of England at the time. The state "interfered" to assist farmers, to guarantee food production and to guarantee our position in the world after the second world war.

The situation has changed since then. The whole emphasis of the common agricultural policy has been to stimulate production, a process which has gone hand in hand with rural depopulation. I do not mean that the number of people living in rural areas has declined, but that there are fewer people working in agriculture and agriculture-related businesses.

The House of Commons Library assisted me yesterday by providing figures for the number of people employed as hired agricultural workers. The figure for 1945 was just under 900,000; the figure for 1996 was 250,000. Over that period, there has been a 70 per cent. reduction in the number of those working on the land. More recent figures suggest that the figure may have fallen to an even lower

The whole thrust of the CAP has been to neglect employment in agriculture as a means of earning a living. I hope that during the Agenda 2000 negotiations, the Government will follow up one of the points raised in the document, which says:

"The Union should make a parallel effort to enhance the economic potential and the environmental value of rural areas and their capacity to provide sustainable jobs."

The policy thus far has not been to provide sustainable jobs, but rather the reverse. Even since 1992, there has been a substantial reduction in the number of people employed in agriculture.

My submission is that the way forward is—to use one of the jargon words that bedevil agricultural economics—decoupling. We should take away support and subsidy for production on an accelerated basis.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument carefully. Does he agree that farmers in his constituency and in mine are in a serious crisis? Does he agree that they require the Government, who were, we were told, elected to look out for the many and not just for the few, to help them? There are many farmers in serious crisis. Does he agree that the Government should seek to unlock the compensation funds in Brussels as a priority? Farmers are not just business men. They are the guardians of the countryside, and they require our help.

Mr. Hurst: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has clearly read a synopsis of my later remarks. I agree entirely that the Government are pursuing a strong policy to support farmers. The figure of £1 billion of support because of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis flips off my tongue, in addition to the £500,000 to support the beef industry.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The hon. Gentleman mentions £1 billion. We were told by Ministers at agriculture Question Time last week that the figure was £1.5 billion. I hope that he understands that that money was negotiated by the previous Government, and was in addition to the agriculture budget. That was done to help the beef industry in a crisis. It is incumbent on the Minister to go back and negotiate more money from his Chancellor in another crisis. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will encourage him to do so.

The Government cannot just parade £1 billion as money that they have obtained. It was obtained in a crisis by the previous Government. We are asking the new Government to do the same now.

Mr. Hurst: I had hoped to avoid going into the origins of the BSE crisis and apportioning blame. The issues should be raised above the political knockabout so that we can examine the root cause of the problems in agriculture. I am sure that others will deal with the party political points in due course.

To sustain the rural economy, people have to work in it. That can be achieved by decoupling the payments from production and supporting the farmer for being the custodian of the countryside. The farmer has two important functions: to produce food and run his business; and to act as the custodian of the countryside. The countryside is for

the cheap. It is only right and proper that farmers should be paid for sustaining environmental projects, keeping the countryside as we like it and supporting the conservation of wildlife.

The advantage of moving subsidy in that way is that conservation schemes are more labour intensive than non-conservation schemes. A hedge can be taken out overnight with a tractor and a man on overtime. It has then gone for a long time. Putting a hedge in requires continual care and cultivation over many years. The more hedges that go in, the more sustainable jobs there are. The more deciduous forestry plantations there are, run in proper woodland management schemes, the more labour will be required to coppice. The more traditional industries that are brought back to agriculture—such as charcoal burning to meet the ever growing barbecue market—the more jobs are put back into agriculture. The growth in game conservation will also put jobs back into agriculture. Each genuine rural job that is put back in agriculture is a boost to the rural community—the shop, the church, the pub and the village hall. It sustains traditional communities that have existed for generations and creates a real countryside, as opposed to a commuter haven for visits at weekends or during the summer.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Was he giving way?

Mr. Hurst: I always seek to do so if I possibly can.

Madam Speaker: I was not sure whether the hon. Gentleman had finished or was giving way.

Mr. Jenkin: It is early in the morning. I am a constituent of the hon. Gentleman, and we share a problem as constituency neighbours. Our rural communities are threatened by the supposed need for 4.4 million houses to be built in the south-east of England over the next 20 years. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is a lose-lose scenario? It will destroy our rural communities. There will be no sense of community if vast new housing estates are to be plastered all over our rural areas.

Will the hon. Gentleman join me in resisting the logic that says that such houses are needed in those areas? It will be bad for the rural economy, bad for the environment, because people will be dependent on cars, and bad for those who will have to live in those soulless housing estates.

Mr. Hurst: As my constituency neighbour and one of my constituents, the hon. Gentleman will know that I have frequently spoken in the constituency against the building plans for that part of northern and central Essex. However, now is not the time to pursue that issue. We had a debate on it recently, when hon. Members aired their views widely.

I shall seek to reach a conclusion, because this is a short debate. Rural communities cannot be sustained without rural employment. Without agricultural subsidies directed at providing incentives for farmers—or business men who are farming—to employ people, there will be ever fewer [illegible] side. That will result in the horror of large housing estates for commuters or retired people built on green-field sites with no economic connection with the local area.

9.54 am

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for—is it Aberdeen and Kincardine?

Sir Robert Smith: West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine.

Mrs. Winterton: I apologise. I congratulate him on introducing this debate on the rural areas of our country, which are so important.

As a representative of a rural community, I pay tribute to the farming community, particularly at this time when it is facing such tremendous difficulties in all sectors. The contribution of the farming community is often undervalued. Wherever one drives in the United Kingdom—I say United Kingdom advisedly—one sees the most beautiful scenery and well-husbanded land. We do not give enough credit to the farming community for keeping it like that.

The first principle of farmers is to produce good, wholesome food, which has been done throughout the ages. The second is to recognise the impact of agriculture on the environment. They are the custodians of the countryside; environmental policies can be introduced through them. In addition, they provide the habitat for wildlife.

Farmers in Cheshire are interested in, and committed to, the land that they farm. They do all that they can to plant new woodland and habitats for wildlife wherever possible. That can be done only where the industry is profitable. As we have heard so often recently, the industry is in a state of crisis and its future is under threat.

Milk is important in Cheshire. The strength of sterling has driven down the produce price, but my farmers do not see much reduction in supermarket prices to reflect that. We can safely say that some people's margins have increased dramatically at the expense of our farming community. That should be said loud and clear. Supermarkets have introduced great benefits to the housewife, providing a wide range of fresh, good-quality food, but there is a down side to the control that they have. We must recognise what is happening. I was pleased to hear the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food say last week that he would speak to the chairmen of all the main supermarkets and tell them that he was disgusted by their behaviour.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that the same phenomenon applies to the beef industry? Last week, we saw the lowest prices ever for beef on the hoof in Chippenham market, but the supermarket price remains miraculously unchanged.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend is right. One of the problems with beef is that, while the hind quarter has sold exceptionally well since the beginning of the BSE crisis, there have been difficulties in shifting the cheaper cuts.

The dairy industry works hand in hand with the beef sector. It provides the cull cows and breeds some of the bull calves, although they do not go into the beef industry. Both sectors have been equally hard hit by the recent crisis.

[Mrs. Winterton]

Dairy farmers in my constituency ask me how it is that Britain has been the second largest net contributor to the budget of the common agricultural policy, yet our Government will not apply to Brussels for green pound compensation for the four revaluations this year that have caused them such difficulty. They also say that the present Government have given up one lever that they could have used in respect of interest rate policy by handing over responsibility for fixing interest rates to the Governor of the Bank of England, who is advised by an unelected committee of experts.

We believe that the Government should apply to the European agri-monetary compensation fund to assist our agriculture industry. Beef prices are down throughout the United Kingdom. Beef farmers have been hit by the weight restrictions in the over-30-months scheme and hill farmers in particular are in dire straits. The good stock is bred and raised by the hill farmers before going down to the lowlands to be finished. If the hill farmers do not survive, vast tracts of the country will go to rack and ruin. Hill farmers look after the environment, produce exceptionally good stock and have a very hard life indeed.

It is all very well for right hon. and hon. Members who work in the warm facilities of the House of Commons and elsewhere, but hill farmers get up very early in the morning to work in all weathers and we should recognise the valuable role that they play in our uplands.

I served on the Select Committee on Agriculture for 10 years, including during the beef crisis. The previous Government were advised by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which comprises distinguished scientists in the field. The Government of the day have always followed its advice to the letter. The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) tried to apportion blame, but it is indisputable that the BSE crisis cannot be blamed on anyone.

Last week, I was horrified to hear the new ruling on deboning. Scientists can advise, but Ministers and politicians must make policy decisions. It was a political decision.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am rather perturbed to hear that. When we debated the issue last week, I thought that there was unanimity on a difficult decision. As it is widely understood that we do not know what caused BSE, surely the precautionary principle should be foremost. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Mrs. Winterton: No. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, as the Minister was faced with three options and took the most severe one. In doing so, we have all let common sense fly out of the window. Naturally, we all regret the people who have died from the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, but those numbers must be balanced against the fact that the chance of contracting the disease is one in 600 million and falling because of the policies that have been introduced over the years to minimise the risk.

The British people showed what they thought of the new decision when they rushed to the supermarkets last week to buy ribs of beef and T-bone steaks. We live in an age when we are expected to take no risks. I probably took more risks getting out of bed this morning and coming to the House than ever I would by eating T-bone steaks every day for the rest of my life. Last week's decision lacked balance and judgment, and beef farmers will suffer as a result.

I have represented Congleton for 14 years. Although there have been ups and downs, there has never been so much depression and such low morale in all sectors of agriculture.

I should also mention badgers and tuberculosis. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) commissioned the Krebs report on badgers and TB, and we are awaiting its publication. The problem is extremely serious; Members representing the west country may wish to mention it later. The disease is spreading northwards to Shropshire and Staffordshire, where it has a considerable impact on the farming industry.

Let me quote from an article in *Farming News* on 28 November to

"emphasise the damage the badger moratorium is causing".

It was about a Staffordshire farmer who

"has lost 20 cows through TB. He was aiming to expand his herd to 120 cows and took on a herdsman in the summer, but after 20 reactors were found, his expansion plans are back on hold."

There is strong circumstantial evidence that the badger is implicated in the transmission of TB to cattle. The present policy is not working because it does not allow proper clearance of infected badgers. I agree with the many people who believe that the system should be changed to allow clearance and that it should be a top priority. Badger numbers are growing dramatically in certain parts of the country and, where badger numbers are high, there is a strong likelihood of spontaneous outbreaks of TB. Shropshire is a graphic example; the badger population there must be managed.

Compensation to farmers is grossly inadequate. It needs to be at least 125 per cent. of replacement value to cover the increased costs involved and the long-term effects on farm businesses.

I am grateful for the time of the House today. I have tried to impress on the Minister the need for positive and urgent Government action to assist British agriculture.

10.7 am

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute briefly to this important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) on his good fortune in being able to initiate a debate on the rural economy at such a pressing time.

I shall confine my remarks entirely to agriculture, and I hope that the Minister will communicate to his ministerial colleagues in the Scottish Office and other Departments the strength of feeling—underlined by the presence of so many Members on the Liberal Democrat Benches—about the present crisis. The word crisis is often overused in politics and in the House. None the less, if anything underlines the fact that there is a genuine crisis not only among farmers but among their leadership, it is the resignation of Sandy Mole yesterday as the president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland.

People such as Sandy Mole do not walk away from the jobs that they have been elected to do, and which they have done with diligence and honour, unless there is a

deep-rooted problem. I hope that Scottish Office Ministers will have observed the sad fact that he has given up his post before the end of his term of office, and will recognise that that is a sign of the crisis of morale that has gripped Scottish agriculture, as it has gripped United Kingdom agriculture as a whole.

I hope that any sense that the Government may have had that this is all just farmers crying foul, or Opposition politicians demanding action, has now disappeared. There is much more than that. This is serious stuff. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine was right to use the opportunity to raise the matter today.

While we are talking about individuals, I must point out that the Government have one great worry—the sole unequivocal support that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food received in the House last week came from his immediate predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg).

There may have been a perception at European level that the previous Minister of Agriculture was doing too little, too late, but the great worry is that in connection with beef on the bone, the present Minister may have done too much, too soon. None of us, especially among the Liberal Democrats, would disagree with the idea of making available to the public scientific advice that is in the pipeline and is being put on Ministers' desks, but it would have been more sensible if the Minister, while reflecting on the advice that he had been given, had passed it on to the public and allowed them to make their decision.

The consequences of that decision over the past week, in terms of both prices and morale, have been catastrophic. I hope that the Government will realise that they have added to an already inflamed situation at the ports, and that they therefore need to take decisive action.

What decisive action should the Government take? I said that I would contribute only briefly to the debate, so I shall confine myself to making two essential points. First, for the rural economy in general and for agriculture in particular, the fact that British taxpayers are subsidising beef production and imports everywhere else in the European Union except in the United Kingdom adds insult to injury. That is a crazy state of affairs; it is like an episode of "Yes, Minister". The Government must do something about it.

Secondly, cognisant of the fact that we must send the right signal not only to United Kingdom farmers but to Brussels, the Government must get off the fence and clarify and confirm the terms and the remit of the independent inquiry that will be set up into the whole sorry saga of BSE.

The state of affairs at the moment is ludicrous. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and I raised the matter in the House last week. The Prime Minister's press secretary—let us be clear about who I mean; it was Alastair Campbell—was briefing people at No. 10 that the decision had been taken in principle some time ago, and that we now had to move ahead with a remit.

However, in the House both the Minister of State and the Leader of the House responded to questions from me and my hon. Friend by saying that no final decision had been taken, and that the Government were not yet in a position to clarify matters. Why are the Government at sixes and sevens over the issue? They should listen to the voices in the Chamber, where it has been made clear that the Labour party is in favour of, and my party has been a long-standing advocate of, an inquiry. The dog that will not bark is the Conservative party. The Conservatives are the only people who are not calling for an inquiry into BSE.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I wonder why.

Mr. Kennedy: We know only too well.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: In a moment. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who has experience of the Scott report—and the scars to prove it—will be the first to underscore the need to confirm not only that an inquiry will take place, but that it will not take the same form as the Scott report. It must be open, independent and accessible, as that process was not.

Mr. Paice: May I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that the Conservative party is happy to have a public inquiry? However, we are anxious to ensure that the setting up of an inquiry is not used by the Government as a smokescreen to curb other action that may be necessary immediately. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree.

Mr. Kennedy: I certainly agree. There will be no disagreement among the Liberal Democrats with the statement that a public inquiry should not be used as a smokescreen. That is not the point of a public inquiry, which is a flushing-out rather than a covering-up exercise. I note the hon. Gentleman's recommendation and the endorsement that he has given on behalf of his party. I expect that we shall rediscover his comments in due course, as and when such an inquiry takes place—or, more important, when it reports.

The history of the problem, which goes back far beyond the immediate BSE crisis, will demonstrate that actions taken by the previous Government on deregulation and so on are extremely relevant to the situation in which we now find ourselves. I am talking about not only agriculture but the rural economy as a whole.

I hope that the Minister who is to respond will be able to say something positive about the need to access European funds to help the farming community, and about how swiftly the Government will press ahead with an independent inquiry.

There is no doubt about the strength of feeling. The Minister will know that, if he has spoken to his Secretary of State. When 500 people turn out in Kirkwall to confront the Secretary of State for Scotland, as they did last Thursday night, to make their point in a peaceful and considered way, that is an expression of the depths of despair in the agricultural community. I know that that point is not lost on the Secretary of State, and I hope that it will not be lost on the Minister.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Did my hon. Friend note that no fewer than 1,000 south-western farmers

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

turned up at Milbay docks in Plymouth on Friday night, as well? As well as the points that he has already made, will my hon. Friend emphasise the need to restore hill livestock compensatory allowances, which were cut by the previous regime, to a reasonable level if we are to help some of the hardest hit of our livestock farmers?

Mr. Kennedy: My hon. Friend is right about HLCAs. The same is true of the cuts in the over-30-months scheme that the present Government have endorsed. If ever there was an example that makes the case that the Liberal Democrats have argued before, during and since the election—that we should not adhere to the somewhat arbitrary spending limits of the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer—it is the decisions that the present Administration have taken on agricultural expenditure.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the great concerns for many farmers, especially tenant farmers who own no land, is the way in which the cut in the money for the over-30-months scheme has cut the capital value of their businesses? For many farmers, that capital value represents their pension. With a stroke of a bureaucratic pen, many British farmers' pensions have been cut.

Mr. Kennedy: My hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, my hon. and learned Friend—*[Interruption.]* It is good to get something out of constructive opposition—*[Interruption.]*—but I am told that the honour predates the present regime. My hon. and learned Friend is right. How many farmers, as well as seeing their pension prognosis scuppered, have seen the value of their herds, their stock and, therefore, their bankability, wiped out overnight? In backing my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, I urge the gravity of the situation on the Minister.

Farmers are not by instinct or tradition militant people. The last thing they want to do is to stand at British ports, checking out vehicles and lorries from other parts of the British Isles. The fact that they feel moved to do so is a recognition and a reflection of a situation that is desperate and is getting worse. As Guy Fawkes said, desperate diseases require desperate remedies. To date, the desperate remedies from the Government have not been sufficient in terms of the overall profundity of the situation. The Minister has a good opportunity today to send the right signal from the Dispatch Box. I hope very much that he will do so.

10.20 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am glad that we are having another debate on rural Britain. I think that this is the third time we have been down this course—it shows the importance of the matter. The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) proposed a similar debate and I was able to initiate a debate on the housing problems that affect the countryside.

We take a dim view of being lectured by the Conservatives on these problems, as much of what is wrong with rural Britain is their responsibility. They had 18 years to put some policies in place. In the six months we have held power, we have tried to deal with what I admit are serious problems in the farming community and we seem to be picking up some of the blame for the Tories' inadequacy.

I want to refer to two issues that relate to agriculture and to the way in which the farming community has been affected. I noted the remarks of the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) and I share many of his views. We feel that the blame should not be attached to us; if the previous Administration had taken more prompt action on BSE, we would not be where we are today.

Sir Robert Smith: My point was that the responsibility of government to an individual in a state exists as a continuity, regardless of the fact that there may have been a change in the party of Administration. The present Government have recognised that the previous one was at fault, but the liability lies with the Government to redress some of the burdens put on the farming community, albeit by the actions of a different party; it was still the Government in terms of the relationship with farmers.

Mr. Drew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is why we will see through the culling process, although it is causing great angst. There is no alternative if we are to get our beef back into world markets. We must go along with those desperate measures and it would seem, on the basis of all the evidence, that they are now working. Some say the crisis will come to a natural end next year, or possibly at the start of the year after, when the stock that could have been affected by BSE has been removed.

We are in a peculiarly difficult position. Although emphasis, understandably, will be placed on the beef market, there are difficulties in the milk and arable sectors. Never in recent years have so many agricultural products been in so much difficulty. That is why I understand what farmers are saying: I understand their anger and why they want action. The Government are listening and will take appropriate action.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): What specific measures will the hon. Gentleman press on the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to provide the answers that he is so hopeful of?

Mr. Drew: If the hon. and learned Gentleman lets me finish, I shall propose some measures.

The farmers I feel particularly sorry for are tenant farmers, who are often mortgaged to the hilt and face increases in input prices and now have the difficulty of an insecure market.

To take the intervention of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) in the spirit in which it was intended, I will make some suggestions. I want to refer to the remarks of the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), who said that as much as the Government can do things, action is very much up to those who buy farm produce; dare I say it, the consumer. I would like to stress that the Government—this is not a party political point—have done everything to prove that the quality and standard of British beef is the best in the world, yet many of the problems that have angered farmers have been caused by their being undercut by cheap foreign imports.

I plead with supermarkets to listen to farmers and to a view that is shared throughout the House; if they make more effort to stress the fact that British beef is safe—we can argue about last week's measures—the situation can improve. Next month, the full traceability scheme is to be introduced, but consumers could be faced with imported beef that is not of the same standard as, and which may be older than, the under-30-months British beef that we presume is being sold here. Supermarkets have an obligation to explain that.

In a free market, we cannot say that supermarkets should take all imports off the shelves, but they should stress that British beef and British products in general are the best. That is why I asked a question on the statement last week. We encouraged the introduction of the food standards agency, which stresses how vital it is that we get our act together and do things right. The consumer will make the right choice, but there are ways in which the consumer can be helped to make that choice.

I do not want to lose the opportunity to talk about some other aspects of the rural economy. Although agriculture is not all of what goes on in the countryside, it is a very important part. It is still the major employer, particularly in the more marginal rural parts of Britain. We are faced with a series of dilemmas which the Government will address.

The document we produced in advance of the election, "A Working Countryside", was a good position paper and the previous Administration's rural White Paper was a statement of how things were. We would argue that the previous Government did not take the issue any further and did not take the action that could have been taken. There is much to be done.

Mrs. Browning: The rural White Paper was not a static document and there was an obligation on the Government to report progress annually. I hope that this Government will continue that.

Mr. Drew: I hope that the Government will consider ways—although not necessarily the same ways as the previous Government—in which to ensure that the rural debate is at the top of the agenda. The Government must genuinely show that action is being taken.

The legacy is painful. As has been said, we have had bus deregulation, a continuing decline in the number of shops and other services and the imposition of signing on in person and the jobseeker's allowance. The last has caused an enormous number of problems in my constituency. They have tried to sign on in person, but there are no buses.

Poverty does not affect only urban Britain. Because the number of rural poor is small, the problem is not statistically recognised, but rural poverty exists and has been made worse by rural decline. I strongly support the establishment of the social exclusion unit, but we must ensure that it has a rural as well as an urban dimension. I believe that we can and will do that.

I was very pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister say that regional development agencies will have a rural dimension. That shows what the Government can do. Some may say that that is at the cost of the Rural Development Commission, but my view is that that quango had served its purpose. I believe in taking decisions at the lowest possible level; that will surely be the role of regional development agencies.

This is a debate that must continually be heard. Serious problems afflict agriculture at the moment, but there are wider rural issues and I look forward to the Government addressing them in the appropriate manner.

10.31 am

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I want to follow the example of the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and concentrate entirely on agriculture, in particular livestock producers in the hills and uplands, where the crisis is most acute.

A survey by the National Farmers Union in 1995 showed that 42 per cent. of farmers in the less-favoured areas had a net farm income of less than £10,000. By any reckoning that is a low figure and it is the background against which we must view the worsening situation.

The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) was right: agricultural employment has been falling for a long while. That is happening predominantly in the arable areas, whereas the hills and uplands tend to have family farms and the fall there has been significantly smaller.

It has been implied this morning that the whole of the problem in the hills falls to the BSE crisis. We cannot get away from the fact that it is a significant factor, but we should consider some more up-to-date information. The peak of the crisis came at the end of March 1996, when the market collapse took place; market prices climbed back during 1996 and other livestock prices benefited from the collapse in beef prices.

Today, fat cattle are about 90p per kilo, compared with £1.09 12 months ago, after the recovery. Store cattle have fallen by more and fat sheep by dramatically more, to 94½p from £1.39 per kilo a year ago. That picture is mirrored across all other farm produce. Imports are coming from countries that use inputs such as mammalian meat and bonemeal, which are banned in this country.

We have had four currency revaluations in 1997, of which two were under the previous Government, because of the appreciation of sterling. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said, the two later revaluations must have been partially affected by the handing over of the control of interest rates to the Bank of England.

It has been estimated that the total cost of the revaluations to the agriculture industry is about £2 billion off farm gate prices. The consequences are there for all to see. The Meat and Livestock Commission estimates that in 1997 sheep exports will be between 400,000 and 500,000 head, compared with 1 million head in 1995 and 770,000 in 1996: a dramatic decline and one significant reason for the fall in sheep prices.

In January to September this year, beef imports from the Republic of Ireland were up 72 per cent. on the same period last year. Those from the rest of the European Union, including many countries that do not have all the controls that we have, but where BSE is known to be present, were up 42 per cent. In particular, it seems odd that we can import beef from over-30-months cattle, whereas we quite rightly cannot consume our own.

The price falls show that a significant part of the current crisis falls to events of the past few months. The Government's actions do them little credit. They abandoned the regional panels within days of taking office, thereby severing the contact with the industry

[Mr. James Paice]

that would have let them know what is going on. The over-30-months scheme cost the industry £29 million, but one should consider that farmers in the less-favoured areas, with an income of about £10,000, would have to dispose of only two cull cows to reduce their income by 10 per cent. because of the difference in price over the past 12 months.

Hill livestock compensatory allowances have been cut. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said that the Conservative Government cut HLCAs. I acknowledge that they did in some years, but that was against the background of a falling pound, rising exports and increasing prices.

The Government decided to charge farmers £5 to £10 for cattle passports. The Conservative Government said that we would fund the setting up of a computerised system; the current Government have abandoned that. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said the other day that the existing passport scheme costs about £7.2 million; but his proposed figures could raise anything up to £38 million. When I challenged his Minister of State, he refused to rule out the possibility that the Treasury might make a profit from the fees.

The Meat Hygiene Service will cost the farming industry about £44 million. I share the views of the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West on the subject of beef on the bone. I believe that the evidence demonstrates that the public believe the ban to be an overreaction.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has criticised my party for urging extra public expenditure on monetary compensation, but he refuses to take on board the fact that some money is available to him. The sheep annual premium scheme will underspend in the current year, so there will be a significant increase in our Fontainebleau rebate in the next financial year; Treasury figures suggest that it could be in excess of £100 million. That money could be reallocated back into the Ministry and used to help with European compensation without an overall increase in public expenditure.

In the past few months, the Labour party has made a great deal of its alleged representation of rural areas. There is a great difference between representing and caring. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has already garnered a reputation for being distant, remote and unwilling to meet representatives of the farming and other industries for which he is responsible. By getting rid of the regional panels, he has cut himself off from the one link that he had. He has been worrying about new names and logos for his Ministry, but the current problems may lead to a dramatic diminution of the agriculture industry for which it is responsible. I hope that the Minister will take on board not only the views of hon. Members on both sides of the House who have spoken this morning but the views of the thousands of farmers across all sectors, but especially in the livestock sector, who face a desperate future. They have gone out on the streets and to the docks. I do not condone any violence, but I recognise the plight that has driven them to those actions.

I hope that the Minister will go back to his colleagues and say, "Act now. We cannot let farmers face the new year in this abysmal situation; the pound continues to harden and prices continue to fall." In this densely populated country of ours, we cannot afford to let the countryside fall into dereliction, but that is what will happen to our hills and uplands if we do not assist farmers now.

10.40 am

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) on obtaining the debate and enabling us to discuss some topical and important problems that confront the countryside. As he began in Scotland, I too shall begin with comments about Scotland.

I sometimes wonder whether those who live in the central belt of Scotland understand that rural Scotland not only comprises 90 per cent. of Scotland's land mass but is home to one third of the Scottish population. That seems sometimes to be forgotten in Scottish domestic politics. It is certainly forgotten by Labour Members, because they have not bothered to turn up this morning.

Employment in rural Scotland increased by 6.5 per cent. between 1981 and 1991; the population rose by 3.5 per cent. In office, the Conservatives set up the rural partnership fund, which was worth £3.7 million in 1996–97 and £4.2 million in 1997–98. In response to a specific point made by the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, I remind him that under the Conservatives capital allocations to housing were substantially higher for rural Scotland than for urban Scotland. He made one or two valid points.

Sir Robert Smith: The Conservatives also introduced rules under which receipts from sales of council houses had to go towards repayment of debt rather than investment in the quality of the local housing stock.

Dr. Fox: I shall not go into that argument. Repayment of debt is important when some councils in the United Kingdom have debts higher than those of some third-world countries.

Today, we have had the rural Liberal Democrats trotted out. More townie than townie or more country than country are the Liberal Democrats, depending on the audience. In a different debate, we will have the townie Liberal Democrats trotted out. A party that cuddles up so closely to the Government—and with a leader who waits under the Cabinet table for any crumbs of prestige that might be dropped on him—is in danger of being found guilty by association with the Labour Government.

The Government do not regard the countryside as a real place with real people or real jobs. For many members of the Government, the countryside is somewhere where people from Islington go at weekends. We have to ask what the Government have against the countryside. They have increased interest rates. The rural development agencies will be based in urban areas. In the south-west—a matter that is important to my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), who were unable to speak in the debate, the RDAs will be dominated by Bristol and Plymouth, not rural areas. The local government settlement has a rural to urban bias.

The Government failed to fight for beef at Amsterdam. They have failed to compensate for the rise in the pound. They have introduced cattle passport charges, new Meat Hygiene Service charges and extra abattoir waste costs.

They have cut over-30-months scheme cattle compensation and the hill livestock compensatory allowance. The Government seem to serve no one's interest but their own. They are there to serve the cult of the Prime Minister's ego, not the people in the countryside.

The question is—*[Interruption.]* The Liberal Democrats should stop for one minute and contain themselves. Why does the rural economy matter? Because it has a £17 billion turnover. It represents 1.5 per cent. of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product. It employs 608,000 people—more than transport, mining and quarrying, research and development, post and telecommunications, or the energy or water supply industries. It makes an important contribution to our trade. It is important for our investment. However, the key measure of farm investment—the agricultural gross fixed capital formation—will be hit by the current loss of confidence and the Government's raising of interest rates.

Farmers are the natural custodians of the countryside. Under the Conservative Government, more than 5,200 farmers signed up to the countryside stewardship scheme. By designating environmentally sensitive areas, which cover more than 15 per cent. of UK land, we encouraged integration of agricultural practices with sensitive conservation management. Under the farm woodland premium, more than 17,000 hectares of tress have been planted. Those are all important environmental gains.

The problem with farmers is that they are capital rich and cash poor. When a crisis hits, they stop spending, which presents a potentially catastrophic downturn for rural service industries. The low incomes associated with the current situation mean that the young will not enter farming. Where will the next generation of farmers come from? If people leave farming, prices will fall, there will be a loss of capital value and we shall have a spiral downwards. That is the root of the crisis. As several of my hon. Friends have said, we face a genuine crisis in the countryside.

Then again, the countryside and environmental management require farming to make a profit. Stone walls do not build themselves. Hedges do not look after themselves. What those in towns tend to call nature is in fact a constant battle against nature, waged on the nation's behalf by those who look after our countryside.

The point made over and over again by hon. Members from all parties is the plight of the beef industry. I represent a constituency which has a large number of beef and dairy farmers. There is a need to understand exactly where we are at present. We have fulfilled the conditions that were set out at Florence. We have kept our part of the bargain. We have the safest beef in Europe. That has been accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House today. The public view what the Minister announced last week as an excessive knee-jerk reaction, but we must accept that the beef ban is now political and economic. It is nothing to do with safety. It is a protectionist measure levied against British farming by a protectionist mentality in the European Union that seeks to protect European farmers from higher-quality British products.

The Government should feel most ashamed of their failure to fight for beef at Amsterdam. We have made it clear that we would not have allowed the Amsterdam process to come to a conclusion without the lifting of the beef ban, but it was cast aside callously by the Government, who have no regard for what was happening.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: No, I do not have time. The pictures of the Prime Minister being embraced by Euro mobs are an adequate price for a few farms going out of business—as far as the Government's news management is concerned.

A strong pound has driven down farm incomes. It means more imports and fewer exports. It means that minimum prices in the United Kingdom are cut. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) asked, why are the Government doing nothing with agrimonetary aid; every other eligible state in the European Union pays its share? Why not Britain? The Minister who is to reply, who has responsibility for Scottish farmers, should tell us why we in the United Kingdom will not support Scottish farmers but, as EU taxpayers, we are subsidising every other group of farmers in the Union.

In Scotland alone, the costs are £7.6 million for cattle passports, £8.3 million in new Meat Hygiene Service charges and £12 million extra in charges for abattoir waste disposal. HLCA payments are down by £50 and sheep support has been frozen at the 1996 level. What will the Minister tell Scottish farmers when they are confronted with those drops in income and when the service industries face reductions in their income as a consequence? He cannot simply sit back and say, "Well, there were 18 years of Conservative government, so we have no responsibility for the crisis you face." Much of the crisis that farmers face at present lies fairly at the door of the Labour Government.

There is no doubt that the rural economy is in crisis. Farming needs action; not inquiries or soundbites. Farmers have not sought confrontation; it has been forced upon them. Everything the Government have touched has been bad for the countryside. Everything they have said shows a callous disregard for farmers; and everything—from the Prime Minister's pictures in *Country Life* magazine, posing as the country boy, onwards—shows that their appeal to the rural electorate was, like so much else, a web of deceit.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Chisholm): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) on securing this debate on the rural economy. We have had an informed and wide-ranging debate that has covered many areas of public policy. The House will be aware that I do not have responsibility for all—indeed, for most—of those areas, but since May I have visited many parts of rural Scotland in connection with my responsibilities for transport, local government housing and European structural funds.

I have 10 minutes in which to speak and I propose to spend five minutes on the general matters the hon. Gentleman raised and five minutes on the beef question. He started by asking about the Government's philosophy and their role in supporting the rural economy. The Government have been elected on a manifesto

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

commitment to sustain vibrant local communities in rural and remote areas. We recognise that those who live and work in rural areas have special needs. Our manifesto also stated that we recognised that the countryside is a great natural asset and a part of our heritage that calls for careful stewardship.

On 31 October, in Scotland, we published a discussion paper, "Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland", which set out the aims we plan to follow in all our policies for rural Scotland. It stressed that sustainable development is at the heart of those policies. In rural areas, such development requires an integrated approach to three main policy objectives: economic, social and environmental. In economic life, we want more job opportunities and improved education and training to enhance the life opportunities of the rural population. In the social area, we want to improve services and enable local communities to retain population and expand social and cultural facilities. In environmental matters, we want to safeguard our natural heritage in a way that recognises that people continue to have an active place in the rural environment.

In short, we are committed to a living countryside. We reject the assumption of general rural prosperity that underlay the previous Government's 1995 rural White Paper. We recognise that there are specific rural problems: low wages in some sectors of the rural economy; inaccessibility for new businesses; and lack of employment opportunities. These are not new problems, but the Government are committed to enhancing opportunity and promoting employment and investment for sustained economic growth. Our aim is to enhance the life chances of rural citizens, especially those who suffer from social exclusion—as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew).

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): When the Minister discusses employment opportunities in the countryside, will he bear in mind the enormous impact a hunting ban would have on countryside employment?

Mr. Chisholm: How I voted on that issue is a matter of record and I do not propose to speak about it now.

Since coming to power in May, the Government have taken decisive action to help rural communities. First, our proposals for devolution will enable far more extensive discussion of rural issues in Scotland; a proportional voting system will ensure that the new Parliament is an inclusive one in which rural Scotland has a strong voice. Secondly, we have announced our intention that national parks will be established in Scotland, ending many years of indecision on that matter. Thirdly, we have established a land reform policy group for Scotland, in fulfilment of our manifesto commitment to

"initiate a study into the system of land ownership and management in Scotland".

I shall comment briefly on the three specific areas mentioned by the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine: structural funds, housing and transport. He will be pleased to learn that a press release today will announce objective 5b funding for his area of the country and we are determined that structural funds for rural areas should continue under the new objective 2 arrangements.

We are also determined to keep funding for the highlands and islands and hope to invoke the sparsely populated area criterion to establish that. Some hon. Members might be surprised to learn that the highlands of Scotland are almost as sparsely populated as Finland. We shall also make use of the new treaty language on islands. I am especially aware of the problems of island communities, having visited the western isles this summer. I recently wrote to the chairman of Caledonian MacBrayne asking him to reconsider the decision to raise fares on the Ullapool-Stornaway route.

In the past two weeks, we have started three major housing initiatives that will help housing in rural areas: the energy efficiency initiative, which is tied in with welfare to work; the empty homes initiative, about which there will be announcements next week; and on Friday we announced £35 million for new housing partnerships, and I have said explicitly that that should apply to rural as well as to urban areas.

In many recent transport speeches, I have emphasised that solutions appropriate to urban areas might not be appropriate to rural areas. We shall have a new framework for bus services, which the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine mentioned. I have also flagged up the importance of community transport and I hope that there will be an announcement about that soon. I have ensured that a member of the Community Transport Association is on the national transport forum which I recently convened.

Beef contributes between one quarter and one third of Scotland's total gross farm output. The continued presence of beef production on our hills and uplands is testament to the Government's commitment to this sector and the extent to which, as a Government, we are prepared to continue to support it. To put that contribution into perspective, I remind the House that the beef industry in Scotland received £127 million in direct subsidies in 1996, not to mention the institutional support that is provided via intervention. Put another way, direct subsidies represent between 200 and 300 per cent. of net farm income on specialist beef farms in our less-favoured areas.

Mrs. Browning: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Chisholm: I have only four minutes left, but I shall take an intervention at the end of my remarks about beef.

On average, each beef farmer in the less-favoured areas receives roughly £25,000 in subsidy. Much has been made—understandably—of the present difficulties that confront beef farmers. In considering that, one has to recognise that various forces are at work. First, there is the long-term downward trend in beef consumption. Secondly, bovine spongiform encephalopathy is having a major impact on the sector. Thirdly, as has been mentioned in the debate, sterling is strong at present, which is a clear reflection of the confidence investors have in the current Government—unlike the previous one.

Much has been made about the downside of a strong pound. I acknowledge that it is aiding imports to this country, particularly from Ireland. It is hardly surprising that farmers—especially beef farmers—are queuing up to press for agrimonetary compensation. There was, however, no such queue when the pound was weak and

farmers were overcompensated to the tune of £100 million per year on average between 1992 and 1996. Even taking account of recent revaluations, common agricultural policy prices in the UK are converted at a rate that is 5.6 per cent. higher than it was in January 1990.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Chisholm: In a minute.

Such is the Government's commitment to the beef sector and such is our recognition of its importance to Scotland that the claims of the beef farmers are not being ignored, pending a review of whether they are justified. If any help is possible—I use the word "if" advisedly—it will have to take account of the tight expenditure provisions within which the Government as a whole have to operate. All the calls for European money ignore the fact that much of that will have to come out of general public expenditure.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Chisholm: I have only three minutes left, I so I shall take only one intervention, from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning).

Mrs. Browning: Does the Minister recognise the difference between the situation facing beef farmers today and that of a year ago? The new situation has arisen because of high interest rates and the strength of the pound. On mixed farms, when beef was down, farmers could continue to survive through milk cheques and payments relating to other sectors, but now all sectors are down. That is why the current situation is such a crisis.

Mr. Chisholm: I accept that point. The Government are giving it further consideration, although some of the factors, such as high interest rates, have to do with the incipient inflation we inherited from the previous Government.

The hon. Members for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) and for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) referred to the deboning issue. I am well aware of the effect on the industry of the measures we had to take. Although the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee perceived the risk from that source to be extremely small, it was only prudent—given the policy of successive Governments of regarding public health as paramount—that we should take action to safeguard the consumer.

Time is running short, but I should like to refer briefly to the BSE inquiry referred to by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will make an announcement about that soon. Time will not allow me to mention reform of the common agricultural policy, except to say that we are keen to achieve that, and CAP reform proposals set out in Agenda 2000 are an important step in the right direction.

As I have already said, rural policy reaches into almost every public policy. We have had an interesting and informed debate. The Government are committed to a living countryside and we are sure that the measures we are putting in place will ensure the maintenance of vibrant, productive local communities.

Cycling

10.59 am

Mr. Charles Clarke (Norwich, South): I welcome this debate, which is the first one on cycling for many years. It is particularly timely given the Kyoto conference on the environment and the Government's review of integrated transport policy. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on that because they are following a course that will be extremely effective, and I want cycling to play its part in the debate.

I should declare an interest as chairman of the all-party cycling group, which has more than 40 members and is growing all the time. It hopes that the views expressed in the debate will be taken into account by the Government. I am sure that that will happen. I am particularly grateful to see that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, is present. He is well known throughout the House for his long-term commitment on this matter and for his campaigning to raise the status of cycling in various guises. I am sure that in the unfortunate circumstances of his party coming to power again, the battlefield means of transport would shift from the armoured personnel carrier to the bicycle.

The purpose of the debate is to stress the need for the Government to have a co-ordinated and coherent strategy to promote cycling in all areas. We believe that that strategy will reduce congestion, promote the Government's general environmental policies and promote public health. That is why we believe that cycling must be regarded as a vital part of the Government's overall transport policies.

I should emphasise that I speak not on behalf of the 1 million cyclists in Britain—although that figure is significant—but on behalf of many more people who would like to cycle if only they felt able to do so but are inhibited from doing so for a number of different reasons. The following figures sum up the current problem: 90 per cent. of children have bikes; 2 per cent. of them cycle to school; and 17 per cent. of cars travelling at 9 am every morning are taking children to and from school—an average journey of about 1.8 miles. The absence of cycling routes increases congestion, makes cycling more dangerous and makes the condition of our environment worse. We want to replace that vicious circle with a virtuous one.

Many people want to cycle, but fail to do so. A number of statistics support that claim. In 1975-76, 14 households in every 100 had a bike. Last year, 30 households in every 100 had a bike. That represents a dramatic increase in the number of bicycles in Britain—23 million bikes are kept by British households. In the past decade, however, bicycle usage has gone down by 20 per cent. at the same time as the ownership of bikes has doubled. That illustrates as well as any figure could the fact that many people want to cycle but are inhibited from doing so.

The pattern of cycling varies across the country. According to the 1991 census, 27 per cent. of people cycle in Cambridge; 18 per cent. in York; 15 per cent. in Gosport; 11 per cent. in Crewe; and 10 per cent. in Grimsby. I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is in his place because he has been a long-standing parliamentary advocate of cycling. In Norwich, the figure stands at 3 per cent., although we are trying to push it up. Those figures

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

reveal the variety of bicycle use across the country, ranging as it does from the top level of 27 per cent. to 3 per cent. in cities such as Norwich. One must compare that with the 43 per cent. bicycle use recorded in Delft in Holland or Munster in Germany—what a dramatic difference.

As the Government's figures suggest, United Kingdom bicycle use is low when compared to that internationally. The figures show that 2 per cent. of journeys in the United Kingdom are made by bicycle, compared with 10 per cent. in Sweden; 11 per cent. in Germany; 15 per cent. in Switzerland—which is so flat, of course!—and 18 per cent. in Denmark. Those figures show that the number of people who cycle is not simply a matter of geographic convenience but depends on whether respective Governments have focused their policies on making such journeys work.

Consider what has happened in Munich, a great city which is not generally considered to be occupied by green cyclists, veggie eaters and all the rest of it. It has increased the number of bike journeys to work from 6 per cent. to 15 per cent. in the past three years by means of properly focused policies.

The scope for such an increase in bicycle use in Britain exists if local and national Government apply themselves to introducing policies to put cycling at the core of an integrated transport strategy. The Royal Automobile Club estimates that 8 per cent. of car journeys, one in 12, are of less than a mile. That is equivalent to a five-minute cycle ride—less if one is the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire. It also estimates that 25 per cent. of car journeys cover less than two miles, which is equivalent to a 10-minute cycle ride.

The desire to increase the use of bicycles also exists and has been admirably set out in the Government's discussion paper, "Developing an Integrated Transport Policy". Cycling is an option for the vast majority of people, including those under the age of 16 to whom many other forms of transport are not available. It is affordable and helps the poorest in our country. A journey by bicycle can be made door to door, a service which public transport, despite its advantages, often cannot offer. An increase in the number of journeys by bicycle would reduce congestion—one of the Government's principal goals—and cut CO_2 emissions in our atmosphere, so improving air quality and health.

What are the inhibitions on the use of the bicycle, given that so many people own a bike and yet fewer and fewer people are using them? There are three fundamental inhibitions that it is within the Government's power to address. The first and most obvious is the danger involved. For understandable reasons, many parents will not permit their children to cycle to school because of the risks involved. The second inhibition relates to the storage and security of a bike at the place of work or wherever the journey may end. The third inhibition relates to convenience and comfort.

We could attack the problems of danger if the Government committed themselves to creating an integrated high-quality network of cycle routes throughout our cities. The Sustrans initiative—I should declare an interest as one of its patrons—has been outstanding. It has made and will continue to make major improvements in the level of cycling, but its efforts are by no means enough. In every town and city we need an integrated transport route strategy to ensure that people can conveniently and safely cycle from home to school or to their place of work or wherever.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Hon. Members are listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman, whose comments we support. Given the role of district and borough councils and the highway authorities, which are often county councils, one of the best things would be to encourage those organisations to work out what would help their staff to travel to work by bicycle. They should make all their staff, not just the bicycling officers, sensitive to what could be done easily, fast and cheaply to encourage bicycle use. That would set an example that could be followed by other employers.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and I agree that the role of employers is critical. They spend large amounts of money subsidising company cars and other items which are not in their best interests and, in many cases, it would be much cheaper and better for them to encourage their employees to cycle to and from work where that is feasible.

We need a high-quality integrated network of cycle routes throughout the country. The Cyclists Touring Club has estimated that it would cost £130 million a year over 10 years to establish such a network. Compare that with the expenses incurred in my region, the eastern region, on motorway building. The estimated cost of projects and schemes in preparation for the widening of junctions 10 to 14 of the M1—as recorded in the Government's roads review, so the work may not go ahead—is £228.5 million. Compare that with the £130 million needed to develop a national cycle network. The M1 junctions 6 to 10 widening will cost £105.9 million, and the A14 improvement, £122.3 million. Those are some of the schemes in my region. The cause of the nation's health and the environment would be advanced if, in the Government's roads review, they tried to put that integrated high-quality cycle network in place throughout the country, rather than widening a few bits of motorway and adding sliproads here and there.

It is particularly important to focus on the issue of safety around schools—the reduction of car speed and protected access to the cycle route are crucial. Experience abroad shows that the more cycles are used, the less dangerous cycling is. Some of the fashionable newspapers are portraying cyclists and pedestrians as being in conflict. When such a conflict occurs, it is bad, but it is nothing like as bad as the conflict between the cyclist and the motorist, as a result of which the cyclist may end up dead or seriously injured. The way to deal with that is to ensure that cyclists are not forced to choose between dangerous roads and illegal pavements. There should be a proper cycle route.

Secondly, on storage and security, it is critical that when people cycle to work or school, they can leave their bike in safety and park it in a proper facility, and that there should be facilities for them to shower, change their clothes and store their cycling gear.

The intervention of the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) was extremely pertinent. Several employers are taking initiatives and working with

Transport 2000—for example, the Royal Mail, Hewlett Packard, the Body Shop and a number of public sector bodies—to try to achieve the kind of co-operation to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I hope that as part of the integrated policy, the Government will approach employers and employers' organisations to encourage cycle use among employees, and that the Government, as a major employer, will do likewise.

In schools, cycle storage is not available now, as it used to be. Some heads actively discourage children from cycling to school. I was about to make a joke about the historic role of the bike shed in British education, but perhaps that would not be appropriate in a tidy debate such as this. Government support for schools to provide proper storage facilities for bikes is an important element which the sustainable roads for schools programme seeks to encourage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the people who can influence others, such as teachers, school governors going to their meetings, and parents, started cycling instead of pointing the finger and telling other people to cycle while they themselves go around in their 1.5 tonne steel waistcoat with the radio blaring, it would be far more likely to help others to put that into practice? Could we start by encouraging Westminster city council, with or without the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, to put an advance stop line for bicyclists at the bottom of Whitehall, and make a bicycle lane as well, and perhaps close the gates of the House of Commons car park for one day a year?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the all-party group had a useful meeting yesterday with the councillors who chair the environment and transport committee of Westminster city council, and also with the people who run the royal parks. We spoke about the specific matters that the hon. Gentleman raised, and also about general issues. The councillors said that they were committed to providing proper bike parking around the Palace of Westminster for visitors. We are pursuing the matter with the Serjeant at Arms.

I take this opportunity to advertise the fact that 10 June next year will be National Bicycle Day—the Wednesday in the middle of National Bicycle Week. We will be organising a bicycle ride in which we hope that as many Members of Parliament as possible will do their bit to encourage people to cycle to work that day, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): Does my hon. Friend agree that the integrated transport strategy is crucial, and that more than one Department has a role to play? May I invite him to develop his argument on the role of employers and to reflect on the role of the planning authorities, which receive applications for new places of employment? Does not planning policy provide a great opportunity to require and encourage employers to make proper facilities available, so that they are built into every new place of work?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend—and especially with his point that it is a matter not just for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, but for a wide range of Government Departments, including the Cabinet Office, which is at the centre of government as an employer. The national health service clearly has an interest in promoting health, and hospitals and health facilities are both a massive employer, and places where a massive number of people go. The Department for Education and Employment has a critical role to play in promoting safe cycling to school.

On planning, I agree that the goal should be to reduce out-of-city building, and to plan new developments—retail developments, hospitals, places of work or whatever—with the shortest possible lines of communication between the development and the people who are likely to go there. That in itself would encourage transport by bicycle.

Thirdly, with reference to comfort and convenience, I shall cite the results of a controlled exercise: a cyclist took 13 minutes to cover the 3.5 miles from Camden lock to St. Paul's cathedral. The same journey took 20 minutes by cab, 29 minutes by car, 32 minutes by tube and 40 minutes by bus. That is an interesting illustration of the fact that the bike can be convenient, effective and speedy. If we could simply solve the problems of danger and proper storage, people would choose to use the bike, because of the convenience.

That also involves a proper exchange between the bicycle and other forms of transport—the fashionable term is intermodal transport. The obvious example is the train, and the argument entails another virtuous circle—if proper bike parks are available around commuting stations, more people will cycle to the bike park, leave their bike securely and travel by train, rather than driving. That would increase business for the train company and benefit the environment.

I am pleased to say that Anglia Railways, which is the train operator between London and Norwich, has won several awards. The company is grateful to the Minister for Transport in London for presenting those awards at a ceremony at Liverpool Street station a few months ago. Anglia Railways removed travel restrictions on bicycles, reduced the bicycle fare from £3 to £1 and was awarded the first cycle mark by Sustrans at the presentation that I mentioned. The company has further plans to increase capacity for cycles by January next year.

Such initiatives are important. In the context of convenience and cost for cyclists, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) for her determined campaign for the granting of cycle allowances by the House and more generally. She is working extremely hard, with our full support.

I hope that I have made the case that the Government could make a big difference to cycle use in Britain by drawing up a coherent and co-ordinated strategy. That would improve the health of the nation and the environment, as other countries have shown. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is committed to that course, and I hope that she and her colleagues in the Department will listen to the contributions in the debate and reflect our concerns in the White Paper to be published at the beginning of next year.

11.19 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) on securing this debate this morning. It is important not least because the House rarely gets to

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

debate this issue—I am not sure that there has been a debate specifically about cycling in this place before. Cycling is vital to the creation of an integrated transport strategy. We expect to hear news today from Kyoto about the outcome of the climate change conference. Sadly, it is likely that any proposals will be inadequate. Nevertheless, changing our transport system and encouraging people to use non-polluting forms of transport is crucial to securing reduced pollution levels and improving our climate.

"Get on yer bike" was a phrase somewhat abused by the previous Government, but it is an increasingly important option in the face of unsustainable growth in road traffic. Cycling is both healthy and non-polluting, and it can play an important part in developing an efficient, integrated transport system. That said, there would be little point in this place's pretending that, in the next 10 years, for example, the bicycle will overtake the car as the preferred form of transport for many types of journey. However, the car need not be people's first preference for every type of journey, as it is at present.

The car should be only one of many ways of getting from A to B—and it should certainly not be the mode of transport most encouraged by Government policy in terms of planning, the roads system and the tax system. In a properly integrated transport system, people should be able to use different travel combinations—car, public transport or bicycles—depending on what is most suited to their journey, and they should have the facilities that make their choice practical.

At present, the car is not only over-used but literally pushing everything else off the road. The Liberal Democrats have long argued that providing everyone with the means to reach work, shops and schools is possible sustainably only if different forms of transport do not conflict with each other and are brought together in an integrated transport strategy. We must ensure that the car does not overwhelm other more environmentally sound ways to travel. We must make travelling much more straightforward so that people do not always feel the need to turn to their cars.

For example, if a train passenger were able to leave his bike at a station in a secure place or take his bike on the train to use at his destination without excessive restrictions or penalty fares, the journey would be quicker and simpler than one that involved sitting in traffic or parking the car. However, in truth, the current rail system is more often a foe than a friend of cycling because it places many obstructions in the way of cyclists. The challenge is to create a system in which cycle routes link with public transport over longer distances so that green transport options are not only the most sustainable but the easiest route to follow. We need to integrate cycling literally into our transport system.

I am pleased that the Government have recognised the urgent need for a complete overhaul of our approach to transport in Britain with the publication of the integrated transport consultation paper. I look forward to the outcome of that process and I hope that cycling will play a full part in the document's conclusions. It is certainly a contrast to the ostrich approach that characterised much of the previous Government's transport policy. The Conservatives ignored the environmental and congestion problems and seemed to pull their heads out of the sand only to give the go-ahead to one road scheme or another. More often than not, such schemes did not relieve congestion but simply transferred it, thus exacerbating the problems that they were meant to solve.

To be fair, the previous Government eventually gave some recognition to the possible contribution that cycling could make to rationalising the transport system by introducing the national cycling strategy. That strategy, which has been adopted by this Government, seeks a fourfold increase in cycling by 2012. Given that cycling accounts for less than 2 per cent. of trips in this country—the hon. Gentleman referred to cycling levels in other countries, including 11 per cent. in Germany and 15 per cent. in Switzerland—an increase to 8 per cent. over the next 15 years is perhaps not such an ambitious target. In any case, the real issue is not the target but how Ministers intend to achieve it.

Today I shall briefly touch on some of the major schemes that have been developed to encourage cycling in Britain and how I believe that the Government could take them much further. The safe routes to school project, which has been referred to already, is funded basically by local authorities and Sustrans. It addresses one of the most pressing problems currently facing cycling in Britain: the problem of safety and, perhaps more accurately, of fear on the part of children who cycle and their parents. Nobody enjoys sitting in rush-hour traffic: it is both stressful and time-consuming. It is also often unnecessary. Much rush-hour traffic, especially in urban areas, is caused by people making short local journeys that could be made quickly and more safely in other ways.

The recent national travel survey found that, before 9 am during term time, about one in every five cars were taking children to school. On average, such trips are less than two miles long. If parents and pupils felt happy cycling or walking to school, there would be a great deal less traffic in the morning and thus less pollution and less danger. That would encourage more people to walk and cycle, thereby creating a virtuous cycle.

In contrast, a vicious circle exists at present. Increasing car use has made cycling and walking to school more dangerous, so more parents decide to use the car and school routes become even more dangerous. The safe routes to school initiative seeks to break that circle by taking people out of their cars and on to safe cycle routes that both parents and children can use without fear. That would get polluting traffic off the roads and help to reverse the declining level of fitness in Britain, thereby creating real long-term health benefits.

That is an excellent project, but it exists only because of funding from a charitable organisation and because some local authorities have managed to find the money. Limited funding means that the project is able to cover only a handful of areas. The Government must look closely at how they can expand their at present limited role and ensure that safe routes to school are available to all Britain's schoolchildren. That involves looking at planning guidance and reducing traffic speed around schools. For example, 20 mph limits around schools and active traffic-calming measures could be introduced. It means supporting schools in providing proper storage facilities for bikes and encouraging both parents and children to cycle. It also means providing local authority funding for that work—a point to which I shall return later.

The National Cycle Network will provide another welcome boost to the campaign to improve safety for cyclists through the creation of 2,500 miles of traffic-free and traffic-calmed paths by 2000. I congratulate Sustrans on securing more than £40 million from the Millennium Commission to fund that innovative scheme, which involves planning cycle tracks along disused railways and towpaths and creating routes not only for work or school but for tourism. It will bring money into, and traffic away from, many of this country's most beautiful areas.

The National Cycle Network will bring the health and environmental benefits of cycling to many areas. However, many of its plans are running into difficulty or face substantial delay. Although it is a millennium project, very little of it will be completed by the millennium. Cash-strapped local authorities are finding it hard, if not impossible, to provide their portion of the funding for their sections of the cycle network. Many local authorities are experiencing difficulties in that area, and the case of Derbyshire was raised with me. The network route between Derby and Burton-on-Trent and between Derby and Nottingham has been postponed.

My home country of Cornwall has difficulty not only with its sections of the cycle network but with its own ambitious cycle path proposal, the Cornish way. The latter project has been on hold for more than a year since the Millennium Commission turned down an application for funding. The project aims to provide a network of eight routes throughout the county not only for cyclists but for walkers and the mobility-impaired. Given the Cornish economy's reliance on tourism, the delay is economically costly. Although the county council is providing all the funding that it can, the Cornish way scheme must now look to Sustrans for assistance. However, Sustrans has little to offer in the way of financial support. Meanwhile, the recently announced local government settlement has cut the county's highways budget even further in cash terms, which guarantees that even fewer discretionary projects will get off the ground.

All local authority cycleway spending has been under pressure since the previous Government's local transport settlement, which was announced last December and which cut the total money available for minor works and safety schemes from £177 million to £139 million. As that budget is the only source of funding for cycle measures, many local authorities, not just Cornwall, have had to suspend cycle schemes in this financial year. Safe routes for schoolchildren have had to be postponed, for example, in Cambridgeshire and in Hertfordshire, as have railway partnership schemes to improve facilities at stations for cyclists in Hampshire. That makes nonsense of the supposed national cycling strategy. We are falling further and further behind in pursuing the initiatives that we want.

At present, funding for cycling is simply not adequate. Research by Transport 2000 shows that just 2 per cent. of local authority transport capital spending goes to cyclists. By contrast, the German environment department recommends that its regional governments spend £20 per head on cycling, 100 times that spent in the United Kingdom, where local authorities are able to spare only 20p per head to turn motorists into cyclists. However much it may be argued that local authorities can transfer things, with that gap, we need to consider the overall funding system. A lot of funding could be found from the tax incentives and other incentives that are given to motorists to drive. That is a good source for the Government to consider.

Cycling can save money. Recent evidence shows that congestion on roads costs the nation £15 billion annually in terms of national health service, health and environment costs and the congestion's effect on the atmosphere overall. We will deal with that only by creating a genuinely integrated transport system, such as cycleways connecting people with school, work or other forms of transport. Funding must reflect the importance of such a system.

The Government have announced further cuts in local government standard spending assessments for transport in 1998–99. I urge the Minister to fight the corner for improved funding for those schemes to ensure that we have not only an integrated transport strategy but, as it were, an integrated budget strategy for the environment and transport.

I hope that Members of Parliament will win the battle to have cycling allowances alongside the generous incentives that we have for motoring. Perhaps at the same time the Minister could deal with the fact that, if members of the public who do not normally have access to this place cycle here, they are not allowed to park their bicycle, but are turned away. As cyclists are banned from locking up their bikes in the streets around Westminster, that seems an extraordinary system. I understand the security issues, but I hope that that rule will be changed.

11.32 am

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): This welcome debate takes place at an auspicious time in the context of the Kyoto conference. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) and the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) have mentioned Sustrans, a charitable company that was formed by an imaginative, creative and forward-looking group of people in Bristol in 1979, and that considered in particular how we could have a sustainable integrated transport system, with a focus on cycling.

To increase the percentage of journeys that are made by cyclists, we are looking for a safe and attractive infrastructure—with traffic-free routes and traffic-calmed roads, where often the speed limit should be only 20 mph—and for a clear lead from central Government, local government and the media to sustain cycling as a modern form of transport that should be encouraged. Sustrans, which had that vision in 1979, has been working hard. It has already put forward, built and designed 250 miles of traffic-free routes for both cyclists and pedestrians. As has been mentioned, in 1995, it was awarded the first Millennium Commission project to build the national cycle network. By 2005, that project will provide 6,500 miles of cycle routes, which will go through city centres and include safe routes to school and work and easy access to the countryside—all without the use of the car. That is what is needed to raise cycling's profile.

Sustrans has drawn my attention to the fact that, in this country, 70 per cent. of all journeys are under five miles. Most of them, of course, could be made by cycling. It is worth remembering that most of the people who are responsible for making decisions about transport travel much further than that to work and may have a different perspective on the use of transport generally.

[Valerie Davey]

Cycling is relatively cheap, yet that millennium project, imaginative as it is, will cost about £180 million. A quarter of it has come from lottery funding. Much more is being raised in other ways, but transport money will also be needed. The Government's contribution towards the aim of opening the first 2,500 miles by midsummer's day of the year 2000, is to provide for 63 new and 38 modified road crossings. I hope that the Government will be able to confirm that we are on schedule and will recognise, as the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell said, that Government funding will be needed within local government financing to complete the urban sections of the network. Billions have been spent on roads, but spending millions on cycle routes would contribute significantly to a better transport system and to reducing the crisis on our roads.

While Sustrans has been making that important national contribution, which many individual cyclists support, my constituents have come up with some more immediate priorities, which echo some of the points that have been made. The first concern is that there should be a clear and combined cycle-rail transport scheme. In Denmark, for example, 35 per cent. of people who use rail reach the station by cycling. In Germany, the figure is 15 per cent., but in Britain less than 1 per cent. of people cycle to the station and continue their journey by cycle at the other end.

The position in my constituency of Bristol, West is interesting. Cyclists may use a local branch line, the Severn-Beach, which has received support from local government, free of charge without the need to book, but, if they reach Bristol Temple Meads—although the security for cycles there has been improved if they wish to leave their bike—and want to travel to a further destination with their bike, they are faced with three different operators, offering different charges and different conditions, with or without booking. That complicated system needs to change if we are to encourage cycling to the station and an onward journey with the bike. A common policy would encourage cycling.

Secondly, individuals are looking for more traffic-calming measures in residential areas. It seems that the Bristol cycle campaign, which was inaugurated six years ago with the main objective of achieving 20 mph speed limits in urban areas, was setting a precedent. Many more people want a national slowdown initiative to reduce the speed of traffic, particularly in residential areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South mentioned accident levels at different speeds. May I spell that out? At 40 mph, an accident involving a pedestrian will almost certainly lead to loss of life. At 30 mph, the pedestrian has a 50:50 chance of survival. At 20 mph, usually only one in 20 will have a fatal accident. It is so logical to reduce speed limits. In addition, in the urban context, driving at 20 mph—remembering of course that the majority of those journeys are under five miles—will add only one minute to the journey time.

We should see cycling as an important part of an integrated transport system. It can be enjoyable, and many more people could take it up. An integrated transport system with more cyclists could, as we have already heard, benefit health, local communities and the environment.

I am sorry that the Chamber is not packed this morning, but I know that many House of Commons staff cycle, and I am delighted to see bicycles as I walk through the Courtyard. I hope that more Members, more staff and more people everywhere are encouraged to cycle by the Government's policy and the work initiated by Sustrans.

11.40 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The debate is fascinating, but the case for encouraging cycling is so obvious that we should not have to put it in such a little debate; it should be central to Government policy. It was powerfully put by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), whom I congratulate on initiating the debate.

There is an environmental case for cycling: it relieves congestion. As has been said several times, most journeys are short—70 per cent. of car journeys are less than five miles—and ideally would be taken on a bicycle. There is also a health argument. Although cycling is compatible with being overweight in my case—and, I suspect, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South—it is a healthy pleasure. Then there is the convenience aspect. I used to live in Kilburn before my wife had delusions of grandeur and decided to move us up in the world to Victoria, where it is hardly worth getting the bike out. It used to take me 25 minutes to cycle in from Kilburn—although that was when I was at the peak of fitness; I was a young contender in politics then—but it took me between 45 minutes and an hour to come in by car, and 45 minutes on the tube.

Given the strength of the argument for cycling, it is amazing that so little is being done. Other countries do much more. In this country, cycling is regarded as a slightly cranky occupation. I wish that my hon. Friend had shorn his beard, partly to help his career in the Labour party but also to present a slightly less cranky image of cycling.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: What about your tie?

Mr. Mitchell: That is not a cranky image; it is a fashionable image.

Cycling is regarded as cranky and quirky. People pay lip service to it, but they do not do anything. A dynamic drive from the top downwards is needed to push the case for cycling, and to bring it into all transport considerations. Pious words and endless deference—which, it is fair to say, we do hear—are not enough. I do not know why more is not done, but encouraging cycling is central to the improvement that we need. Use breeds interest. The more people cycle, the safer cycling is—and, as all the figures show, the fewer people cycle, the more dangerous it is. As my hon. Friend pointed out, there are more people on cycles, but fewer people use their cycles to make, for instance, the journey to work. We must remove the obstacles to cycling. That means recognition of what the obstacles are, and a massive effort to get rid of them. The all-party cycling group will do its best, but the drive must come from Ministers, as well as from local authorities.

What are the obstacles that need to be removed? One of the main problems experienced by cyclists—particularly in London, but I experience it in Grimsby, in Yorkshire as a whole and, indeed, all over the

country—is that, having cycled somewhere because, in general, it is more convenient to cycle a short distance than to walk or drive, they have nowhere to put their bicycles. That is a perennial and pressing problem. There are signs defacing railings everywhere, especially in London, saying that police will remove cycles—but what better use is there for railings, except where dogs are concerned, than as somewhere to lock cycles so that they are not stolen? The signs are a monstrosity: we should be able to put our cycles somewhere. There should be facilities at workplaces, and also in the street. Why are there no cycle parks in central positions in London? Why are there not cycle parks at more railway and bus stations, so that people can combine cycling with other forms of transport?

Even at the House of Commons there is cycle storage space, but the facilities at Norman Shaw are pathetic. Cyclists compete for places with great bags of rubbish which, when moved, usually knock all the cycles over. When I lean my cycle against the wall, it is then moved because it is an inconvenience. Cycle storage space at work is essential.

Facilities for changing are also essential. I tend not to cycle in my fashionable suits—I prefer to cycle in a pair of jeans and a shirt—but I sometimes cycle to the House in a suit. When people shuffle away from me during debates, it is not because of my politics, old Labour though they are; it is because, having cycled in, I am hot and sweaty, and there are no facilities to enable me to shower and change my clothes. The facilities are few enough here, but in most other places they are pathetic.

There should be more emphasis on safety, so that people feel more confident. I would make crash helmets compulsory. More cycling routes should be designated—not just routes through parks, which we discussed yesterday in the all-party cycling group, but on the roads. As others have said, we also need traffic-calming measures. Traffic should be slower in the vicinity of schools, so that children will be encouraged to cycle to school. My heart goes out to mothers with small children perched on the back of their bicycles. When I see my daughter taking my grandchildren to school on the back of her bike, it worries me enormously.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Should we not re-examine the question of roundabouts? When the local authority in Cambridge discovered that most accidents to cyclists took place at roundabouts, they removed them, which led to a significant reduction in the number of casualties.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree entirely. There should also be designated places at traffic lights, so that cars do not suddenly sweep across cyclists to turn left when the cyclists are going straight ahead.

Bicycles should be better designed. I am tempted to buy a small collapsible bicycle, but I am so tall that when I ride such bicycles they wobble all over the place, because the saddle and the handlebars are so extended. It is like riding a jelly—or perhaps I am the jelly. Nevertheless, portable bicycles are very useful, as are bicycles with facilities for carrying things. When I was cycling from Kilburn, I lost the manuscript of a book that set out the whole case for new Labour. *[Laughter.]* No, no: it forecast accurately everything that needed to happen to the party. That was in the early 1980s. I sometimes wonder whether the manuscript was discovered in the park through which I was cycling by my hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio. Perhaps that was the beginning of his rise to power. As far as I know, the book was never found, despite my desperate inquiries of the police; but its suggestions have certainly been implemented by the Labour party. If proper carrying facilities had been available, the manuscript would not have dropped from my bike and I would now be in a powerful position rather than standing here pleading for cyclists' views to be heard.

The case for cyclists has been well put by hon. Members. We need a drive to cycling, a policy that is wider and more powerful than the enthusiasm of those of us taking part in the debate. That means a drive by local authorities to introduce cycling into all traffic developments. Grimsby in north-east Lincolnshire is a case in point and was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South. We have developed effective cycling policies, but the limitation is always finance to build cycleways and install facilities. There should be dedicated finance for local authorities to encourage cycling.

I was distressed to find that the national network of 6,500 miles will not provide facilities in such beauty spots as the Yorkshire dales, the Lincolnshire wolds and the lake district. It is just a means of getting from one end of the country to the other rather than a facility that will allow people to branch out into beautiful areas. We need imaginative national planning but most of all there must be a drive from the top to encourage cycling, and that means a Minister whose specific responsibility is to promote and develop cycling so that it is included in all considerations and decisions. That Minister would develop a financial framework to promote cycling and reward cyclists. That would bring a whole new enthusiasm to cycling matters and make it a central rather than a peripheral part of transport policy. The simple answer is to do what we have suggested and I call on the Minister to get on her bike.

11.51 am

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): It is an enormous pleasure to speak in this important debate because cycling gives much pleasure to those who are able to engage in it. It is also a great tourist opportunity which is currently undervalued. My wife and I spent more than a year cycling abroad, an activity that enables one to see a country from the bottom up in a quiet leisurely way without making any impact on it. It is a superb way to explore a country, but although this country is ideal for such touring because the key sites are close together and many of them can be visited in a day, our roads system is inherently hostile to cyclists. We are missing a great economic opportunity.

Some people say that they cannot cycle because they have children. In the year that my wife and I cycled 5,000 miles through California, Mexico and Australia, we had a two-year-old child in a trailer on the back of the bike. If we could do it in our state—we are not quite so portly as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke)—I suspect that many people could do it.

I am especially concerned about children, and primarily those who cycle to school. The statistics are alarming. In 1971, some 80 per cent. of our children cycled to school,

[Mr. David Lock]

and I was one of them. Now only 10 per cent. do that. A recent survey in Bury St. Edmunds showed that fewer than one in 20 of our children were taking the amount of exercise that is necessary to maintain minimum fitness. That is frightening. Nine out of 10 juniors own a bike but only one in four of them are allowed by their parents to cycle on the roads. As 300 children a year are killed on our roads, such parental objection is understandable in the light of a roads system that is inherently hostile to cyclists.

Denmark has 10 times the number of cyclists in Britain but as hon. Members have eloquently said, a Danish cyclist is 12 times less likely to be killed or injured per mile travelled. Some 23 per cent. of our children travel to school by car, and that accounts for one in five cars at peak times although the distances travelled are between one and two miles. Over such short distances, catalytic converters do not have time to warm up and, paradoxically, those journeys produce the highest levels of pollution.

The advantages of a national strategy to encourage children to cycle to school are overwhelming. The first of those is health: we do not want a nation of couch potatoes. We must train children to use their bodies and minds responsibly. The Health Education Authority has asked for cycling to be doubled, and the British Medical Association says that that will make a significant contribution to the nation's health. If children are encouraged to cycle early, they will keep the habit for life. If we deprive them of the opportunity to cycle early, they will not adopt that habit. Cycling provides a great opportunity to teach children independence because when cycling they make limited decisions. It will also cut congestion and protect the environment.

How are we to reach our goal? The first step is to recognise the benefits and then to invest in cycling routes as part of a rearrangement of our transport priorities. We must overcome the fear of parents and children of cycling. We can take some simple steps. As my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has said, there should be secure facilities for locking cycles. We must introduce traffic-calming measures and 20 mph zones around schools and encourage road safety and cycle training within schools. Nine out of 10 children have bicycles, and we are failing in our duty if we do not teach them to cycle safely as part of the national curriculum.

We must build on the excellent work that has been carried out under the safe routes to school project. We need better and safer junctions and car-free routes and we must build on good practice. In areas where cycling to school has been promoted, the effects are startling. Reading and York both promote cycling and now 35 per cent. of children in Reading cycle to school. That is a vast improvement on previous statistics and those children reap the benefit and get into the habit of cycling. As hon. Members have said, what we need most is guidance from the top for a comprehensive and properly funded strategy. The targets in the national cycling strategy are impressive, but without the necessary drive we will fail to reach them, just as the previous Government failed to reach the "Health of the Nation" targets. Labour is in government and I hope that policies will be implemented to make sure that, for everybody's benefit, the targets are met.

11.57 am

Mr. Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) on securing this important debate. I should like to relay my experiences from my constituency. In the past seven years, two road projects for bypasses were planned for my area—one for Rhyl and one for Prestatyn. The Rhyl project was to cost £17 million and the Prestatyn one £10 million. The terminology is interesting. Initially, they were called bypasses but when the business community found that it was to be bypassed the projects were called relief roads.

Some £27 million was to be spent on two relief roads that were unwanted and unnecessary. A massive petition was presented and the two projects were knocked on the head. Compare those unnecessary projects, costing £27 million, with the £42 million that the lottery, a charity, gave to Sustrans. What is our priority? Is it to promote unnecessary and unwanted roads, or to promote a strategic cycleway system for the United Kingdom?

Before being elected to the House, I taught in a large primary school which had 560 pupils. I attended the same school in the 1960s. In the 1960s, my school had bicycle sheds that were filled to overflowing with bicycles. On my most recent visit there, in September 1997, I saw one bicycle chained to the fence. The bicycle sheds had gone, and one pupil out of 560 had cycled to school. That situation is mirrored in towns and cities across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) said that our children are being turned into couch potatoes. It is true. Their parents drive them to their destination, because they believe that the roads are too dangerous. The more children are driven to school, the more road traffic will increase: the prophecy becomes self-fulfilling, and fears increasingly become justified.

Provision of off-road cycleways specifically for schoolchildren would bring great benefits to the United Kingdom. It would encourage children to cycle and take regular exercise from an early age—which is the critical factor, because children establish patterns for life at an early age. Schoolchildren cycling to school would drastically reduce the 8.30 am and 3.30 pm rush hours caused by school runs, thereby reducing traffic, the number of accidents—especially those involving children—and pollution levels.

When I served as a councillor in my community, I participated in a project to discover what local schoolchildren wanted. In nine local schools, we asked 600 children, ranging in age from seven to 16, what facilities they wanted in their tourist-oriented town. They did not want more "palaces of culture"—a euphemism for slot machine arcades. They wanted pure and simple things: the first was cycleways and the second was ice rinks.

All the jigsaw pieces are in place. There is demand for cycling, and people own bikes. Parents, however, are reluctant to allow or encourage their children to cycle because of perceived dangers. The Government should be concentrating their energy on the young, whose attitudes and life styles are still being formed.

I ask Ministers to listen to the many valid points made in this debate by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I urge the Government to lead the way in promoting cycling by providing finance, co-ordination

and—most importantly, as has been said many times in this debate—vision, so that cycling can play its full role in an integrated transport system.

12.2 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) on securing this debate. He was absolutely right to begin his speech by recognising my right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) as a key factor in the development of cycling policy in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman did not mention my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan)—who did sterling work with the all-party cycling group—but I am sure that that was a mere oversight.

I should declare my interest as a cyclist. I am a member of the Dorset cyclists network, a long-standing member of the tandem club and the owner of not only a tandem but a tandem trailer. For hon. Members who have not seen my tandem and tandem trailer together, it is approximately the same length as a Volvo estate. I have also participated with my family in the mass cycle ride in Christchurch, which was initiated to celebrate the 900th anniversary of Christchurch priory but has now become a very popular annual event in Christchurch during environment week. I have participated also in "Healthy Bike Ride", which was promoted by local general practitioners.

I agree with the priorities stated by the hon. Member for Norwich, South to deal with the barriers to people starting cycling—especially the problems of safety and danger, storage and security, and convenience and comfort.

Cycling is not and should not be a party political issue. I am delighted that the Government have endorsed the national cycling strategy—initiated by the previous Government—of doubling cycle use by 2002 and quadrupling it by 2012. However, the Library tells me that there is no specific mention of cycling in the Government's consultation on integrated transport. That is an extraordinary oversight which the Government will have to face up to.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) essentially asked the Minister to get on her bike. I am worried about rumours that she never cycles. It has even been rumoured that she cannot ride a bike. If that is true and the result of some phobia, may I offer to take her out on my tandem? Perhaps I can introduce her to the joys of the open road.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Thanks to the policies of the previous Government, we now have very severe traffic congestion in many of our cities. I am fortunate in living in Cambridge, which has tried to cater for cyclists. Does the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that in many cities cycling is quite hazardous and should not be undertaken lightly or with little preparation?

Mr. Chope: I thought that the hon. Lady was going to say that cycling should not be undertaken with a Minister on the back of a tandem. She has anticipated the burden of my remarks, which will emphasise the safety problems.

The Liberal Democrats' contribution to the debate, as usual, has been long on need for more money. I take issue with the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) in saying that the previous Government were ostrich-like, taking their head out of the sand only when approving roads schemes. I remember going to the hon. Gentleman's constituency as Minister with responsibility for roads on many occasions to open roads schemes such as improvements to the A30 for which he had campaigned, and he is campaigning for more improvements.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has been campaigning for full dualling of a trunk road in his constituency, and everyone knows that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) was campaigning vigorously for a bypass in his constituency. Across the country, Liberal Democrats are campaigning for increased roads expenditure. They are campaigning even in the county of Dorset, for completion of the Poole bridge. They are also promoting a scheme for a new road near Wareham. The Liberal Democrats are therefore committed to increasing roads expenditure.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Perhaps we can return to the subject of the debate, which is cycling. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the previous Government spent too much, too little or just the right amount on cycling provision?

Mr. Chope: Cycling provision is largely a responsibility for local authorities, and most cycling is done on local roads. Perhaps not the hon. Gentleman, but hon. Members who understand how responsibilities are shared out will realise that responsibility for local roads is for local authorities. It is up to them to decide on what priority they will accord to investment in cycling.

As I said, the safety issue is paramount, because it is the main barrier to participation in cycling. The fact is that cycling is now as dangerous as motor cycling. Some hon. Members talk about the perception of cycling as dangerous, but it is the reality: cycling is indeed dangerous.

The report on road accidents in Great Britain in 1995 shows that whereas in 1975 motor cycles were three times as dangerous as pedal cycles per 100 million vehicle kilometres covered, by 1995 they were about the same. In that period, the danger of riding a motor cycle had fallen to one third of what it was before. The danger of riding a pedal cycle, having dropped in 1985, increased in 1995 to a level similar to what it was in 1975. I am keen that we should increase participation in cycling, but to do so we must overcome the real dangers involved.

Mr. Mitchell: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the danger is a product of the culture of the Tory Government for 18 years? They were a captive of the road lobby and indulged in the philosophy of building more roads, causing people to buy more cars, then building more roads, again causing people to buy more cars. In that situation, cycling is bound to become more dangerous. The need is for a national policy of integrating cycling into transport so that we give it a push.

Mr. Chope: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We must consider ordinary, everyday cycling. Why are only 1 per cent. of journeys to school made by bicycle? I can remember cycling to school down the old Bath road. The reason why it is dangerous to cycle on the roads is that the provision for cyclists is often inadequate. Increased investment is needed to deal with the problem.

[Mr. Chope]

In recent years, three members of the Dorset police have been seriously injured while cycling. Two suffered extensive head injuries and one was severely and permanently disabled. Horrible cycling accidents take place all too frequently. A few weeks ago, there was a serious hit-and-run accident on the Christchurch bypass in which a cyclist, Mr. House, was killed on his way to the Conservative club. Sadly, he is not the only cyclist who has been killed near my constituency. A prominent member of the New Forest cycling club was killed on the A35 while cycling up a hill near Holmsley. The accident was caused by there being no extra space on that road for cyclists. We ignore the dangers of cycling at our peril. If we cannot persuade parents that it is safe for children to cycle to school, we should not encourage them to put their children on bicycles and send them off to school.

I urge the Government to spend more money on basic highway maintenance. The Government have announced in this year's grant settlement that they will reduce by 0.5 per cent. the money available nationally for spending on highway maintenance. This is at a time when the use of roads is increasing dramatically and inflation is also increasing. The Government seem to regard spending by local authorities on the road network—and that includes expenditure to fill in the potholes that are a nightmare for cyclists—as less important than the previous Government did.

We need a policy of zero tolerance towards bad cycling. A few years ago, my wife was knocked to the ground by a cycle courier who was travelling at speed the wrong way down a one-way street. We need to penalise cyclists who intimidate pedestrians and force them off the pavement. In the past year, there have been four prosecutions for such cycling in Dorset and the problem is becoming more widespread. The reason is that cyclists are being forced off the roads on to the pavements.

Mr. Lock: The hon. Gentleman refers to zero tolerance. Surely it is more important that we should have zero tolerance of motorists who drive too fast and too close to cyclists, who are then forced off the road—whether well maintained or otherwise—on to the pavement. That produces the problem that the hon. Gentleman is describing.

Mr. Chope: I do not defend bad driving by car or lorry drivers which contributes to accidents. One problem cyclists face is encountering potholes. They have either to swerve out into the road or to go through the pothole risking a buckled wheel. Potholes are a real problem and I am concerned that the Minister does not understand the nitty-gritty issue of what it is like to cycle along roads with potholes. I fear that until she does we shall not get the investment in the local highway network that the country deserves. Let us remove the largest barrier to entry into cycling—the barrier caused by the danger to cyclists.

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) on affording the House an opportunity this morning to debate what has been an overlooked and underrated form of transport. He was courteous and generous in paying tribute not only to the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), but to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) who, I am pleased to say, has joined us for this debate. I pay tribute to her sterling work on the issue of rates for Members of Parliament who are cyclists.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) began by pointing out that the debate had been remarkably apolitical, but he then tried to reduce it to a mere party political rant. He also misinformed the House. Cycling is indeed part of the Government's consultation document on an integrated transport strategy—and I can cycle. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his offer of tuition but, given the lamentable lack of leadership and direction that is the hallmark of his party, I must decline his kind offer—I would think twice if he offered to lead me across a road, potholed or otherwise.

Hon. Members on both sides have expressed their concern about the decline of cycling in recent years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South pointed out, 20 years ago, 3.2 per cent. of all journeys on the roads were undertaken by bicycle. Regrettably, the figure is now 1.26 per cent. The average number of journeys made by bicycle per person per year has dropped from 30 to 17. Those are depressing statistics and they are even more depressing when compared with similar statistics for other European countries.

There are, however, more positive signs which indicate considerable potential to reverse the trend. Annual sales of new bicycles have grown to about 2 million, exceeding the number of new cars sold. It is estimated that there are now about 20 million bicycles in existence. About 99 per cent. of men, 89 per cent. of women and 90 per cent. of children can cycle.

Hon. Members on both sides raised the issue of children being taken by car to school. All hon. Members have a common interest in promoting and expanding safe routes to school. That point was made by my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) and for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane), and by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor). This is an issue on which the Government have been concentrating since we took office. We want to reduce the number of unnecessary car journeys on our roads, but there is also concern about the health of the nation's children. The lack of exercise by children is a cause for concern.

As I said, the Government are committed to safe routes to school, but we must examine the idea in the round. It requires close consultation not only with schools, school governors, teachers, parents and pupils, but with local authorities. Several schemes are up and running and they provide best practice. Our encouragement of the greater use of cycles is part of our integrated transport strategy. Not only on this but on all issues connected with cycling, we must work out how we can disseminate best practice.

Mr. Bob Russell: Is the Minister promising additional Government finance? Does she accept that there are schemes and examples of initiative and enthusiasm across the country, but they lack resources?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Liberal Democrats have spent all the money already.

Ms Jackson: As my hon. Friend points out, that miraculous 1p that the Liberal Democrats were going to

use to solve all the nation's problems has been spent 12 times. I understand that the approach of some Liberal Democrat-run local authorities to the road network is benign neglect.

The extent of the traffic congestion in the capital means that cycling now offers the fastest journey time for trips in inner London. Cycling has the potential to confer a range of positive benefits. It is widely available and gives direct, door-to-door, flexible and reliable transport at any time. It offers equivalent personal freedom to that associated with the car at a fraction of the cost, and without the negative impacts of pollution, congestion and inefficiency. In addition, cycling helps to sustain fitness—that is particularly relevant for the nation's children—and mobility for people of all ages.

Last year saw the launch of the national cycling strategy—a blueprint for cycling. It was developed by a steering group comprising central Government, local authorities, the commercial sector and voluntary organisations. That spirit of partnership remains an essential prerequisite for delivering the targets set out in the strategy, which the Government are keen to support.

The objective of the strategy is to establish a culture that favours the increased use of bicycles for all age groups. We want to develop innovative policies and good practice, with a central target of doubling the amount of cycling by 2002, and doubling that again by 2012.

The aims of the strategy link in with the Government's wider objectives of air quality improvement, sustainable development, transport efficiency and personal and public health. We need to recognise the bicycle as a serious transport option for going to work, to the shops, to the bus or train station, or to school. That means focusing on infrastructure as well as attitudes.

Mr. Chope: On which of the occasions that the Minister has just described does she use her bicycle?

Ms Jackson: I regret that my ability to use my bicycle to go to the shops has been somewhat precluded. Given the pressure of work, my ability to go to the shops is almost nil.

A national cycling forum has been established. It is responsible for ensuring that national and local policy and provision deliver increases in cycling, in line with the identified NCS outputs. The forum also co-ordinates the contributions of a number of working groups. Seven such groups have been established to look at a range of subjects.

One of those groups is exploring ways to maximise the opportunities for combining cycling with public transport. That is a major issue that involves not just bicycle carriage on other vehicles, but the provision of physical facilities at stations, bus stops and major interchanges, and of information about what is available to those planning multimodal journeys.

We are looking to train and station operators to play a major role in developing a cycle-friendly railway system. That will be achieved only if operators deliver what cyclists want—facilities for cycle carriage, convenient and secure facilities at stations, and comprehensive information. The voluntary code of practice, "Providing for Cyclists", launched earlier this year, offers helpful guidance to operators. The code was developed by the cyclists public affairs group, the Cyclists Touring Club and Sustrans—to whose valuable and inspirational work my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) paid tribute.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South mentioned earlier, I was invited to make the first cycle mark award earlier this year to Anglia Railways for its "Bikes on Trains" initiative, developed in partnership—again I use that word partnership—with cycle user groups, the community, local authorities and the Government. Chiltern Railways has installed secure cycle racks at its stations. Great Western Trains has increased capacity and reduced its charge for reserving cycle carriage from £3 to £1. Thames Trains is providing flexible space for carrying bicycles on its trains. Those companies have pointed the way and we expect others to follow.

Making the railways more cycle-friendly is not the responsibility of just the train and station operators. On 6 November, we issued new objectives, instructions and guidance to the franchising director, placing a new duty on him to ensure that, as far as possible, the railway provides suitable facilities for cyclists. If a franchisee plans to order new rolling stock, the franchising director is now required to discuss with the franchise operator the provision of suitable space for accommodating bicycles on the trains. The franchising director is also required to encourage operators to provide suitable facilities for cyclists at the stations that they manage.

Hon. Members on both sides have mentioned the key issue of safety. We have announced our intention to set a new road safety target for the years beyond the turn of the century. The perception that promoting more cycling and reducing road casualties are not compatible must be challenged. One of the forum's working groups aims to ensure that the national cycling strategy can work in harmony with the development of the road safety strategy. Traffic management and related highway engineering offer enormous potential to make cycling conditions safer and more attractive to use. Networks of bus and cycle lanes, advanced stop lines for cyclists at traffic signals and one-way streets with contraflow are just some examples of possible measures. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest highlighted the need for planning to take the needs of cyclists into account when creating new buildings and workplace environments.

Cycle security is a perennial concern for cyclists. No matter what measures are put in place to encourage people to use their bike, the chances of their doing so are diminished if they do not have a reasonable expectation of finding it, with all its pieces in working order, where they left it.

A working group has been exploring the potential for developing a graded set of security standards for locking devices and is also keeping in touch with Southampton city council's review of existing guidance on the design, manufacture, planning and siting of cycle parking equipment.

Local authorities are the primary agents for delivering physical improvements for cyclists. My Department is developing guidance to help authorities to review the cycle-friendliness of their existing networks and proposals for new road infrastructure.

The strategy invites local authorities to contribute towards its headline target by putting together their own local cycling strategies. Some authorities may find it relatively easy to achieve—or exceed—a doubling of

[Ms Jackson]

cycle use. Others will find it more realistic to adopt a more modest target. That is why the strategy does not prescribe local targets, but encourages authorities to determine for themselves what is appropriate and achievable.

Public transport operators, bus and train station managers and employers can also be more proactive by providing secure cycle parks and shower facilities at work and by improving cycle access, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) pointed out. My Department offers interest-free loans to staff to purchase bicycles. There are excellent facilities available at Eland house and Great Minster house for staff who cycle to work. We have issued a green transport guide to all Departments. All Departments work together on a green Cabinet Sub-Committee to put the environment at the heart of all our policies. Transport has a major impact on our ability to achieve our aims for a sustainable economy and an acceptable and improving environment.

Putting in place practical and physical improvements will help to provide some tangible evidence of better provision for cyclists. There is a wealth of good practice. Information on successful initiatives, new approaches and innovations needs to be spread widely. There is much value in sharing knowledge and experience. The forum's best practice group has taken on the challenge and will be looking at topics such as cycling and town centres and cycling and health. Its task is to generate and disseminate guidance covering the principles of the national cycling strategy and relevant best practice examples.

Recent experience in cycle challenge and elsewhere has demonstrated the importance of establishing strong partnerships for action. I have asked my officials to analyse the outcomes of cycle challenge and ensure that the results are disseminated widely. Public transport operators were involved in a number of cycle challenge schemes. They include Greater Manchester passenger transport executive's drive to improve cycle parking at Metrolink stations and an initiative by Transport Management Services in conjunction with Stagecoach Cumberland to enable buses to carry bicycles on rural routes.

Examples from the health sector include a partnership between Southampton city council and Southampton University Hospital NHS trust to improve cycle parking on the hospital site and to reduce the number of cars coming on site. Stockport health authority received cycle challenge funds to operate a cycle leasing scheme to staff willing to give up their cars.

Employers, too, took part in cycle challenge. Dover council worked with Pfizer UK to improve cycle facilities for staff on the site, to fund cycle facilities in the town of Sandwich, and to improve access and local routes for cyclists. BNR Europe established cycle facilities and improved access to its site at Harlow in Essex.

Many voluntary groups either received cycle challenge funds or—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We must move on.

Major Milos Stankovic

12.30 pm

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate a debate on an important case. I shall keep my remarks as short as possible, to allow others to speak. It is a debate about procedure and about a serving Army major who has been arrested under the Official Secrets Act 1911. It is not a debate about substance, as the major has not been charged. I do not know what any charges will be, or what they can be, because, during the relevant period, he was serving with the United Nations force in Bosnia—a force which, by definition, has neither secrets nor enemies—and, therefore, he could not be accused of passing a secret to an enemy.

Major Milos Stankovic is a serving officer with the Parachute Regiment. He is British, he has a British passport and he is a loyal British subject. His father was a Serb who fought with the Chetniks in the second world war and barely escaped with his life. He came to Britain with nothing, built a new life and started a family. In due course, his son Milos wanted to become a Regular Army officer and had the distinction of being selected by the Parachute Regiment. He served as a platoon commander and a captain with the UN force in Kuwait.

In October 1992, the British Army was deployed for the first time on a large scale in Bosnia and was looking for Serb speakers. It had only two in its ranks—both were the sons of Serbian fathers, and Milos Stankovic was one of them. He was assigned for four tours of duty—two years in Bosnia. He served longer there in hazardous conditions than any other British soldier. He acted as an interpreter, interpreting not only the language but the people, and as an adviser to Colonel Bob Stewart of the Cheshire Regiment, to General Smith and to General Rose. His job was to deal with the Serbs—the most difficult of the three ethnic groups—and he did so. His job was to win their trust, and he did so. His job was to get to know them, and he did so.

In the Bihac crisis of late November and early December 1994, Milos Stankovic was personally responsible for freeing 50 Canadian UN hostages held by the Serbs and unblocking convoys and the airport. He did that alone and with great distinction. He crossed front lines in a soft vehicle under fire. He is a man of great courage.

In May 1993, Major Stankovic saved the life of a Muslim woman wounded by Croatian sniper fire in the town of Vitez. He scooped her up and took her to hospital and saved her life. He was awarded the MBE. He received his medal from the Queen at Buckingham palace.

Beyond the line of duty, Major Stankovic took part in humanitarian endeavours. He was responsible for helping many people. I shall not specify exactly what he did, although if charges are laid against him I may have to do so because they bear upon his courage and his character. However, I shall read an extract of a letter that he received from a Muslim woman whom he had helped and who had a Serb husband:

"We really must consider you our friend since what you have done for us is a huge thing. Such people who are prepared to help others risking their own lives are people who really must be considered friends. Therefore, one more huge thankyou for what you have done—you and that great humanitarian, General Rose."

In spring 1995, Milos Stankovic was returned to normal soldiering. He served with distinction as a company commander with the first battalion of the Parachute Regiment in Aldershot and he was eventually selected to participate in the joint services task force at Bracknell. It was there on 16 October this year that the Ministry of Defence police came to get him. They arrested him, but they did not charge him. They took him to Guildford police station where he was locked in a cell. They told him that, because of the gravity of the case, he was not allowed to make a single telephone call. After two hours in the cell, the Guildford police quite properly countermanded that decision and allowed him to make a telephone call. Eight hours later, the arresting officers returned with a questionnaire. If their instructions had been obeyed, he would have had no advice in helping him with his replies.

During those eight hours, the police had been searching Milos Stankovic's house. They took away six boxes of documents, papers and mementoes—the kind of thing that people gather in war zones. They did not give him an itemised inventory, so he does not know exactly what they have. Therefore, it is difficult for him to prepare any defence. They took something from a shrine that he kept to the memory of his father who had died 18 months earlier. It may seem unusual for a serving British officer to have a shrine in his house, but there is nothing seditious or suspicious about it. They took his medals from his mess kit—the minature medals. They were the GSM for service in Northern Ireland, the UNIKOM medal for service in Kuwait, the Bosnia medal that he won four times over, and the MBE.

Last week, the police sent Major Stankovic a letter saying that he would have to be rebailed not, as originally agreed, on 11 December, but on 11 March. Apparently, there will now be a five-month fishing expedition. What was most upsetting was that the letter was addressed to Mr. Stankovic—there was no rank and no medal. It may seem a trifling discourtesy to someone who has not worn the Queen's uniform, but to someone in Major Stankovic's position it is a clear indication that he has already been judged guilty.

Major Stankovic has the same right as any serving soldier, charged with or under suspicion of having committed a grave offence, to have a senior soldier as his adviser, godfather or prisoner's friend. That courtesy has not been extended to him. He has been told to talk to no soldier, and any soldier who talks to him has to report it. He is left twisting in the wind.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for having given me notice that he intended to raise the subject. I represent Aldershot, the home of the Parachute Regiment. The hon. Gentleman is explaining that the major has not been allowed to talk to anyone serving in the Army. The Parachute Regiment has been adroit in representing the interests of some of its past members who have been in trouble. Does the hon. Gentleman know whether former members of the Parachute Regiment have been able to assist him or the major, and are they supporting him?

Mr. Bell: I believe that Major Stankovic has wide support within the regiment and, indeed, within the Army. A retired member of the regiment would be ideal. In some ways, General Sir Michael Rose would be ideal, but he cannot be involved because he may have to give evidence. The same applies to General Sir Rupert Smith who is the colonel-commandant of the regiment. The gap has not been filled and Major Stankovic still has no one to help him. The House should know that.

I had hoped that the Minister might be here, because I have some points to put to him. I wonder whether anyone else would like to intervene while I wait for the Minister.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Major Stankovic is a constituent of mine living in Farnham. I acknowledge the efforts of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) in finding an opportunity to raise his case in the House. Those who have already heard some of the background to the case will be deeply concerned. Clearly, Major Stankovic is an officer who has seen dangerous duty and shown courage in some of the most difficult circumstances.

The hon. Member for Tatton, on the basis of his specialist knowledge, has further information that the House and the Minister will no doubt wish to consider. As we learn more about the matter it seems that there are two elements, in particular, that the Minister will want to consider.

First, there is the question whether there is any truth in the allegations against my constituent. I am certainly in no position to provide any comment on that matter. If there is any truth in the allegations, and if they are substantial, one must ask the Secretary of State for Defence to hasten the inquiry and afford my constituent natural justice by allowing the evidence to come forward. Charges should be brought, or the investigation should be dropped and Major Stankovic publicly exonerated.

The present state of affairs, in which ignorance is prolonged by delay, is not fair. It is also enormously damaging to Major Stankovic and his family. Whatever the state of any allegations, there seems to have been great difficulty and lack of care and support in the way in which he has been treated.

There appears to be a conspiracy to hold my constituent completely incommunicado and to deprive him of essential evidence for his defence. There has been a choice not to follow the normal Army system of appointing an officer to advise him after his arrest, and he has been left with no information about whether charges are to be made.

Underlying that, there is also the possibility of personal danger arising from public allegations of partisanship in a vicious situation. As the constituency Member of Parliament, I add my concerns to those raised by the hon. Member for Tatton. Now that the Minister is here, I believe that the hon. Member may wish to address the House again.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for the intervention by the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). She mentioned Major Stankovic's family, and this is a time of great anxiety for him and of distress for his 75-year-old mother. May I say how grateful I am to see the Minister here, and how much I appreciate what he does? I believe that the armed forces are lucky to have him. That is genuine; I regard him as a friend.

[Mr. Bell]

The case that I have been laying out is that of a serving major who I, like other people both in and out of uniform, feel has been denied due process. That applies especially to the fact that he was not allowed to make a telephone call after being arrested and that his medals and documents were taken. He has been left to twist in the wind.

I know that the Minister's powers in the matter are limited, but there are some things that he can do. I urge him to ensure that Major Stankovic's rights are respected and protected, and that his documents, including his driving licence, are returned to him, having been photocopied if necessary. I urge the Minister also to ensure that Major Stankovic's medals are returned, with an apology, and that the case is brought to an expeditious conclusion. I also urge him to wonder whether the fraud squad of the Ministry of Defence police is the right agency to investigate a matter of such complexity.

I finish with a question. What kind of a people are we, and what kind of a signal does it send, if we reward our heroes by arresting them? Heroes are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Major Milos Stankovic is such a man.

12.43 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): First, I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) for my late arrival for the debate. It was unavoidable. The hon. Gentleman may wish to know that I travelled here by car with Ambassador Butler of UNSCOM—the United Nations Special Commission—to try to fit in my arrival with the time of the debate.

As a preliminary, may I tell the hon. Member that the whole House admires the way in which he worked, risked his life and showed such courage in reporting the war in Bosnia? He showed great personal courage in some dangerous situations and reported what he saw with passion and with compassion, but always with integrity and objectivity, too. Whenever he raises any matter in the House, we listen to him with great respect. In my view, the hon. Gentleman displayed deep compassion for all sides of the dispute in Bosnia and for all the peoples of that troubled land, whether Bosniac, Croat or Serb.

However, today it is not the war in Bosnia or the prospects for peace that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to raise. He knows that, because of the position that I hold, I rise to respond to him under restrictions and restraints of which he is well aware. I am restricted and restrained in how I can respond to the points that he has made—although I can say that the whole House will have heard what he said. I shall seek to respond to those points that do not fall properly within the process of judicial inquiry and operations.

The hon. Gentleman has made a judgment in deciding to raise the matter today. I am sure that he did so after careful thought, and with the conscientiousness that he would normally apply to such questions. He will know that in speaking about the case of Major Stankovic he will inevitably have given that case publicity. He will also know that it has already featured in detail in an article in the *Daily Mail* on Monday. Some of the points that he had previously made in private and has made again today were also expressed in that article.

Therefore, inevitably, publicity will surround the case. The hon. Gentleman will have made a judgment about that before embarking on his course of action. I have no means of knowing either what informed that judgment, or Major Stankovic's view of the publicity that his case will now receive, and whether he may believe that it will be helpful or otherwise to his own position.

For my part, in case there is any doubt on the subject, I wish to place on the record the fact that my Department has sought no publicity whatever for the case. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that we in the Ministry of Defence have been scrupulous in doing everything in our power to avoid publicity, which could cause unnecessary distress to Major Stankovic, and could risk prejudicing subsequent proceedings, or his defence if—I repeat "if"—he were to be charged.

Indeed, hitherto my Department has not even acknowledged the name of Major Stankovic or given it to the press. Whatever speculation may have arisen in that regard, it did not arise in any authorised fashion or, I hope, from any element in my Department.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): From the public prints, are not we entitled to ask whether the role of the military police will be seriously looked at, as that certainly is within the purview of the Minister's Department?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is entitled to ask anything he likes, but I am more constrained in how I can reply. If he asks whether, in due course, consideration will be given to the MOD police, that subject—particularly during the strategic defence review—could be examined. If he is implying that I should somehow intervene in the investigation, that course is not open to me, and it would be unwise. That is precisely why I am being as constrained as I am in my remarks.

I would not wish to take any action or make any comment that might in any way influence an investigation that is under way or which ultimately could be perceived in any way to have affected the investigation or even the case for the defence, if charges were brought against Major Stankovic.

Mr. Martin Bell: As time is running out, will the Minister find it in himself to address two points: the protection of the rights of Major Stankovic, and the provision of a serving or ex-serving military officer to help and advise him?

Dr. Reid: I will address those points if the hon. Gentleman bears with me. He has relayed his views to me personally and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has written to the chief constable of the MOD police about the case, as was right and proper, and he has met MOD police officers. He will be able to confirm that my right hon. Friend and I told him that, while we could listen, we could make no comment on the merits of the case or the conduct of the MOD police investigation, for reasons that will be obvious. Ministers do not answer for the operational activities of police forces. The chief constable of the MOD police is responsible for the conduct of the investigation by his force and, in his constabulary capacity, he is independent of the Government under law.

Perhaps it would be helpful to the House if I outlined the processes involved. When the MOD police complete an investigation, they report to the Crown Prosecution

Service, and careful consideration is given to the question of prosecution. If, having applied the criteria set out in the code for Crown prosecutors, the CPS concludes that proceedings are appropriate, it will make any necessary applications to the Attorney-General for his comments. If the decision is not to prosecute Major Stankovic, standard procedures will be followed by the MOD, including consideration of whether there might be evidence of a military offence having been committed.

It would be understandable if the hon. Member for Tatton or Major Stankovic felt concerned that the process could take some time. I can assure the House and the hon. Gentleman that once the MOD police have completed their investigation—and a decision has been taken on whether Major Stankovic should be prosecuted—and when the matter comes within the realm of my responsibility, my Department will carry out our procedures with fairness and with all possible speed.

I cannot make any prediction of the outcome, any more than I can comment on the merits of the case. The hon. Member understands all that, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have explained it to him carefully. In any case, he is well aware of the procedures. However, I thought it right to set them out in some detail in case they were not entirely familiar to some hon. Members or to members of the public who may read our reports. I trust that the House will understand why I cannot reply to many of the questions raised by the hon. Gentleman in his speech.

I wish to emphasise that if Major Stankovic is charged with any offence, he will have a full opportunity and plenty of time to prepare his defence. He may wish to refer to some of the matters to which the hon. Member referred. The House will understand how prejudicial it would be to any subsequent procedures, and to Major Stankovic's interests, if I were to say anything at all about the matters today. I ask the hon. Gentleman to give serious thought to those considerations.

One point to which I can refer, because it falls within my responsibilities, is the Army's support for Major Stankovic, which the hon. Gentleman believes is inadequate. I can confirm that Major Stankovic is receiving Army support, as I made inquiries about this matter—and this matter alone—as late as yesterday. He is entitled to the assistance of what is called a soldier's friend. His commanding officer has advised him on that entitlement, and a soldier's friend has been appointed. An individual may choose any Army officer who is not in the chain of command or a potential witness. I am glad that I can assure the hon. Gentleman on that point.

I also assure the hon. Gentleman that if charges are not brought, the matter will be dealt with, so far as our procedures are concerned, in an expeditious and fair manner. Other than that, there is very little that I can say that would not be open to misinterpretation as interference in the due process of the investigation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I understand the difficulties that the Minister faces in terms of the legalities. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) raised some procedural matters—for example, the failure to provide an inventory of the personal effects taken from Major Stankovic's home—which the Minister could properly deal with. Any of us who had had items removed from our home would feel, at the very least, that we should have a proper inventory of all that was taken. The hon. Gentleman referred to Major Stankovic's medals, and perhaps the Minister might also be able to address that point. Will he ensure that the MOD police provide an inventory of all items taken from the major's home?

Dr. Reid: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but he will know that the fine distinction that he is able to draw between interfering with the process of an investigation and alleging any irregularities in the procedures of the investigation is one that might not be apparent to every objective observer. On these occasions, it is as well to err on the side of caution so that there is not seen to be any ministerial interference in an independent investigation.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) will know that the proceedings of the House will be watched, listened to and read by a number of people, including the chief constable of the MOD police who will, by this afternoon or tomorrow morning, be well aware of the questions that have been asked. He will be aware also, no doubt, that when the procedure is finished, hon. Members such as the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Tatton may wish to return to those questions. Even without my directly intervening in any way, the casual observer might conclude that the matters would be attended to.

I shall ask whether such an important matter as this debate, which is relevant to general police matters, can be brought to the attention of the chief constable of the MOD police. That may suffice to meet the hon. Gentleman's point without direct intervention.

Mr. Dalyell: To pursue the point raised by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), I would never dream of asking my hon. Friend the Minister to interfere in an investigation; the issue that I raised was the behaviour of the military police, as described in the public prints, which appeared not to be acceptable to a possibly distinguished and brave man.

Dr. Reid: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but it is a fine philosophical point to draw a distinction between the behaviour of the police investigating—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael J. Martin): Order. It is time for the next debate.

Digital Television (North-West Norfolk)

1 pm

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I wonder whether I am the only Member of Parliament who, when sitting down to watch television on the odd occasion at the weekend, consults the weather forecast before looking at the television guide. The problem of poor television reception experienced in my part of rural Norfolk is shared by many other sparsely populated areas, but it is uniquely annoying in north-west Norfolk because, although over the years there have been technical attempts under the analogue transmission system to improve reception, they seem to have failed abysmally for many thousands of my constituents.

Mrs. Ellen Ward from King's Lynn says:

"We only have Yorkshire TV despite having two aerials. The chap who came to fix our second one tried in vain to get Anglia for us. The picture is awful and we have not been able to watch it. I am disabled through illness and although I watch very little TV I do especially love news items. I think most of this area gets pretty peeved off about the coverage we get."

Not only do we have problems with the weather, because reception is marginal from the transmitters designed to serve East Anglia, but, as in Wales, where I understand that 30 per cent. of people get better coverage from English than from Welsh transmitters, we get better reception from transmitters serving Yorkshire and northern England than from those meant to transmit to the people of East Anglia.

Yorkshire Television is transmitted from Belmont and has plenty of news about what is going on in northern England in its regional news programmes. To be blunt, people in Norfolk are more interested in the Canaries and the King's Lynn football team than in the affairs of Barnsley football club. One of my constituents, in a letter to the press, said:

"I have spent hundreds of pounds on aerials and boosters trying to obtain Anglia TV and BBC East so my family and I can see the local news for our area. But to no avail, we still have to look at Yorkshire TV (wonderful picture, super picture and sound) and hear about what is happening in Leeds and Bradford . . . that is unless the atmospherics are feeling benevolent and allow us through the snow to get a glimpse of something nearer home, and hear how Norwich City or King's Lynn got on at football, instead of Barnsley and Huddersfield!"

On a more serious note, a constituent tells me:

"We are just a couple of miles from the coast, with the Ouse and Nene nearby. I am fearful that in not having our own local news, storm and flood warnings might be missed, while we were watching the news from the North!"

One of the best quotations, in the technical environment in which we live, came from a constituent who said:

"It does seem quite abysmal that men can travel to the Moon and back yet, even with a booster fitted to the aerial you are unable to get reception to my sitting room!"

The problem has been long standing. As an electronic engineer, I at least can understand what the engineers tell me. Since I have been a Member of Parliament—and indeed when I was seeking election—they have told me woefully about the technical problems in transmitting analogue television. I know, because the King's Lynn *Citizen* mounted a strong campaign, that at least 5,000 people in my constituency have been troubled enough to write and say so.

I know from the campaigning of some borough councillors, especially Charles Ward and Marcus Liddington, who are bringing the issue to the borough council today, that the problem is large; and the solution, with analogue television, could be expensive and, given that we as a nation have stopped building relay transmission for analogue television, would probably not be achievable in the present regime.

As an electronic engineer, I am also extremely well aware that there is a solution. I am in the fortunate position, I hope, not of merely carping to the Minister but of being confident that the technical problems of the past, so well expressed by my constituents, can be solved by modern technology. I refer in particular to the revolution in communications represented by digital transmission, which is the distinctive way of transmitting information much more efficiently on the same radio waves.

The House will not want a technical lecture on the subject, but let me outline the two major advantages of digital television. First, some clever engineers have ensured that, by compressing data, the frequency spectrum, which is finite and governed by equations not even in the control of the Minister, can be more effectively used. For every television station that we can transmit by analogue transmission, using the same range of frequencies, we can transmit at least four, and probably more next year and the year after, digitally.

We shall have an enormous number of options in terms of picture quality, added services, interactive television and help for the handicapped. Fifty or so frequencies are available but, with analogue transmission, only four or possibly five channels can be received nationally—and those with difficulty, as my constituents know—but without cabling, which will not happen quickly in rural areas, and without people having to subscribe to Sky, we shall, with digital transmission, be able, with the transmitters that are currently in use, to transmit 20 to 30 television channels to every home. That is a huge advantage in terms of the wealth of communications that we can deliver from every transmitter in the land, as we move from analogue to digital.

The second advantage is that digital television will be much less susceptible to interference than the analogue that it replaces. We are about to enter an interim period during which analogue television may well be interfered with by digital. That is a jolly good argument for speeding up the process by which we move to the digital domain with its much greater efficiency. Under digital, much lower signal levels will allow high-quality pictures to be received, which will be a godsend in the sparse rural environments and the difficult patches of Norfolk to which I have referred. As an engineer, I have a clear understanding that there are no technical objections to the solution, which should be explored and implemented.

As a nation, we should have a social requirement that the key channels—bluntly, it is BBC1 and channel 3 that have the proper regional variations—should be, as of right, universally received in the United Kingdom. To do that, all we need to do is to ensure that transmitters that are now technically capable of transmitting only four channels and which will, as we move forward, be able to transmit 20 or 30, include within their expansion the channels that the people who receive broadcasts from that transmitter want to watch. Greater priority should be given to ensuring that people get the television reception that they want before they are plagued with requests to

pay for the extra facilities, many of which they will not want, that the new technology opens up. People will not thank the Government if, in several years, they can receive 20 channels, but they still cannot receive the key local coverage and the channels that they most want to receive.

I am particularly grateful to the Library for trying to bring me up to speed on the legal side of the issue. Emma Downing has served me especially well in guiding me through the labyrinth of legislation. I shall summarise what I have gleaned from that. It seems to me that there is nothing in the legislation which stops us achieving what I have suggested, but there is possibly not too much that encourages it. The responsibility to ensure universal coverage, or the nearest to it that we can obtain, seems to be divided between the Minister, the Independent Television Commission and the BBC.

I have had mixed responses from the BBC. When complaints were made some time ago, its local spokesman said that the television licence was like a fishing licence. It enabled people to receive television, but it did not guarantee that they could do so. That was not an acceptable response to my constituents, given the extra facility that the BBC is given in legislation to transmit extra information around the country. I must say that I received a much friendlier hearing from the chairman of the governors last week. He has at least offered some meetings, so that I can discuss with BBC technical advisers a more satisfactory route forward.

Neither has the ITC held out any prospect of an easy solution. My predecessor was told that it did not see the prospect of a solution with the move to digital television. Bluntly, that is not acceptable. Today I have my opportunity to ask the Minister to ensure that a fresh look is taken at the matter. It seems to me that a fresh look is appropriate for a new Government.

I and the many other hon. Members who represent sparsely populated rural areas do not expect immediate solutions, but given the wealth that the technical advances have given us in terms of our ability to communicate better, I hope that we can hold out a prospect today that we shall not wait for ever—mañana, mañana—for our problems to be solved. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will accept the validity of my complaints on behalf of my constituents, but will also acknowledge that many others in other rural parts of the country could argue similarly.

I have already mentioned that one third of the people in Wales receive English television more clearly than Welsh. They, too, could be helped by my proposed solution. In taking a fresh look at the problem, does the Minister accept that, in the array of opportunities made available by the move to digital broadcasting, there is a possibility of solving the problem that I have emphasised today at least for the vast majority of my constituents, and possibly for many others in this interim period of mixed analogue and digital broadcasting?

Will my hon. Friend the Minister undertake to ensure that those responsible—it is a divided responsibility, and that is one of the problems—face up to the issues that I have raised and give proper priority to universal reception of core television channels? The new Government have made much of the need for communities to act, and for community solutions to problems, whether crime or problems of regional development. We have an obligation to ensure that those communities are given the support of community television, at least in the regional variations that the main broadcasters provide. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to use not only his power under the Broadcasting Act 1996 but, probably more important, his influence.

I suspect that technology will ensure that we legislate yet again on broadcasting during the lifetime of this Parliament. The fact that telephone, computer and broadcasting communications are merging technologies will necessitate that. I should have thought that my hon. Friend the Minister would tell those who had vested interests to protect and wanted to see the licence fee retained that constituents such as mine were not prepared to pay the licence fee while the BBC viewed it as an opportunity to receive television signals, but did not put enough effort into making sure that its services could be watched.

I have a more personal plea. As a former lecturer in digital electronics, I am confident that the fastest possible track should be given to the revolution that engineering has made possible and which politicians now need to ensure that we exploit.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) on securing an Adjournment debate on the important issue of television reception in his constituency, on which he and I have recently corresponded. As he says, the issue is of interest to a wider range of people, because it affects many rural areas in different ways.

I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will appreciate his assiduous pursuit of their interests, including his detailed discussions with the engineering division of the ITC, which is responsible for terrestrial transmission arrangements in my hon. Friend's part of the country. His advocacy, as he modestly did not stress, is given extra weight by his expert knowledge of the technicalities of transmission. He is a former university lecturer in electronic engineering. I suspect that he speaks with greater knowledge than any other Member of Parliament on a difficult and abstruse issue. The people of north-west Norfolk could not have a better champion than my hon. Friend, with his determination, his success in obtaining this debate and his almost unique expertise.

Many of my hon. Friend's constituents are unable to receive their preferred regional television service. He cited Mrs. Ward of King's Lynn. She and others must be baffled that, at a moment of huge technical advance, they cannot receive their preferred transmission. It is frustrating for them to pay a licence fee to receive a service which is not the one that they want.

I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend's constituents and, indeed, with my hon. Friend himself, who is one of his own constituents who does not receive the service he wants. However, as he is only too well aware, the problems that we are dealing with are, first, the properties of radio transmission and, secondly, the topography of East Anglia. I know that, with his considerable technical knowledge, my hon. Friend is familiar with those issues; but it might be helpful if I summarise, for the benefit of those less expert in these matters, some of the difficulties that are encountered.

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

The radiomagnetic spectrum is a finite resource and we must operate within the constraints of what is available. We have available for broadcasting 46 frequency channels to cover the whole of the United Kingdom and, as my hon. Friend is aware, broadcast transmissions from one site can readily interfere with and distort transmissions on a similar frequency from a neighbouring site. In addition to meeting the spectrum demands within the UK, we must have regard to the impact of our plans on our continental neighbours, given that broadcast signals do not respect national boundaries and travel a long distance, especially over water.

Reconciling those constraints and problems can be hard and can lead to limits on the coverage area of transmissions within the UK. In some circumstances, it might simply not be possible to use certain frequency channels because of the potential to interfere with existing services in other nations. It follows that there are certain areas within the UK where available spectrum for broadcasting is a genuinely scarce commodity. Coastal regions such as my hon. Friend's area are especially prone to such limitations and there is undoubtedly a genuine difficulty, not easily resolved, in north-west Norfolk.

The television services of BBC East and the Anglia Television ITV franchise are, as my hon. Friend knows, transmitted from three transmitters—Tacolnestone, Sandy Heath and Sudbury—and are extended by associated relay stations. I gather that the ITC's engineers have made every effort to extend coverage and to remedy anomalies in the region, for example, by setting up three relay stations at Burnham, King's Lynn and Wells-next-the-Sea. Because of the frequency limitations that I have already outlined, those relays are limited to two channels: Anglia Television and BBC1. There are four other relays at Creake, Little Walsingham, West Runton and Overstrand.

I recognise, as does the ITC, that there are areas in my hon. Friend's constituency that do not receive a satisfactory Anglia Television service in particular. I gather that about 30,000 people, including my hon. Friend, have to rely on the Belmont main transmitter in Lincolnshire as the source of their programmes, and that Belmont delivers the Yorkshire Television ITV service and BBC North. Clearly, much of their programming is unlikely to be of major interest to most people living in north-west Norfolk, although I understand that some of Yorkshire Television's programming broadcast from Belmont reflects East Anglian issues to a certain extent. Nevertheless, I understand that the consequences can be serious, especially in a coastal region.

Dr. George Turner: I should like to state publicly that today I approached Yorkshire Television and BBC North and asked them, exceptionally, to consider covering this debate, so that my constituents can see that I am speaking up for them. Interestingly, the BBC told me to get lost, but Yorkshire Television did at least say that it would give such coverage fair consideration as part of the news. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that having the odd item on Yorkshire Television is only a patch and can never be an acceptable solution to the problem. Until we get proper broadcasting from the Belmont transmitter into Norfolk, presumably in the digital domain, the problem will not be solved.

Mr. Fisher: I am concerned that serious broadcasters did not take my hon. Friend's request more to heart, given that public service broadcasters have a responsibility to cover events in the House. He might have noticed that there is another Adjournment debate tomorrow, on the broadcasting companies' responsibilities to cover debates in this Chamber, which might be of some interest to him.

Although I appreciate that there is no direct comfort for my hon. Friend's constituents, north-west Norfolk has received a considerable degree of special attention—perhaps more attention than most of the rest of the country—from the ITC in an attempt to address the regional anomalies, as illustrated by the number of additional relays provided. However, I accept that existing analogue transmissions can never fully solve the problem. My hon. Friend, in his excellent contribution, envisaged the solution as being digital, and that does indeed offer greater potential than analogue. However, it must be recognised that, even with digital, frequency availability will remain a constraining factor, at least during the early years before the analogue transmission network is switched off and not least because, in most locations, people will receive their digital transmissions from the same main transmitter source as their analogue transmissions.

My hon. Friend will know that digital transmissions differ from analogue in that there is no gradual decline in the quality of reception; consequently, there are no "mush" areas between different transmitters and coverage may therefore be more easily defined. People will either receive a signal of sufficient strength to obtain a service, or they will not. That will ease some planning difficulties and further increase the efficient use of the 46 frequency channels available. However, I would not want to mislead either my hon. Friend or the House by offering a certain prospect that digital will offer his constituents a quick or necessarily total solution to their reception problems. In the longer term, with the closure of analogue, digital might offer a solution to reception problems in north-west Norfolk, but until further spectrum planning has been undertaken, that solution cannot be certain—at least, not as certain as my hon. Friend believes.

Digital terrestrial television is a new technology and we are still at an early stage in its development. At present, the transmission plans of only the first 81 transmitters are being devised. Those are the main transmitters and some of the larger relays, which together will deliver digital services to more than 90 per cent. of the UK population for multiplexes carrying existing terrestrial services. Those 81 transmitters contrast with about 1,200 transmitters required to achieve analogue coverage for 99.4 per cent. of our population. Further relays may be brought into the digital plan, but the spectrum planning for them cannot commence until the plans for the first 81 are completed.

I am not in a position today to inform the House definitively whether digital terrestrial television will solve the problems that my hon. Friend described. He suggested that the increased capacity offered by digital would enable Yorkshire Television to broadcast from the Belmont transmitter both Yorkshire and Anglia regional variations. The Belmont transmitter is in the first stage of the digital

plan, and it will be operational on the launch of DTT services. However, the issue is not as simple as that, and we need to examine it more carefully. The ITC companies might consider that it would be sensible to use their digital capacity to deliver regional programming more accurately, and I assure my hon. Friend that I shall pass on his concerns and those of his constituents to both the Independent Television Association and Yorkshire Television. I am sorry to be unable to give my hon. Friend the categoric reassurance that he would like at this stage. Obviously, the extent of digital delivery of regional services will be an issue that the Government will have to consider when determining our strategy for switching over from analogue to digital terrestrial television.

I emphasise that there are no quick solutions, but I assure my hon. Friend and his constituents that the Government take these matters seriously. He has raised valid complaints and described valid problems on behalf of his constituents, and we need to consider them seriously as the potential of digital is realised. I look forward to continuing the dialogue, both through correspondence and in other ways, with my hon. Friend.

Town Centres

1.29 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I am well aware that the future of our town centres and the impact upon them of edge-of-town supermarkets and out-of-town supermarkets have been well aired in the House in recent years. Indeed, the Business Improvement Districts Bill is being discussed in another place at the moment. Problems still exist. I shall be as brief as I can be so that the Minister has maximum time to respond.

Between 1990 and 1994, 8,000 small shops closed. Hon. Members all know how the Merry Hill shopping centre in the west midlands, now of notorious repute, has caused the death of several town centres in midlands, including that in my home area, so I know them well.

My constituency of Richmond Park has two fine shopping centres, Richmond and Kingston, and many groups of village shops and small shopping parades within it. Over the years, the two borough councils have struggled to maintain the life of their town centres. They have encouraged supermarket chains into those centres, albeit on restricted sites. By doing so, they have given shoppers the benefits of supermarket shopping.

Recently, two supermarket developments have been allowed, on appeal to the Department of the Environment, after considerable local opposition. An application for another supermarket on the famous Old Deer park in Richmond is imminent. All three are on the edge of Kingston and Richmond and will cause severe traffic congestion and have a major impact on two beautiful towns. Those towns are also threatened by the expansion of air-side and land-side shopping malls that are part of the terminal 5 development at Heathrow airport, which plans to provide huge shopping facilities for its customers. With the removal of duty free regulations next year, how long will it be before British Airways organises one-day shopping trips to Heathrow? That could affect town centres throughout the country, and not just local ones. Richmond in particular will suffer because it is a small centre where, as our motto says,

"the countryside comes to town."

However much the Government fall back on planning guidelines—the planning policy guidance note 6 was introduced by the previous Government and was greatly welcomed—and claim that nothing has changed, discussions are taking place that will affect the future of our town centres. It is a mystery to me why that should happen, particularly in the case of the Manor road site in Richmond, which recently received planning permission on appeal. I am aware that the inspector makes that decision and not the Government, but I shall say no more than that it is a mystery to me.

Another aspect of the problem which concerns me has long-term implications because the sites being used for the supermarkets are brown-field ones—in two cases in my constituency they are the sites of old gas works. The local authority and the DOE have no power to command the total cleansing of those much polluted sites—they merely need to be decontaminated for the use to which they will be put. That is a less expensive option than that required if those sites were to be used for housing, and it is an option that British Gas welcomes. I have visited the British Gas laboratories at its invitation, but despite that and my repeated requests, it will not divulge any details

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

about the two local sites in my constituency that most concern me—at King's road in Kingston and Manor road in Richmond.

That means that pollution will be locked into those sites for future generations. The local authorities will have to accept that they can never be used for any other purpose. Town centres will therefore always be under siege for new sites, and housing, for which there is such a desperate need, will never be built because the cost to the developer of proper decontamination will be prohibitive.

I shall conclude by asking a few questions. Why does not the DOE insist on the total decontamination of those sites, which would enable them to be used for housing? Why do we continue to permit out-of-town and edge-of-town supermarkets when we know how much damage they can do to our town centres? Where will the elderly, disabled people and those without cars go to do their shopping when the small retailers on whom we depend have gone? Why are the Government continuing to encourage shopping by car, which increases pollution? Why cannot the supermarkets operate smaller stores such as Spar, Mace and Europa do? I must commend Tesco because its Metro developments reveal that it is showing signs of looking for smaller sites and smaller outlets for its goods. Why can we not encourage such marketing? When will the DOE commission proper research into the impact of retail developments on town centres? In March, the then Select Committee on the Environment produced an excellent report on that subject. Why cannot the Government act upon it?

1.35 pm

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on initiating the debate. I understand why she has raised the subject, but I hope that she will equally appreciate that I cannot speak about any particular cases, such as those in her constituency, which are either sub judice or where an appeal might be lodged with the Secretary of State in the future. That is simply the product of the proper rules that guarantee that any such appeal that comes before the Secretary of State must be dealt with on a strictly impartial basis. I am, nevertheless, pleased that the hon. Lady has chosen this subject for debate because it gives me the opportunity to set out clearly the Government's policy.

The Government are committed to regenerating town centres and, unlike the previous Government who saw the writing on the wall much too late, we have always been the champion of town centres. The damage inflicted in the 1980s and early 1990s was caused by the permissive policies of the previous Government, ironically often aided by public money. The Metro centre on Tyneside, Meadowhall and Merry Hill, to which the hon. Lady referred, all received Government funds through enterprise zones, the derelict land grant, or by being in a development corporation area.

Such developments have had an inevitable impact on their surrounding areas, to which the hon. Lady has also referred, and now there are calls for public money to be spent to assist the regeneration of the areas damaged by those big developments. Obviously, that is not a logical and sensible way to proceed and it is not one that the Government will pursue.

The permissive policies of the previous Administration helped to bring about a major shift in retailing patterns. In 1979, just 5 per cent. of retail sales turnover was generated outside existing town centres. Today, that figure is estimated at more than 25 per cent. and it is likely to exceed 30 per cent. by 2000. That is the legacy that we have inherited. The permissions currently working through the system are largely those that were granted before we came into power. Therefore, we have no control over them. It is inevitable that there will be a further increase in permissions because of those already in the pipeline.

It was not until 1993, with the issuing of a revised PPG6, that the previous Government began to move towards the current policy. The change in policy was initially played down as a change in the balance between town centre and out-of-town development, but in fact it was the beginning of a sea change.

In its 1994 report on shopping centres, the Select Committee on the Environment endorsed the policy and recommended that it be strengthened. Its recommendations were broadly accepted by the previous Government, leading to a further revision of PPG6 in June 1996. The policy was further reviewed and endorsed by the Environment Committee, which reported in March this year.

In answer to the hon. Lady's final question, I can tell her that that report was one of the first matters to receive our attention after the general election. As she knows, we responded by the end of July, making clear our support for the policy endorsed by the Select Committee and our interest in a number of its specific proposals. There is no question of the Government doing anything other than endorsing the approach already recommended by the Select Committee—an approach committed to the regeneration of town centres and in particular, as I shall explain, to the rigorous application of the sequential test in relation to planning applications for developments of out-of-town centres.

Our response in July showed that the Government are firmly committed to PPG6 and it spelt out our key objectives for town centres: first, to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of existing city, town and district centres; secondly, to make them the focus for investment, particularly in retail, office, leisure and other appropriate developments; and thirdly, to provide easy access to a wide range of facilities and services by a choice of means of transport.

It is important to ensure that people have opportunities to reach shopping centres by good public transport, to avoid the problem of growing dependence on the car, to which the hon. Lady referred. Such investment is essential to the regeneration and enhancement of the attractiveness of our town and city centres.

That is not to say that town centres did not need to change and that some of the competition has not helped galvanise town centres to respond to the challenge. However, the challenge has been damaging. We are trying to mobilise public and private funds to combat the continuing, often slow, haemorrhaging of our town centres as the full, long-term effect of the new regional shopping centres comes through.

The full effects of those new centres have yet to be felt, as town centres within 50 miles adjust to the loss of trade and some stores close or contract. The effect of major new

centres, such as Bluewater in south-east London, Cribbs Causeway on the edge of Bristol, Trafford Park in the Manchester conurbation and even the more recent Mortlake Road development in Kew, have yet to come through in full. Those effects are likely to be felt in the next few years.

How do we expect the policy to operate? Local authorities have a major job ahead. Many will need to review their development plans. Up to now, many plans have not set out a clear strategy for town centres that would encourage shops, offices, leisure and even housing back into existing centres. In many cases, local authorities have been essentially locked into a reactive mode—trying to defend their town centres from out-of-town shopping developments, and often having few policies for the other key uses of existing town centres.

We want local authorities to adopt a much more positive and proactive approach to planning town centres. We want them to say where development will be encouraged, and to produce a clear strategy, as well as policies for all key town centre uses. Indeed, we want them to go further. We expect them to adopt a sequential approach to identifying and assessing sites in or on the edge of town centres for their suitability for town centre developments.

Let me explain what the sequential test involves. It means, first, identifying sites within centres. If a suitable site is not identified, edge-of-centre sites should be sought. Only if that fails should local authorities consider an out-of-centre site, which is well served or could be well served by public transport.

We expect local authorities to be realistic and to discuss the suitability of such sites with the private sector. We expect them to develop planning briefs for town centre sites ahead of revising the development plan, and we also expect them to take a much more positive approach to using their compulsory purchase powers to assist with land assembly, where that seems necessary. That will require local planning authorities to take a more positive approach than many have adopted in the past.

The sequential approach also applies to the way in which developers should approach the issue. Any proposal, whether for a new development or for expansion of an existing development, for out-of-town locations will need to demonstrate that there are no suitable sites in more central locations. If there are no such sites, before out-of-centre sites are considered, there will still be a question to be answered as to whether there is a need for such a development. The Government have made it clear that that approach would apply as much to leisure, office and other town centre uses as to retail developments.

The policy must apply to all phases of the planning process: the preparation of development plans, the handling of planning applications and the determination of appeals. We expect inspectors to apply the same criteria in determining planning appeals.

Some people believe that the Secretary of State should call in all major applications and recover all planning appeals for his own determination. The Government's general approach to call-ins is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities, save in exceptional cases where that is necessary. The Secretary of State is therefore very selective about calling in applications for his own determination, and will generally intervene only if matters of more than local importance are involved.

Each case must be considered on its individual merits. In recent years, the average number of appeals to the Secretary of State has been approximately 14,000 annually. I am sure that the hon. Lady will appreciate that it would be impractical for the Secretary of State to determine such a large number of cases personally.

All appeals to the Secretary of State are handled in the first instance by the Planning Inspectorate executive agency. In well over 90 per cent. of cases, the appeal is determined by the inspector on behalf of the Secretary of State. A small number of appeals each year are recovered by the Secretary of State for his own decision. The decision to recover an appeal is taken by reference to published criteria contained in the Government's response to the Select Committee on the Environment in 1986—Cmnd 43.

In the case of supermarkets and large retail developments, the criteria specify that the Secretary of State will recover development proposals involving development of more than 100,000 sq ft. Those that the hon. Lady mentioned in her constituency were smaller than that and therefore did not meet the criteria, so they were properly determined by the inspector.

In addition to getting key commercial uses back into town centres, the Government are keen to get more people living there. We hope to achieve that by encouraging the development of more housing, on its own or as part of mixed-use development. That will help to bring back diversity and life to our town centres.

People are the key ingredient to revitalising town centres. We hope that, for some people, who do not want to live in a quiet suburban area, the town centre can offer an exciting and attractive environment to live in. Young people may be attracted by proximity to entertainment facilities and transport links, and older people may be happy to live in the centre, with easy access to shops and other facilities.

Often, a town centre's location may be extremely attractive, and we must do much more to encourage the imaginative use of sites and the re-use of existing buildings to provide housing opportunities in our town centres. That would not only meet housing needs, but help to bring life back into town centres, which too often go dead at night, when the shopkeepers leave and the businesses close, and where there is often a risk, because of the absence of people keeping watch over the area.

The hon. Lady rightly raised the question of contaminated land. The issue has exercised the Government considerably. A number of sites in urban areas are severely contaminated and require remediation work before they can be used. There are obvious questions of cost involved in the remediation of such sites. It is unreasonable to make developers clear up to a standard above that required for the purposes of the site. It would inhibit development if there were an artificially high remediation standard that bore no relation to the use proposed for the site. That creates a difficulty in terms of meeting the case advanced by the hon. Lady. However, there is no reason why sites could not be cleared up further after initial remediation to allow houses to be built on them, for example.

Dr. Tonge: Does the Minister agree that a future developer who wished to build houses on a site that had been decontaminated for only supermarket and leisure use

[Dr. Tonge]

would be deterred by the cost of further decontamination? If the sites are decontaminated superficially only for the purposes for which they are intended now, those sites will be locked into that use for ever. No future developers will want to meet the cost of decontaminating the sites fully.

Mr. Raynsford: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but I refer her to my earlier comments about the importance of local authorities taking a more proactive role in determining appropriate uses for sites in development plans. If local authorities adopt that approach, there will be an appropriate level of response to the future needs of sites. If a site is not designated for housing purposes in a development plan, it is entirely understandable—under the plan-led system that we operate—that developers who acquire that site in future, anticipating the level of costs associated with decontamination and remediation for non-housing purposes, will say that it is not possible for the site to meet the higher standards required for housing. That is why it is essential that there be the greatest clarity possible in the planning system. Authorities should determine as far as possible in advance what is an appropriate use for a site so that all parties involved are aware of the implications and the associated costs.

Dr. Tonge: The Minister must realise that, although local authorities have district plans, they are not written in stone. We are talking about district plans that may last for 10 or 15 years. Local authorities may set down the uses that they wish for particular sites, but I am thinking about 30 or 40 years hence. I do not see why any developer would want to develop a site if he must first spend millions of pounds on decontamination—which, in the two cases that I mentioned, should have been completed by British Gas before it vacated the sites.

Mr. Raynsford: Two issues arise from the hon. Lady's comments. First, we attach considerable importance to local authorities reviewing and updating their development plans regularly. Plans should not be allowed to remain in force for many years, long after they have ceased to be an accurate and up-to-date reflection of need. Regular updating of plans is essential. Secondly, there is no reason why changing patterns of use will not create new economic circumstances not envisaged previously. After all, we are talking about sites that, 20 or 30 years ago, were considered as being exclusively for industrial use. Planning policies at that time envisaged the maximum separation of residential development from such sites.

As industry has declined, it has become necessary to adopt a different approach and to see whether it is possible to put some such sites to other uses. As I have said, the Government are keen to ensure the re-use of brown-field sites that are no longer required for their former purposes and the re-use of existing premises that are no longer needed and could be put to more beneficial use. The housing use of former warehouses and office buildings is a case in point.

We must not assume that it is possible to lay out at a particular point a strategy that will govern the potential uses of sites for 30 or 40 years or more. Equally, it would be wrong to sterilise sites that may be used in the short term by setting an artificially high standard of decontamination and remediation that would deter any development and leave that site blighted and sterilised. We must adopt a pragmatic, step-by-step approach to ensure that, wherever possible, sites are brought back into use. We should not put obstacles in the way of development that might be appropriate and might help to improve the environment.

Local authorities have a major role to play, and will need to involve all the stakeholders. For many town centres, that process is already well under way. Local authorities need to develop a consensus in consultation with property owners, businesses, the local community and others with a stake in the future of the centre. From this, a strategy and an action plan must be produced and a town centre management body must be set up to oversee its implementation. Nearly 200 town centres have got this far already, and more are developing all the time. We encourage that development through support of the Association of Town Centre Management and the Civic Trust. The hon. Lady's constituency has adopted that approach and a town centre manager has been appointed. That is a very positive step.

The Government keep those policies under review, and we shall be prepared to make further changes if problems arise.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry, but time is short and I must continue.

The hon. Lady will know from the answer that I gave on 5 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *401-02*, that we recently clarified the policy further to ensure that proposals for extensions to existing out-of-centre supermarkets are subject to the same tests as other additional retail developments in such locations. That is an important extension of the policy to ensure that there is no scope for subverting its purpose by extending an existing supermarket rather than building a new one. I hope that that gives the hon. Lady an idea of the Government's commitment to keep policies under constant review and to take steps where necessary to ensure that they are effective in defending town centres.

The hon. Lady asked some other questions that I have not yet answered fully—which is why I required more time in which to respond. First, she asked why we permitted out-of-town or edge-of-town centres to be developed at all. The answer is that, in appropriate circumstances where there is no suitable town centre site, an edge-of-centre development may help to enhance the vitality of the town centre—particularly when good communication links are provided. In certain limited circumstances where there is no suitable town centre or edge-of-centre site available, the shopping needs of a community may require the provision of an out-of-town shopping centre. However, I stress that we do not envisage taking up that option when there is an alternative site available in the town centre or on the edge of the centre. In any case, there must be good public transport links in order to avoid undue dependence on the motor car.

Secondly, the hon. Lady asked why supermarkets cannot operate smaller units. That is a matter for the managers of those supermarkets. The hon. Lady correctly

identified a trend, which is to be encouraged, on the part of some supermarket firms to develop smaller town centre outlets. Such outlets have proved successful, and I hope that others will learn from that experience. We must ensure that there is a wide range of options and choice for the public, as well as action to revitalise town centres. We must encourage trends that are already producing benefits.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked where elderly people will shop if there are no facilities in town centres. In order to meet the needs of the elderly and others who do not have access to cars and who depend on public transport or must walk to the shops, we are emphatic that there must be shopping in town centres. That is why we are so committed to retaining the vitality of town centres and action to support them.

The policies in PPG6 fit well with our concerns to tackle social exclusion, to develop a more integrated transport strategy than this country has had before, and to regenerate our most deprived areas. We are concerned to see that those policies are implemented consistently across the country.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SCOTTISH AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Reproductive and Sexual Health

1. **Jacqui Smith:** What initiatives she has taken to promote greater reproductive and sexual health in developing countries. [18421]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The White Paper on international development sets out the Government's commitment to contributing to international development targets. Among them is the goal of ensuring access to basic health care, including reproductive health services for all by 2015. We believe that all people have a right to be able to control their fertility and to raise healthy, educated children.

Jacqui Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for the commitment that she has outlined. Does she agree that one of the most important steps that the Department for International Development can take is to work with the poorest countries to improve sex and health education and information for young people so that they can make informed choices about their families? What can the Department do to facilitate that?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. She is absolutely right: getting proper services to young people is crucial if they are to be able to control their future, to prevent disease and to have the number of children that they want. We are focusing on that priority, but we believe that access to reproductive health services should be part of basic health care systems for all. That is the way in which to achieve a universal service and to reach everyone; and that is our priority.

Debt Burden

2. **Mr. Fraser:** What is her Department's policy on reducing the debt burden of developing countries. [18422]

Clare Short: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer leads on debt policy but, as was set out in the recent development White Paper, my Department has a key interest in the rapid and flexible implementation of debt reduction measures that aim to secure debt sustainability for some of the world's poorest countries. We must try to mobilise international support for more rapid progress if we are to reach international poverty eradication targets.

Mr. Fraser: I am sure that the Secretary of State is more aware than most that Uganda has benefited from debt reduction assistance. Will she assure the House that Her Majesty's Government will call for a yes vote in Uganda's forthcoming referendum on whether to set up a democratic state, and that, if we do not see a yes vote, she will report back and tell us why?

Clare Short: That has nothing to do with debt relief, but it is true that Uganda will be one of the first countries to qualify, which is important if it is to sustain the great progress that it has made. It is committed to having a referendum on what form of democracy it should have. My view is that democracy, pluralistic democracy, and the right for people to select the candidate that they want and to oust Governments are crucial. We should not try to foist on Africa our precise model because, in some countries, it has led to terrible division on old tribal lines. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will always work for the protection of democracy everywhere, but I will not suggest to Uganda that it should adopt our precise democratic model.

Dr. Tonge: Have the Government considered taking any measures to deal with the double standards that exist in multilateral and bilateral aid to countries that are in debt? I am thinking in particular of the difference between our attitude to Indonesia and Mozambique.

Clare Short: There is an enormous difference between our attitude to Indonesia and our attitude to Mozambique. Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world and has overcome a terrible civil war. The Mozambique Government are now co-operating with the side they fought in that war, when dreadful atrocities took place. That is a fantastic achievement for the people of Mozambique and for both Government and Opposition there. We believe that, against terrible odds, the Government in Mozambique are trying very hard to bring about development and to eradicate poverty. We want to help them in every way we can.

Indonesia is a middle-income country. As the hon. Lady knows, I have reviewed our aid and reduced parts of it to increase help to sustain forestry and to assist trade unions that are persecuted in Indonesia and non-governmental organisations in East Timor. That has not been easy to organise.

Our attitudes to the two countries are massively different because the needs and natures of their Governments are so different.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: What is Her Majesty's Government's attitude to Zimbabwe's international debts in the light of proposals to nationalise several million hectares of farming land without compensation, with access to the courts apparently to be denied to those who are deprived of their property? Economists and agriculture experts have warned that it will result in the collapse of Zimbabwe's agriculture industry, which is the country's biggest single foreign currency earner and generates two thirds of its domestic economy.

Clare Short: The situation in Zimbabwe is indeed very worrying. We have made our attitude to the current land proposals very clear. I have personally written to the Land Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have said that it is true that land is distributed very unfairly in Zimbabwe and that we would be willing to back a properly organised system of land redistribution that gives some land to the poor and enables them to improve their livelihoods and reduces poverty in Zimbabwe, but we will not fund or support in any way a scheme that endangers food production and Zimbabwe's economic health. I hope that Zimbabwe's Government will pull back and go for a properly organised redistribution of benefits to people in Zimbabwe.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

3. **Mr. Flight:** When the change in status of the Commonwealth Development Corporation to a public-private partnership will take place. [18423]

Clare Short: I am keen to mobilise new investment through the Commonwealth Development Corporation in the neediest countries in the world as soon as possible, but there are many steps to be gone through, not least to deal with the need for new legislation.

Mr. Flight: Are the Government willing to consider bringing private sector shareholders into the CDC, given that they would help to confer the benefits to which the right hon. Lady has referred? If so, what kind of shareholding might the Government wish to retain, and—potentially—what kind of outside parties would they want to bring in? I think that the House should know where the Government are going.

Clare Short: I am sure that the House should know where the Government are going. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke about the matter at the last Prime Minister's Question Time and, I believe, the one before that, so there are no secrets; clear statements have been made.

As the hon. Gentleman should know, I have reviewed the CDC's work. It is a very important instrument to secure investment for countries that are not attracting private flows. We want to increase those flows and to use the CDC as a bridge to draw in more. I have therefore looked at the CDC's structure. Because it is wholly Government-owned, it is not allowed to raise private finance because that would count as Government borrowing. I want it to be restructured in a way that will allow the retention of a substantial Government share while leaving the majority of the corporation in private ownership. That will enable us to raise additional flows of investment while leaving a golden share that will entrench the corporation as a development institution encouraging investment in the poorest countries.

Those are the proposals and they are being scrutinised. As the hon. Gentleman will know, there is much detailed work to be done and after that we must introduce legislation; but I hope to do all that.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

4. **Mr. McAllion:** What is her assessment of the impact of the proposed multilateral agreement on investment on measures to reduce inequalities between rich and poor countries. [18424]

8. **Mr. Chaytor:** What steps she will take to ensure that the multilateral agreement on investment includes mandatory safeguards against unsustainable economic development in the poorest countries. [18428]

Clare Short: The multilateral agreement on investment is designed to introduce rules for investment flows, primarily between Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries to ensure that foreign investors are treated in the same way as domestic investors. The MAI is not designed for poorer developing countries but, of course, it could become a model and we are supporting consultation with them on how their interests can be taken into account. My Department is commissioning a study to look at any implications the MAI may have for these countries. The Government will work towards the eventual establishment of a more widely applicable World Trade Organisation agreement on international investment.

Mr. McAllion: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Governments, in particular the Governments of poor countries, must remain free to impose restrictions on foreign inward investment, whether that is to protect their populations or their environments? If she does, can she assure the House that the Government will never sign up to any multilateral agreement on investment that allows multinationals or transnational corporations to use the World Trade Organisation to overrule restrictions that have been placed on inward investment by Governments in the interests of their people and their environments?

Clare Short: I think that my hon. Friend's concerns are a little misplaced. Overwhelmingly, the desire of poor countries is to attract more inward investment to bring about the development that will enable them to have the full economic growth that will benefit the poor. The multilateral agreement on investment is currently intended to apply only to OECD countries and says only that Governments who sign up to it voluntarily are not allowed to treat domestic investment and inward investment differently. In that agreement, which the Government hope to sign, we are trying to ensure protection for core labour standards and environmental standards, for example. We are trying to ensure that, if it becomes a model for the future, the future interests of developing countries are protected. My hon. Friend's fears are slightly misguided. We need more investment in those countries, not less.

Mr. Chaytor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the context of the attempts by some multinational companies to sabotage the current climate negotiations in Kyoto, it is crucial that the present OECD non-binding code of good practice is made binding within the multilateral agreement on investment?

Clare Short: I am not sure whether multinational companies are more to blame than Governments for dragging their feet. Companies can promote advertising campaigns, but Governments are responsible for protecting the future interests of the world's people. That is where the primary responsibility lies. I share my hon. Friend's concern and assure him that we are seeking to have the OECD guidelines on multinationals' corporate behaviour associated with the multilateral agreement on investment.

Mr. Faber: I am sure that the right hon. Lady agrees that trade and investment are essential for developing countries. While the multilateral agreement on investment is a welcome step, when will the Government accept as their goal the complementary policy of global free trade by 2020? The right hon. Lady has not been afraid to adopt other targets. Why will she not adopt that one?

Clare Short: That topic has been raised in the House before, when I am sure the hon. Gentleman was present.

I have said to him that my view is that broadening trade on beneficial terms is our objective, but that for the very poorest and frailest economies I agree with the recent United Nations Conference on Trade and Development report that a rapid opening up could damage frail economies. We need to include them in the process, but in a way that will enable them to strengthen their economies to take advantage of an opening up. I do not know whether the date that the hon. Gentleman suggests is right. That is the sort of progress that we favour and we are seeking to promote it and work with countries and with the World Trade Organisation to bring it about.

Mr. MacShane: Will my right hon. Friend comment on President Clinton's failure to secure an agreement for a fast track on free trade in the United States? That reflects grave concerns in north America about the failure to add a social dimension to the complex question of trade. Whether on the MAI, which is the subject of the question, or on forthcoming meetings of the World Trade Organisation, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Government will side with President Clinton and most other democratic countries in seeking a social element and will not bow to the wishes of multinational companies and authoritarian Governments in the third world?

Clare Short: Obtaining agreement on core labour standards and environmental protection so that globalisation does not lead to a levelling down is an enormously important priority for all the people of the world, wherever they live, otherwise we could have what has been called the rush to the bottom. As my hon. Friend knows, there is no prospect of immediate progress on the adoption by the World Trade Organisation of the human rights clause that many people advocate, but we are seeking to make progress through the International Labour Organisation and by introducing incentives in the European Union's general system of preferences in the form of greater privileges to countries that guarantee core labour standards. I agree with my hon. Friend's analysis, but we must mobilise more international support for that objective.

Intermediate Technology

5. **Mr. Boswell:** What assistance she is offering for the adoption of intermediate technology by developing countries. [18425]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): Our Department offers a broad range of support to encourage the adoption of appropriate intermediate technology solutions in developing countries through our country programmes, our research and knowledge work and through the joint funding scheme for non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Boswell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that intermediate technology is not second best if it is the appropriate technology to meet the need? British companies and non-governmental organisations are particularly strong in that area. As the White Paper was rather feeble on this subject, will he make amends by giving it an enhanced emphasis?

Mr. Foulkes: The White Paper was feeble on no subject. It was greatly welcomed by all the non-governmental organisations and even by the Opposition spokesman. Last year, our Department supported the intermediate technology development group to the tune of more than £3 million. I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's constituency interest in this matter, but if he considers objectively what we have spent and our commitment, he will agree that this is a priority of the new Labour Government.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On the question of former Overseas Development Administration support for such projects and for projects more generally, would it not be interesting to take a snapshot year, perhaps in the mid-1980s, and revisit all the projects that were supported in that year with British taxpayers' money to see to what extent they are still being properly managed and utilised to the benefit of the recipient countries? I asked that question following my visit in 1991 to the Orissa health project in southern India, which I found to be a disaster area.

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend and I are spending some time examining all our projects to see how effective they are. The Select Committee on International Development could carry out the role that my hon. Friend suggests. I assure him that, under the White Paper to which the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) referred, projects such as the Pergau dam would receive no support from the new Labour Government.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Minister agree that, although intermediate technology is appropriate in many circumstances, high technology is sometimes also appropriate for third-world development? I am thinking particularly of sustainable energy policies. Is not the development of renewable energy often the means by which underdeveloped countries can make the leap from underdevelopment to sustainable development? What do the Government intend to do about encouraging the transfer of such technology to the underdeveloped world?

Mr. Foulkes: The transfer of our technology to transition countries in eastern and central Europe has been achieved through the know-how fund. Some of the techniques used by the know-how fund can now be extended to developing countries, especially in the area to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We have supported successful work in South Africa to train young unemployed people in information technology. Those people have obtained work very quickly, which shows the effectiveness of our support for such work in those countries.

Mr. Grant: I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is to visit South Africa. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Minister will urge her to visit the computer information technology centre in Welkom in the Free State. She will see there an excellent project run by black British expatriates who are teaching people in places such as Bronville and Tahbong how to use information technology. Will he also examine how those people are working with the local population and use their example as a model for future development to meet the White Paper's objectives?

Mr. Foulkes: The project to which my hon. Friend refers is precisely that to which I was referring earlier. I am very pleased that—I hope next week—I shall be able to meet him and the organiser of that project.

St. Helena

6. **Dr. Marek:** What plans she has to visit St. Helena. [18426]

Mr. Foulkes: Last week, I met the delegation of councillors from St. Helena and had useful and constructive discussions with them. As my hon. Friend knows, however, lead responsibility for the dependent territories lies with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I am discussing with my colleagues ways in which contacts between Her Majesty's Government and the Government and people of St. Helena can be developed constructively.

Dr. Marek: I warmly welcome that remark. The situation on St. Helena is now being addressed. If my hon. Friend can get there, I am sure that St. Helenians would be delighted with a ministerial visit. Will he pay particular attention to St. Helena's need for an airport or airstrip? If a feasibility study is possible, will he ensure that it is undertaken with a view to determining what is possible and practicable, not how expensive an airport or airstrip is and why it should not be built?

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the Government in this matter. We have offered to finance a comprehensive study of all possible air links and options to improve access to St. Helena by air. The only ministerial visit to St. Helena was made in 1699, which indicates how difficult it is to get there.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I should like the Minister to know that I visited St. Helena on behalf of Her Majesty's Government rather more recently than 1699. When he considers an airstrip, will he bear in mind the opinion of the islanders—the Saints? The last time I was there they did not want an airstrip.

Mr. Foulkes: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's visit did not stick in the minds of the St. Helenian councillors I met last week—although I am sure that it stuck in his mind. I assure him that the views of the people and representatives of St. Helena will be taken fully into account in an access study.

Mr. David Heath: Does the Minister appreciate that, last week, the St. Helena delegation said that they could not remember ever having received a visit from a Minister? He would therefore be warmly received if he were to go, particularly if he were to find an aid package and take a promise from the Government that full UK citizenship for St. Helenians—which was removed in 1981—will be restored.

Mr. Foulkes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's views on citizenship. That matter is being considered sympathetically by other Departments. I assure him, however, that we have agreed with the St. Helena Government a country policy plan that, over the next three years, will involve expenditure by the United Kingdom Government of £26 million, which is £1,500 per capita—the highest per capita expenditure of any of our programmes.

Children in War Zones

7. **Mr. Timms:** What steps she is taking to encourage implementation of the Machel recommendations on children in war zones. [18427]

Mr. Foulkes: We greatly welcome the Machel report and have already pledged £200,000 to enable the newly appointed UN Secretary-General's special representative on children and armed conflict to begin his work to co-ordinate international action in response to the report. In addition, we have offered to host a meeting in London during our presidency of the European Union to encourage our European partners to give sympathetic consideration to the special representative's work and priorities.

Mr. Timms: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's reply. He will know that the report for the United Nations Children Fund, for which Mrs. Machel was responsible, highlighted the issue of households headed by children. He will also know that it is estimated that there could be 80,000 such households in Rwanda following the conflict there, that there are many more in Uganda as a result of the conflict in the north of that country and as a result of AIDS, and that there are more such households elsewhere. Does he agree that the issue needs to be recognised in a policy? Will he tell the House what steps the Department is taking to address the issue of households headed by children?

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue. It is a terrible tragedy that when parents have died in conflicts or from diseases such as AIDS, a young child heads the household. The new special representative, Mr. Otunnu, is well qualified to undertake his task and we shall give him all the support we can.

Chevening Scholarship Programme

9. **Mr. Rowe:** What plans she has for the Chevening scholarship programme. [18429]

Mr. Foulkes: Expenditure plans for the next financial year are under negotiation now between officials of my Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Chevening scholarship programme is funded by the Foreign Office. My Department contributes only in countries where we have an aid programme and excludes military training. We are currently reviewing how our contribution can be made consistent with the aims set out in the White Paper, particularly that of poverty eradication.

Mr. Rowe: I suggest to the Minister that this valuable programme could achieve the purposes of the White Paper if the allocation of scholarships was skewed much more towards primary health care programmes, the development of programmes for disability, primary education and similar things rather than, as at present, its valuable contribution being skewed towards business and technology. Will the Minister consider that suggestion rather than there being any risk of scrapping the programme?

Mr. Foulkes: We are certainly not planning to scrap the programme. We are looking at precisely what the

hon. Gentleman suggests—reorienting it towards our priorities. Last year, £24 million was spent on 3,500 scholars. We want to ensure that all the money spent is consistent with our poverty eradication programme. I am sure that even the Leader of the Opposition agrees with that.

Rain Forests (Brazil)

10. **Mr. Sheerman:** What steps she is taking to work with the Government of Brazil to ensure that its continued economic development does not result in further destruction of its rain forests. [18430]

Clare Short: Our technical co-operation programme with Brazil is our largest in Latin America and focuses heavily on the environment. Our major activity is forestry, in particular addressing sustainable management issues in the Amazon rain forest. We are also active in the G7 pilot programme to conserve the Brazilian rain forest which seeks to reduce the rate of deforestation in a manner consistent with the sustainable development of the area's natural and human resources. More widely, we are working to help to ensure that economic development and trade in forestry products is managed sustainably and is combined with protection of sensitive habitats.

Mr. Sheerman: Will my right hon. Friend mount a serious investigation into the allegations of corruption in IBAMA—the environmental agency that is supposed to protect the rain forests? There are allegations that no fines are ever paid, that the loggers get off scot free and that from top to bottom, IBAMA, which we help to fund through the G7, is corrupt. There are further allegations that more logging than ever before is going on in the rain forests of Brazil. Will my right hon. Friend mount an investigation?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I would be more than happy to investigate the points he raises. I hope that he will let me have whatever details he has. The lesson of sustainable forest management is that if the local poor people can manage the future of the forest, they conserve it. It is when short-term commercial interests come in that we get the destruction of forestry.

Mr. Randall: Only 1 per cent. of the United Kingdom aid budget goes towards sustaining biodiversity. Does the Secretary of State have any plans to increase that percentage, bearing in mind the fact that, at the current rates of habitat destruction, the forests of Africa could disappear by 2050?

Clare Short: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's figure is correct, but I doubt it. There is a strong and growing environmental strand to our work. We are doing a lot of work on conserving forests in Cameroon, and learning how to conserve the other remaining forests of Africa. Forestry and sustaining biodiversity are major priorities of our work. Some of that work is done through the global environment facility, which is an international treaty that we helped to fund. Work is being done on replenishment, but I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Assistance (Poorest Countries)

11. **Mr. Evans:** What plans she has to assist the poorest countries in the world. [18431]

Clare Short: We shall focus our energies and resources on the elimination of poverty and mobilising the political will necessary to meet the international poverty eradication targets by 2015. To that end, we shall work in partnership with other donors, Governments of developing countries and others—including the private sector—who are committed to eradicating poverty.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful for that answer. While targeting the poorest countries, will the Secretary of State also take note of the pockets of poverty in other parts of the world? I make a particular plea on behalf of Brazil, where Church groups and other voluntary organisations are working to help with the problem of the street children.

Clare Short: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I agree with him. The poorest countries must have the top priority for resource transfers and investment to enable them to work their way out of poverty, but many middle-income countries have serious problems. As our White Paper says, those areas do not need big resource transfers, but need support for changes that will protect the neediest people. We are committed to that work, including work with street children in Latin America. *[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Conversations are much too noisy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am delighted that the House agrees. It will now come to order.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [18451] **Mr. Clapham:** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I met with ministerial colleagues and others and will have further meetings later today.

Mr. Clapham: I know that my right hon. Friend is aware that coal makes a significant contribution to the British energy economy. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom deep coal mining industry is facing a crisis. Will my right hon. Friend consider short-term measures that may help the industry, such as looking at the negotiations with the French on the interconnector, introducing a restraint on opencast mining and increasing the stocking obligation of the generators? That would allow the British coal industry to survive until the initiatives of my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry have been introduced.

The Prime Minister: We are looking at many of the things that my hon. Friend has discussed and put on the agenda today. I understand that the three main

UK generators—National Power, PowerGen and Eastern—and RJB Mining have agreed in principle to make supply arrangements covering the period between now and 30 June 1998. That will allow the UK deep mine coal industry to continue production at present levels without immediate redundancies or pit closures. That is a six-month delay. However, it is important that we use that opportunity to review the long-term energy requirements of the nation and make sure that we have an energy policy consistent with a competitive industry and the long-term energy needs of the country.

Mr. Hague: The Opposition will support the Government tonight, as we believe that married couples should not be discriminated against by the benefit system. Clearly, the Minister who has resigned in the past half hour does not agree with that. Does the Prime Minister believe in that principle?

The Prime Minister: I believe that, in the choice of priorities that we have available to us, helping lone parents off benefit and into work is the best thing that we can do for them. That is why we have a package worth £200 million specifically for lone parents.

Mr. Hague: Let me ask the Prime Minister the same question again, as he did not answer it. Does he support the principle that married couples should not be discriminated against, or does he just want to save the £5 million at stake next year from the measure?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman says that the figure is £5 million. It is not £5 million or anything like it. Over a period of time it amounts to hundreds of millions of pounds. It is important to emphasise that lone parents currently on benefit will lose no cash whatever. Of course the right hon. Gentleman is right to point out that the effect is to equalise arrangements for married couples on the same income. If the Government had unlimited resources, no doubt such a change would not be necessary, but we believe that it is better to spend the available resources on helping lone parents off benefit and into work.

Mr. Hague: Why, then, did the Prime Minister not have the courage to say that before the election? Does he recall the Secretary of State for Scotland saying that the proposal had nothing to do with moral principles or an effective welfare system but was designed to win popularity at the Tory party conference? Will the Secretary of State for Scotland be joining us in the Lobby tonight? Why was the Labour party not straight with people before the election?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman is wrong. I have in front of me the comments that we made before the election. We said that

"We will stick within the existing budget"

and that

"we can offer better and different ways of getting single parents back into work."

There is a choice within the priorities. The right hon. Gentleman has said that he will support the Government tonight. Perhaps he can now say whether he will support the Government's £200 million programme helping lone parents back into work.

Mr. Hague: We will support the Government when they are right and we will oppose them when they are wrong. It is extraordinary for the Prime Minister to claim that Labour said that it would do this before the election. When the Secretary of State for Social Security was asked whether she would introduce the legislation, did she not say:

"No, of course not"?

Did not the Financial Secretary say that it was

"a shameful attack on lone parents"?

Did not the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport say that with such a policy the previous Government were going in completely the wrong direction? Which way will he vote tonight? Why was the Labour party not straight with people before the election?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, but that is simply not correct. My right hon. Friend made it clear before the election, as I did—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

The Prime Minister: We made it clear before the election that we would stick within the existing budget. We said that it was important to give lone parents a chance to get off benefit and into work. That is why we have not only the £200 million programme for lone parents as part of the new deal, but the £300 million programme for after-school clubs and centres. That will mean that all lone parents will have after-school care for their children. Independent research suggests that lone parents who get work will receive some £50 a week more. We have made a simple choice within priorities. Now perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will say whether he will support us in our programme to help lone parents off benefit and into work, where they will be better off.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister is quite right to pursue that policy. I asked why he was not straight about its implications before the election. Does he recall saying on Radio 4 when asked about it:

"No, we believe we can avoid that within the existing budgets"?

That is what he actually said. He was not straight with people before the election. Why can he not concede that he was wrong not to be level with the country before the election?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, but once again the right hon. Gentleman is reading out only one part of the sentence. I said before the election:

"We will stick within the existing budget . . . but we can offer better and different ways of getting single parents back into work."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] The Opposition either want the facts or they do not. I suspect that they do not. The right hon. Gentleman is supporting us today, but it is a simple choice between the Conservative party, which would put through benefit changes but not offer help in getting people back to work, and the present Government, who are helping people off benefit and into work. That is the difference that people will remember at the next election.

Mr. Hague: Tonight we shall vote for a principle that is right, while the Labour party will be dragged through the Lobby to vote for a measure which before the election it called shameful, malign and completely wrong. Is that

not another example of a Government without principles and without values? Is it not a case of us having the courage of our convictions and one resigned Minister having the courage of his, but of the Labour party in general having neither courage nor convictions?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has still not told us whether he supports our welfare-to-work package. As for the difference in priorities between the Conservative party and Labour, there is the £3.5 billion welfare-to-work programme; that is not a Tory policy. There is the £1.2 billion school building programme; that is not a Tory policy. There is the £900 million release of capital receipts; that is not a Tory policy. There is the £50 extra help with heating bills for pensioners; that is not a Tory policy. There is the section 11 funding cut reversed by this Government; that is not a Tory policy. There is also the housing benefit change reversed by this Government; that is not a Tory policy.

There are different priorities, but we believe that the most important thing is to help lone parents off benefit and into work, and to do so in a way that does not lose control of public finances. No one will go back to the days of the record borrowing requirement of the Conservatives. We shall take the tough decisions necessary, but balance them with fairness to help those people back into work.

Ms Abbott: Does the Prime Minister accept that even if the new deal for lone parents is 100 per cent. successful, there will always be women, especially mothers with children under five, who are not able to work? How does he justify cutting those women's benefits?

The Prime Minister: First, as I pointed out before, for existing lone parents there is no cash loss of benefit. The change effectively means that those who come on and become lone parents will get the same as couples on the same income. That is not exactly as my hon. Friend has represented it.

Secondly, I must tell my hon. Friend very frankly indeed that we were elected as a Government because people believed that we would keep a tight control on public finance, and because we said clearly before the election, as I repeat now, that what is important is to get as many people as possible off benefit and into work. What they need for the future is not to live in a household and bring up children where there is no work in the family, but the chance to get into work. We shall help them to do so. With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend, I think that that is a better way of achieving our aims.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister has talked about a choice of priorities, and about limited resources. Very well then: if he were to close the loophole used by the very rich to avoid taxes through offshore trust funds, that would generate a sum equivalent to twice what is needed to restore the cut for lone parents. If there is a choice of priorities, why does he not do that first?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman says is simply incorrect. In the Budget measures were announced that will raise some £1½ billion through closing various tax loopholes. The Liberal Democrats will always say that there are easy, painless ways of getting money. There are not, I am afraid. Choices and priorities have to be decided, and no matter what the short-term difficulty may be, I shall carry on doing that.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister has a choice; he has just ignored it. We agree with the Government about the need to break dependency. We applaud them for providing child care for single parents who want to work. But why does that have to be paid for by single parents who have to stay at home? Does the Prime Minister not realise that people are simply bewildered about why a Labour Government should choose to ask the poor to pay for the poor while the rich can continue to duck their taxes?

The Prime Minister: That is simply not right. The right hon. Gentleman says that he fully supports our welfare-to-work programme, and the arrangements for single parents under that programme, but his party refused to support the windfall tax that brings it about. As I explained to one of his hon. Friends last week, the Liberal Democrats will sit there and ask for more money for everything. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] But they do; not just for schools and hospitals, but for jobs, transport and the environment. There are limited resources.

When we came to power, we made it clear that we had to stick within existing budgets and guidelines because we were not going to lose control of the money that is available. Within the money that is available, we have lots of difficult choices—I have just listed a whole series of them—but we will not lose control of financial prudence within the limits that we have. We have given that additional £200 million to lone parents and £300 million more for after-school care clubs which will look after not merely the children of lone parents, but others. I believe that that is the right choice to make.

Mr. Snape: Will the Prime Minister help the House in tracing the £190 billion of public money revealed recently by the Liberal Democrats as being available for expenditure on public services? Has he heard the rumour that the money has been buried in a magic forest by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, where it is being guarded by his economic advisers—Tinky Winky and the rest of the Teletubbies?

The Prime Minister: I certainly think that Tinky Winky would make a better economic spokesman for the Liberal Democrats.

Q2. [18452] **Mr. Townend:** Why was the Prime Minister not more honest at the election on another matter? Why did he not tell middle England that savers who took full advantage of TESSAs and PEPs would be penalised? Is that not the height of hypocrisy when the Paymaster General—the man who dreamt up these proposals—is a beneficiary of a multi-million-pound Channel Islands trust? Does this not show that, under new Labour, fat cats flourish while middle England suffers? The Prime Minister said, "Put your trust in me." His Ministers put their trusts offshore.

The Prime Minister: First—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: First, the hon. Gentleman is wrong in what he said about the Paymaster General. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. I have never known such intolerance and noise during Prime Minister's questions.

The Prime Minister: Secondly, in relation to individual savings accounts—as I pointed out to the

Leader of the Opposition last week—6 million people will get the chance to put money in tax-free accounts. That is a considerable increase. Not merely the same amount of money but more money will be available by way of tax relief. For couples, £100,000—in other words, £50,000 each—will be the amount that can go into the fund. In addition, and contrary to what has been said by the Opposition, this is not retrospective at all, and there will be full protection for people up to April 1999. That is a far better deal, offering more help to more people than the Conservatives offered.

Ms Dari Taylor: Many of our youngsters are facing a serious crisis. One in 10 children who are absent from school are supposedly on GCSE courses but feel confident neither about being on those courses nor about their success. Many of them who are in youth courts—some 42 per cent.—are excluded from schools. The previous Administration excluded those youngsters and put them in this position. *[Interruption.]* Will our social exclusion unit embrace them and ensure that they do not feel excluded? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, despite the scorn and derision of Opposition Members. Much of the crime in our country today is created exactly as a result of high levels of deprivation, with families that are sometimes third-generation unemployed. That is precisely why we are putting £3.5 billion into the welfare-to-work programme, which will allow those youngsters to come off the dole and have some chance of finding work and opportunities for the future. That is a better and more intelligent use of resources, allowing them to stand on their own two feet and be independent, and giving them the chance, often for the first time in a generation, to work and earn a decent standard of living. That is the way to help people on benefit.

Q3. [18453] **Mr. Willis:** I returned this morning from Ireland, having met about 40 women's groups in Belfast yesterday, all of which asked me to convey a message to the Prime Minister about lone-parent benefits. They have few child care facilities and live in areas of high unemployment, yet he wants to take a benefit away from them and harm the poorest people when he should be tackling the rich. Will he accept what the Chancellor is reported as saying in *The Guardian* today: that by closing tax loopholes and using that money we can tax the rich rather than the poorest in our society?

The Prime Minister: The point on tax that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) made earlier is nonsense: the money is not available to substitute in the way that he said. I hope that the hon. Gentleman said to people in Northern Ireland that £140 million was there specifically to help people, including lone parents, off benefit and into work.

No existing lone parent is losing cash money—I have made that clear already—and the impact of our measures will be to allow many people the chance to get help with child care, with skills and with educational opportunities for the first time in their lives. The hon. Gentleman will have to face the fact, as we have, that within limited resources that is the right priority for people and their future.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Will my right hon. Friend emphasise the importance of the Kyoto summit and the leading work of the Labour Government in getting the politicians to acknowledge the importance of an agreement for tomorrow's generation, our children, as opposed to the vested interests that some of them seem to be putting first? Will he ensure that all the signatories carry through the agreement to which they sign up?

The Prime Minister: We hope very much that we can reach agreement in Kyoto. If we can, it will be an extremely important step forward. If the percentage reductions currently under discussion are agreed, it will be less than we and other European countries might have wished, but it will be a huge step forward from where we were even a few weeks ago.

If we can get the developed countries to agree substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from the 1990 levels by 2010 and then, equally important, bind in the developing countries to play their part, we will have created for the first time the framework in which the world can make real progress. The part played by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in achieving that has been absolutely marvellous.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Prime Minister explain to the people of Northern Ireland how he can argue that he must meet Gerry Adams tomorrow, in the same way as he meets the leaders of democratic parties in Northern Ireland? Is it not a fact that those other leaders, who represent constituencies in the House, do not come to Downing street with three members of an outlawed Army Council that controls Semtex for bombs and weapons for murder? Is he not aware that those very members were in post when Downing street was blown up in an attempt to kill the previous Cabinet of this country?

The Prime Minister: Of course I recall that, as I recall all the violence and injury caused by the Provisional IRA over a very long period, but if we cannot get parties talking in the process we will never get a lasting settlement to the problems of Northern Ireland. Every party to the talks process has to sign up to the principles of democracy and non-violence. In my view, it is essential that if they do so they are treated in the same way as other parties, which means meeting me and other people in the course of the process.

There never has been and never will be any concession in respect of violence offered by those to whom the hon. Gentleman referred or by anyone else: if they return to violence they will go out of the talks. The only alternative to involving everyone in the talks process and trying to make progress is ending up with the situation with which he is very familiar, in which children grow up in divided communities and there is violence, sectarianism and all the scars of history that have been on the people of Northern Ireland over centuries. If we can remove that by getting people talking, it is worth taking a few risks to get them to talk.

Mr. Hoyle: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there has been a downsizing in my constituency of Chorley,

where the leader of the Conservatives officially left the party last night to join the Labour party? That is along with the downsizing of the Liberal party Democrat after a senior Liberal Democrat councillor also crossed the floor to join the Labour party.

The Prime Minister: I am glad to hear it. I await with interest the application of the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). My hon. Friend is right in that many of those who used to support the Conservative party can see what a hopeless shower the party is, in opposition as well as in government, and are coming over to the Labour party.

Q4. [18454] **Mr. Blunt:** When the Prime Minister considers the past seven months, will he think about vitamin B6 users, home owners who have a mortgage, home owners who are presumptuous enough to want a doorstep, car owners, sports pistol enthusiasts and country sports enthusiasts? All those people, as well as those of us who are partial to a rib of beef, want to know why the Prime Minister was not honest with them before the election and why he did not tell them that he aspired to be not so much the Queen's first Minister as the nation's first nanny.

The Prime Minister: First, on the banning of beef on the bone, as the hon. Gentleman knows, advice was tendered a week ago by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee—the scientific body that advises us. The chief medical officer then gave his advice and we followed that advice to the letter. Had we not followed that advice, we would have been subject to criticism.

As for what the hon. Gentleman says on interest rates, of course we could have carried on as the previous Government did at the end of the 1980s when there were warning signs in the economy. We ended up with interest rates at 15 per cent. for a year, record repossessions and record bankruptcies. We have taken the measures both to cure the budget deficit and to bring inflation under control that were necessary. One of the best but certainly most curious things is that the Labour party is now the party of financial prudence, not the Conservative party.

Mr. Home Robertson: My right hon. Friend may recall that a former Prime Minister once said that the national health service was safe in her hands, but that we ended up with a demented, bureaucratic internal market in which doctor had to compete against doctor and hospital had to compete against hospital, and patients had to be very patient indeed. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this week's White Paper is an important step towards reinstating the NHS as a national health service? I must choose my words carefully, but may I say that it is very welcome that we are implementing a vital socialist policy so early in our career.

The Prime Minister: Bit radical, that. Madam Speaker—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting, is it not, that Conservative Members do not ask a single question about the health service the day after we put together a White Paper on it. It is tremendously important that we are not merely getting the additional resources into the NHS but ending the absurdity of hospital competing against hospital and doctor competing against doctor, which is wholly contrary to the ethics and principles of the NHS. In addition, over time we can reform and improve the NHS so that in three or four years we no longer talk about saving it, but talk about the massive changes and improvements brought about by a Labour Government, a Labour Government having introduced the NHS in the teeth of the opposition of the Tories.

Q5. [18455] **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** Is the Prime Minister aware of the enormous number of representations that I and other hon. Members have received from councils, charities, companies and individuals regarding the removal of advance corporation tax credit? Does he accept that, devastating though his raid on pension funds will be, his Government would have been subject to far less opposition if he had at least been honest about his intentions before the election?

The Prime Minister: First, as I said in answer to an earlier question, the tax promises of the Labour party were clear before the election and we have kept every single one of them—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes we have. Secondly, in relation to advance corporation tax, the Confederation of British Industry welcomed the changes we proposed, which is merely an indication of how far away today's Tory party is from business. Thirdly, after the initial transition period, there is a £2 billion corporation tax cut for business as a result of the changes—yes, cut for business—and it is this Government, a Labour Government, who have introduced the lowest corporation tax rate and the lowest tax rate for small businesses this country has ever seen.

Helen Jones: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the recent historic decision in Ottawa, where 110 countries joined together to ban land mines? Will he undertake to do everything possible to persuade those countries that have not yet signed the agreement that it is the real way forward to remove that scourge from our planet?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may oppose it, but the land mines treaty has done a superb job and we on Government Benches support it thoroughly. Furthermore, it is another initiative in which the new Government played a leading role. In addition, we are providing extra help and resources in order to remove existing land mines in other countries. It is a great step forward and I am particularly proud of the part our Government played in it.

Mental Incapacity

3.31 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to repeat a statement on mental incapacity, which has been made in another place—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me get people out of the Chamber—it is very noisy. I am sure that hon. Members will move quickly and quietly so that we can hear the statement.

Mr. Hoon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In my answer to hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope) on 28 October 1997, *Official Report*, column 787, I said that it was the Government's intention to issue a consultation paper on the subject of mental incapacity. I am pleased to announce the publication of a Green Paper on that subject today. It concerns the law in England and Wales, and examines a wide range of issues concerning the legal rights of people who are unable to make decisions for themselves, or who cannot communicate their decisions, as the result of disease, disability, or injury.

As it currently stands, the law affords little protection either to mentally incapacitated adults or to those who care for them. The law is confusing and fragmented: many carers in particular are expected to make decisions on behalf of incapacitated adults without a clear idea of what legal authority there is for those decisions. Everyone will know of a friend or relative whose life is affected by the unsatisfactory state of the current law.

Let me provide just three examples: the first is a young man with a learning disability who has reached the age of 18 and wants to be able to make some decisions for himself, such as what clothes to wear, or where to live. A second example might be a young woman, formerly a high-flying executive until a severe car crash caused brain damage, making her incapable of taking all but the simplest decisions about her life, health or welfare. A third example would be an elderly woman who is suffering from dementia. She is in a home and currently there are concerns about how her finances are protected. The present law does not provide sufficient guidance or safeguards for each of the people I have mentioned, or for those who care for them. The Green Paper therefore invites views on the need to create a legal framework for decision making on behalf of people who lack mental capacity. The Government are determined that the law should be developed and modernised.

I must make it clear at the outset that the Green Paper does not seek views on euthanasia. Euthanasia is a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, at an individual's own request or for a merciful motive. That is not acceptable to the Government. We fully support the view of the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics in its report of February 1994 that euthanasia is unacceptable and cannot be sanctioned in any circumstances. Euthanasia is illegal now and will remain illegal, so let us not be side-tracked by that issue.

The current law lacks coherence because it has developed piecemeal. It is unsystematic and full of glaring gaps. It has many areas of uncertainty, and fails to offer adequate protection either for mentally incapacitated adults or for the people who look after them. The scale of the problem must not be underestimated. The range of people who are let down by the current law is extensive. They include adults with profound learning disabilities; victims of accidents, such as road traffic accident victims who suffer brain damage; those who lose mental capacity as a result of a stroke; and those who lose mental capacity later in life—for example, those who suffer from dementia.

In preparing the Green Paper, the Government acknowledge two debts. The first is to the Law Commission, whose work in this area culminated in 1995 in the publication of its report entitled, "Mental Incapacity". The Green Paper published today is based closely on the wide-ranging and coherent set of recommendations contained in the Law Commission's final report. The Government's second debt is to the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, chaired by Lord Walton, whose report was published in 1994.

I recognise that many of the issues raised in the Green Paper are sensitive and attract strong views. The Green Paper seeks the broadest range of responses before policy can be settled. With the exception of our absolute opposition to euthanasia, the Government have no fixed or final views on any of the questions. We will develop policy only when the consultation process is complete.

The areas covered by the Green Paper include definitions of incapacity and what is meant by the best interests of an incapacitated person. It also considers the need for a more informal framework for those making day-to-day decisions on behalf of an incapacitated person. It looks at the possibilities open to someone who is able to make arrangements for a time when mental capacity may be lost. It examines the law relating to the making of advance statements and proposals for a new form of power of attorney that would cover health care and personal welfare issues, as well as financial issues.

The independent supervision of medical and research procedures is also considered, as is the possibility of increased protection under public law for people with a mental incapacity and any others at risk. Finally, the Green Paper looks at a possible judicial and administrative framework to supervise and regulate all those arrangements.

The first set of issues examined in the Green Paper are the key principles that underpin the Law Commission's recommendations. The first of those is the need to replace the variety of different tests of mental capacity with a single, straightforward statutory definition. The proposed test of capacity would focus in each particular case on the decision that has to be taken and on the ability of the person concerned to understand the nature of the decision required, as well as its implications. That would avoid unnecessary intrusion into an individual's personal affairs, and would allow for as much involvement as possible by him in the decision-making process. It would allow a person to continue to make everyday decisions about, for example, how his finances should be organised or what presents to buy for Christmas, even if that person was deemed incapable of making a decision about whether a particular form of medical treatment was or was not appropriate.

[Mr. Hoon]

The second principle is that decisions on behalf of people under an incapacity should be made in their best interests. The decision maker should take account of a number of factors, including the ascertainable past and present wishes of the individual concerned; the views of others whom it is appropriate and practical to consult; and whether the purpose for which the decision is required can be achieved as effectively in a way that is less restrictive of the individual's freedom of action. Decisions taken on behalf of a person lacking capacity would therefore require a consideration of that person as an individual.

The Green Paper seeks views on the practical application of those criteria. For example, there may be differences of opinion between those who are to be consulted and conflicts of interest may arise. For example, two close relatives may differ about where a person should be looked after—a spouse might wish to continue to care for the patient at home, while a son or daughter might favour nursing home care.

The Law Commission also proposed that a legal framework be established to govern the many informal day-to-day decisions that are made by carers, family members or treatment providers on behalf of those under a mental incapacity. That legal framework would include a general authority for decisions to be taken on behalf of an incapacitated adult, provided those decisions are reasonable and in the person's best interests. The Government accept those proposals in principle, but remain concerned that any such system should have adequate safeguards built in to ensure that incapacitated people and their assets are protected against abuse. The Green Paper therefore seeks views on the additional safeguards that might be needed.

One area of the Law Commission report that has raised particular concern in some quarters is that involving health care decisions intended to have effect when a person loses mental capacity. Those decisions are commonly known as living wills, but a more accurate term—advance statement—is used by the Law Commission and in the Green Paper.

There is a misconception that the Law Commission's proposals would make legal provision for advance statements for the first time. That is not the case. Valid advance refusals already have full effect at common law. This means that a person who is worried about the possibility of a particular form of medical treatment already has the right to refuse that treatment by way of an advance refusal. A Jehovah's Witness, for example, can already refuse to receive a blood transfusion. That refusal is binding on the doctor and cannot be overruled.

An advance statement enables people to leave instructions about their potential medical treatment, in anticipation of a time when they are no longer capable of making decisions or of communicating them. The sorts of decisions that can be made are only those that a fully competent adult is allowed to make.

When mentally competent, each of us has the right to consent to or refuse any form of medical treatment. The instructions included in an advance statement would enable exactly the same decisions to be made, and can therefore include both consenting to treatment and refusing it. As is the position for competent adults, however, advance statements cannot force a doctor to give a particular type of treatment, or ask a doctor to do anything that is illegal. An advance statement could not, for example, ask a doctor deliberately to end life. The blunt truth is that if a doctor took such action, he or she would be exposed to a charge of murder.

An advance statement would, however, allow patients with cancer, who know that they may at some future time lose capacity to consent to treatment, or capacity to communicate that consent, to provide that consent in advance. An advance statement could even allow the patient to consent to the use of new drugs on a trial basis, if that is what the patient wanted. Equally, a terminally ill patient could request that treatment is provided to sustain life for the longest possible time, even if the resultant treatment might be thought by others to be unnecessarily burdensome.

The Government recognise that the Law Commission's proposals on advance statements raise complex issues on which many people hold strong personal, religious or ethical opinions. For that reason, the Green Paper specifically seeks views on whether legislation in this area is appropriate, and, if so, what its objectives should be.

The Law Commission was of the opinion that certain types of serious medical procedures, including sterilisation and donation of tissue or bone marrow, should receive additional independent supervision to ensure that the best interests of the incapacitated individual are properly protected. That supervision could take the form of consideration by the courts, an independent second medical opinion, or certain other types of supervisory mechanism.

The Law Commission suggested that, in certain limited circumstances, a departure from the best interests criteria, which I mentioned earlier, might be justified. One of those relates to the withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration from a patient in a persistent vegetative state. In view of the different opinions that exist about whether such patients can, in fact, be said to have best interests, the Government believe that it is important that the criteria are considered very carefully in each and every case that arises. The Green Paper seeks views on the vital ethical considerations that must be addressed in reaching decisions on the discontinuation of artificial nutrition and hydration in those cases.

The Law Commission also considered that there might be a case for departing from the best interests criteria in the area of medical procedures and research for the benefit of others. The commission recommended that it should be possible for those procedures to be authorised, in relation to a person without the capacity to consent to them, if the procedure would not cause the person significant harm and would be of significant benefit to others.

An example of that type of procedure is the removal of samples of blood or taking a mouth swab from the patient to investigate his or her genetic make-up. That could be of significant benefit to other members of the patient's family in identifying and treating inherited conditions. Procedures of this nature could also extend to non-therapeutic research into conditions from which the patient is suffering, for the benefit of others suffering from that condition. The Law Commission suggested that such research should be justifiable only where the procedures involved minimal risk for the patient.

The Green Paper seeks views on whether such research is ethical and reasonable, and on whether the conditions for research proposed in the Council of Europe convention on human rights and biomedicine provide adequate safeguards for patients unable to give consent.

The Law Commission also proposed an extension of the existing legal framework for enduring powers of attorney to include the concept of a "continuing power of attorney". At present, it is possible for people to make enduring powers of attorney to enable their property and financial affairs to be looked after if they become mentally incapable. The Law Commission's proposals would enable a person with capacity to appoint somebody to make decisions on his or her behalf if that capacity was ever lost. Under those provisions, the decisions that could be taken would cover health care and personal welfare matters in addition to financial matters.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics expressed concern that the decisions of attorneys are unlikely to be completely objective—for example, an attorney might find it difficult to decide whether to approve costly medical treatment or nursing care if he or she is either paying the bills or entitled to benefit from the patient's estate. Equally, given the changing nature of relationships, the choice of attorney might quickly become out of date and, by the time an attorney is asked to act, he or she might have lost the close rapport that once existed with the patient.

The Law Commission has attempted to take account of those concerns by proposing safeguards and by listing a number of areas where an attorney should not be able to act on behalf of a person without capacity. However, here, too, there are different views. The Green Paper therefore seeks responses on whether legislation in that area would be appropriate, as well as seeking comments on the Law Commission's detailed proposals.

The Law Commission also considered the need for new laws to ensure that a broader group of people are protected from abuse and neglect. That group would include people who may not be able to protect themselves, such as the elderly or those with serious physical illnesses, as well as those suffering from mental incapacity. In particular, it recommended that social services authorities should have a new duty to investigate cases of possible neglect or abuse, and should have short-term powers to protect people in those cases.

The Government believe that, although there may be merit in some of the Law Commission's recommendations concerning the new provisions, there may not be a pressing need for reform in the light of powers that already exist in this area. The consultation paper therefore seeks views on the need for legislation and on the practicalities of the proposals.

The Law Commission's proposals in each of these areas clearly have substantial implications for the legal and administrative systems that would be needed to manage and supervise their operation. The commission therefore recommended a new court jurisdiction that could deal with personal welfare and health care issues, as well as property and financial matters. The latter are currently dealt with by the Court of Protection and the Public Trust Office. The Law Commission's proposals would require a substantial extension of their jurisdiction, as well as offering an increased role for the civil courts.

The Government can see the advantage in having a unified jurisdiction in that area, but there would clearly be considerable implications for the court system, in terms of both resources and practicality. The consultation paper invites views on the structure proposed by the Law Commission and on the form and extent of court jurisdiction that would be appropriate in particular areas.

The Green Paper raises many issues of great sensitivity, complexity and importance. They must be addressed to ensure not only that the interests of incapacitated persons are adequately protected, but that those who must make decisions on their behalf have a clear legal framework within which to do so. The Government are determined to make progress in an area in which those who lack mental capacity, and those who care for them, are not adequately protected under the law today. The Government are equally determined that any reform should command the widest possible public support.

The Government have not yet made any decisions to legislate. Any legislation would be of wide-ranging social significance and of comparable scope and sensitivity to the Children Act 1989. I therefore hope that the Green Paper will generate a wide range of responses from all those with an interest in this area, whether professional or personal, in order to assist the Government in determining the best way forward.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I thank the Minister for his statement on what is, on any view, a very difficult subject. I shall not take too long in responding to the Minister's statement as I know that a great many of his hon. Friends want to spend much of today discussing the Government's conduct in relation to social security.

I am grateful to the Minister for making a statement in the House about a matter that is currently in the public eye, not least because of the Doctor Assisted Dying Bill, which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) will shortly seek leave to introduce. I must inform the hon. Member that I shall vote against his motion.

I take this opportunity to thank the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics and the Law Commission for their invaluable work. We may not always agree with their suggestions and proposals, but they are always considered and cogent, and they deserve more parliamentary time. Indeed, the Law Commission's work receives precious little acknowledgment in the House. I trust that, to some extent, the Minister and I have redressed that.

I welcome the Government's announcement of a Green Paper on the Law Commission's draft Bill on mental incapacity. I hope that the consultation will be wide ranging and thorough, as there is a need for clarity and certainty in this aspect of the law, where little exists.

Is the Minister aware that English law appears to possess no procedures whereby a third party or a court can take a medical decision on behalf of an adult patient without capacity to take that decision? Is he also aware of the concern that public law provides no acceptable power to protect incapacitated or vulnerable people from abuse and neglect? Does he share my concern about clause 11 of the draft Bill, which would, if enacted, give scope to permit medical experiments on incapacitated patients without consent? I heard what he said about the limited nature of the proposal, but will he take on board the concerns that I and many other members of the public have about it?

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

I welcome the Government's firm stance against euthanasia. Will the Minister examine with the greatest possible care any proposals, from wherever they come, to legalise euthanasia, however clinically described, and to introduce so-called living wills? Disposing of the inconvenient, either by commission or omission, may be the next step.

The Minister spoke of the need for a more informal framework for making day-to-day decisions on behalf of an incapacitated person. Although I understand what he means, we should not lightly ignore the need for formality when the care of the vulnerable is in issue. I accept the Minister's analysis of the current law on incapacity, but he should tread very carefully down the path of rewriting the law without the fullest possible consideration of the legal, moral and ethical issues that are revealed by the Green Paper and the Law Commission report on mental incapacity.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. and learned Member's support. I agree that, after the Law Commission published its report in 1995, having considered the matter carefully over a long period, it was right that the Government should take the matter forward as urgently as possible. I agree that it is crucial to have wide-ranging consultation. When he examines the Green Paper closely, he will discover that we are consulting on about 107 separate questions. This is a Green Paper of the deepest green, and we are determined to secure widespread support for the proposals.

If I understood the hon. and learned Member correctly, he agrees with me in relation to the present inadequacy of existing law, but I was slightly confused by his comments that appeared to link euthanasia and what I prefer to call advance statements. I carefully distinguished between the two. The Government have no time for euthanasia. As I have said, they remain firmly opposed to any idea that euthanasia might be legalised. However, that is not to say that there may not be a role for advance statements that indicate the approach that people who are at present mentally competent may wish to take if they lose mental capacity. To some extent, such advance statements are already recognised in our law. It is important that we have a comprehensive approach to the matter and that we develop a framework in which these decisions can be taken properly.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): May I congratulate the Minister on his statement, which is welcome? I congratulate the Government on taking the Law Commission's work forward, but, to prevent any confusion outside the House, will he make it absolutely clear that the proposals have no connection with either euthanasia or so-called doctor-assisted suicide?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. I repeat that the Government are firmly opposed to euthanasia, which is a deliberate action to end life. Anyone with the ability to make a decision is legally entitled to consent to or to refuse medical treatment. An advance statement is a way for a person simply to plan ahead for a time when he may no longer be able to make or to convey his decision. That distinction lies at the heart of my statement and of the Green Paper, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point again.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): We welcome the Government's open-minded approach to a difficult question. We realise that this part of the law is fraught with conflicts of interest. What is essential is independent advice for donors of extended powers of attorney, and for anyone considering making a so-called living will. Moreover, any witnesses to such documents must have proper independent medical qualifications. I hope that the Government will bear in mind the essential nature of those points before the matter proceeds further.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. I mentioned the importance of seeking to resolve potential conflicts of interest, and the need for greater safeguards, particularly in regard to the securing of independent advice and support for carers who must sometimes make very difficult decisions.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As my hon. Friend is flanked by both Scottish and English Health Ministers, may I ask whether the Government will revisit the possibility of tabling amendments to the Human Tissue Act 1961 to allow a hospital to take the organs of those in whom clinical death has been established by at least two surgeons—neither of whom will be the beneficiary as a renal transplant surgeon—to increase the number of available tissues? That was discussed in detail in a debate that I initiated on Friday 3 March 1979, and has also been discussed in ten-minute Bills. I think that the proposal is well known to Health Ministers, and it would seem to provide an opportunity for legislation.

Mr. Hoon: As ever, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his thoughtful contribution. I must tell him, however, that his proposal is well beyond the scope of the Green Paper, and is not the responsibility of my Department.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): The Minister has maintained that the Government are opposed to euthanasia, yet they have not abandoned those sections of the Law Commission's draft Bill that would enshrine deliberate killing by omission. I refer to the withholding of hydration and nutrition. Is not that euthanasia by the back door?

Mr. Hoon: No. It has nothing to do with euthanasia. Under the present law, medical treatment may be withdrawn if it is judged to be in the patient's best interest not to continue it.

Mrs. Winterton: What constitutes medical treatment?

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Lady will allow me to explain, I will draw an important distinction.

Decisions concerning the withdrawal of artificial feeding from people in a permanent vegetative state must be referred to a court. The Green Paper seeks views on whether decisions on the withdrawal of artificial feeding of patients should always be made by the courts, whether

a person with the new power of attorney to make treatment decisions can decide or whether there should be a "second opinion" procedure.

It is important to recognise that euthanasia is a deliberate act to end life. The intentional termination of life should not be confused with the withdrawal of treatment when it no longer has any beneficial effect, even though that may mean that patients die of their illnesses. Care to keep a patient comfortable should, of course, always be given.

The courts have held that when nutrition and hydration are provided artificially, they are being used to overcome a failure of bodily functions such as the ability to swallow. Just as dialysis to overcome kidney failure is medical treatment, so are artificial nutrition and hydration, which are used to overcome failure of some part of the digestive system.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is it not an amazing, breathtaking coincidence that the Government have managed to make a 20-minute statement just before my ten-minute Bill? May I reassure my hon. Friend that my Bill is not about euthanasia, and does not advocate euthanasia? I do not think that there was any need to make the statement today.

When does my hon. Friend intend these proposals to become legislation? Who will speak on behalf of terminally ill patients, and will there be any legislation to give those patients a choice?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is a distinguished former Whip, and has written about these matters. He understands how they work rather better than I do. I cannot give him any idea of a likely date for legislation, not least because we have embarked on an extensive programme of consultation, and we need to see the results before we can decide whether legislation is necessary.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): A few years ago in the House, I successfully sponsored a change in the criminal procedure affecting those who are mentally disordered and who come before the courts. I welcome the Minister's statement about the need to extend that arrangement to deal with people with mental incapacity. Does he agree that it would be a tragedy if the reporting of his statement led to its being seen purely in terms of a statement about euthanasia?

Day after day, tens of thousands of people in this country—some voluntarily and some professionally—care for those with mental incapacity. The Minister is ensuring a proper code of practice, proper guidelines and a proper framework within which decisions about those people can be properly taken. Can he assure the House that if, as a result of his consultation, a change in the law is seen to be necessary, he will speedily introduce the necessary legislation?

Mr. Hoon: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support and I pay tribute to his work in this area. I have taken great pains to distinguish the problems of mental incapacity from the issue of euthanasia and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his forceful observation. I hope that the result of the consultation will allow us to clarify the law in this area. Clearly, we must await responses to the wide variety of questions in the Green Paper.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): The Minister's statement is welcome and covers a considerable number of fields. I suspect that Law Commission reports and other evidence that will result from the consultation will spawn not one Bill but a number of them to deal with separate areas. If that occurs and such legislation is needed, for example, for the protection of carers and people with mental incapacity problems, if I may put it that way, does he agree that such Bills ought to be dealt with by way of a Special Standing Committee whose examination would precede debate in the House?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestions, but, having said it is important to await the results of the consultation before deciding whether a single Bill is necessary, I am in no better position to suggest that a number of Bills might be necessary. My hon. Friend's final observation shows the importance of ensuring that whatever the Government's proposals, they have the widespread support of the House and the wider population. This is a hugely delicate and sensitive area and we shall move forward only when we feel that there is widespread confidence in our decisions.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As a Member who is totally opposed to euthanasia in any situation, I am grateful to the Minister for his considered and detailed statement and for saying that the Government are totally opposed to euthanasia in any situation. However, he was less than frank about living wills or advance statements. Does he not accept that there are problems in this area, particularly when life-saving treatments may be developed after a person has made such an advance statement? He needs to look at that area with particular care, and so does the House.

Mr. Hoon: There is no need to repeat my and the Government's opposition to euthanasia. I share the hon. Gentleman's views. I recognise, and said as much in the statement, that there are difficulties about advance statements. That is why there is to be such extensive consultation. I specifically made the point about changes in medical technology. After all, such changes are responsible for many of these problems arising. Therefore, it is important to take account of the hon. Gentleman's point as we consult on these proposals.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome the Minister's statement, because the present law leaves many people wide open to exploitation and abuse. I hope that the steps that he has outlined will address that.

I should like to press the Minister on two issues. First, directly because of Government community care policy, a significant number of vulnerable people who live in the community may previously have been in various kinds of institutional care. Has the Minister, in conjunction with his colleagues in the Department of Health, looked at the possibility of updating the guardianship regulations, which date back to, I think, 1959, to bring them into line with the current situation? Secondly, bearing in mind the fact that, through the privatisation of community care, more and more vulnerable people are in the care of private

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

businesses, has he had the opportunity to look at supervising the financial circumstances of people who are in private care homes? I cast no aspersions on the many private care homes that offer very good care, but sometimes things have gone badly wrong.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his considered observations. Guardianship regulations are not the direct responsibility of my Department, but my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who is responsible for such matters, will have heard his comments, and I am sure that he will give them appropriate and careful consideration.

I realise that there are concerns about the circumstances in community homes, which must be investigated from time to time. The Green Paper contains a proposal to give social services enhanced powers to investigate the circumstances in which people, especially the elderly, are kept. I should be grateful if, in due course, my hon. Friend would write to the Department expressing his concerns in greater detail, so that his views can inform our decision making in this area.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his considered exposition of this matter and for his consultation document. The gratitude that I felt when he announced unequivocal opposition to euthanasia was somewhat attenuated when he announced an exploration of living wills and the extension of enduring power of attorney to cover health decisions. Those two measures added together make me uneasy.

The Minister made a comparison between people who are of sound mind, who make a decision whether they will accept medical treatment, and people who are not of sound mind and have made that decision in advance. There is a huge difference. People who decide to consent to or refuse treatment have a specific medical problem of which they are fully aware, and the specific medical treatment and possible outcomes have been explained to them—it is a very specific decision—whereas a living will, by definition, is vastly more general and cannot cover that.

What would happen if two people were in hospital beds side by side, one of whom had made a living will and one of whom had not? A different law would apply to each of them.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the right hon. Member's support for the considered view that I set out. The nature of the problems makes it necessary to examine whether there is an argument for legislation on advance statements or for reforming existing powers of attorney. Examining the problem in a considered way allows us to discuss possible legislative solutions. I take on board her point about comparing specific indications with the more general instructions that may be contained in an advance statement. It is important for treatment to reflect the needs and concerns of the individual.

The right hon. Lady's example of two patients side by side in a hospital ward does not necessarily cause me any difficulty. It is right for the doctors or authorities to take account of the specific indications of one patient, whereas the general intentions of the other patient are a matter of interpretation. That causes no difficulty, because a different approach can be taken according to an individual's particular circumstances. What runs through the Green Paper above all else is our absolute commitment to seeking to give effect to the intentions of an individual. I am sure that the right hon. Member and I agree on that.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I welcome my hon. Friend's comments. The Court of Protection has been doing a very good job with personal injury and accident victims, and I am pleased that we are considering extending its role. Equally, however, it does not come cheap, and there have been arguments in personal injury claims about who is responsible for Court of Protection costs. If there is to be a review, and if it is to go wider and potentially increase legal costs, will he assure the House that the costs of pursuing civil justice will be taken into account in the review, and, specifically, that costs will not be passed on to accident victims?

Mr. Hoon: I am aware of the concern about costs. Anxiety about extending the court's jurisdiction to cover issues of personal welfare, health, property and finance is addressed in the Green Paper. It is important that sufficient resources are available to ensure that decisions can be made in those more sensitive areas, and we are consulting on the matter. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's observations. I think that it is important, however, that we try to establish a single court jurisdiction, not only to cover questions of property and finance but to deal with the wider range of issues affecting particularly the elderly.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Minister will have noticed the non-partisan way in which Conservative Members have responded to his suggestions on greater protection for people who suffer mental incapacitation. Is he willing to consult and make representations to his colleagues in the Department of Health, so that a similar non-partisan approach is taken to my own private Member's Bill, which will be debated on Friday morning? I hope that my Bill receives a Second Reading—although that seems unlikely—as it proposes providing greater protection for people who suffer acute episodes of mental illness.

Mr. Hoon: Above all else, this is not a party political issue, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's observations on that matter. As the Under-Secretary of State for Health is in the Chamber, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's words will be taken into account.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): You, Madam Speaker, know that, a few years ago, I introduced the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill. There was much opposition to it not only outside but inside the House. The House is a conservative body, and it either does not accept changes in the law or takes a long time to make such changes. That has been the House's history. Similarly, people are not yet prepared to accept that individuals require freedom. Does my hon. Friend accept that—although we talk about many types of freedom in the House, and our new Government are prepared to give more freedom to the individual—voluntary euthanasia is the only freedom

that is not available to any individual? However, the Green Paper is a step forward, and I fully support it. I welcome the initiative, and I hope that the House will accept it.

Mr. Hoon: I have made it clear that the Government are prepared to consult on almost every question in the Green Paper, save for the one of euthanasia.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): Will the Minister take into account during the consultation period a situation in my constituency in which a family's application for British citizenship was successful, except for one member of the family? Under current rules, that family member was deemed not to be able to understand the British constitution, and was therefore not able to qualify as a British citizen. That is a monstrous situation, and it should be corrected through legislation which the Green Paper will make possible. Will he examine the matter?

Mr. Hoon: I have not heard of that situation, although I shall certainly examine it. If the hon. Gentleman will write to me or to a colleague in the Home Office, I am sure that, between us, we will be able to deal with that important matter.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement, which I very much welcome. As a nurse of some 25 years' standing, I believe that the medical profession will be very pleased with some of the Green Paper's proposals. We often get caught up in discussions about quality of life and assisting people to die, but we often forget—among all the legal talk—the issue of the quality of death.

I hope that my hon. Friend receives in the consultations many responses from people who believe that we should not only think about the subject in legal terms but ensure that people are able to die in the way that they wish and do not have to be assisted by medical people. I know that the public will be pleased to have the issue cleared up.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her observations. I repeat the point I made a few moments ago. The important principle running through the Green Paper is that we should seek above all else to give effect to the intentions of individuals. Their intentions in relation to how they may choose to die are as important as how they may choose to live their lives.

BILL PRESENTED

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Secretary Prescott, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Secretary Margaret Beckett, Dr. John Cunningham, Mr. Secretary Smith, Mr. Richard Caborn and Angela Eagle, presented a Bill to make provision for regional development agencies in England; to make provision about the Development Commission and the Urban Regeneration Agency; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 100].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Council Tax Benefit

That the Council Tax Benefit (General) (Amendment) Regulations 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 1841) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

Question agreed to.

Doctor Assisted Dying

4.14 pm

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable a person who is suffering distress as a result of his terminal illness or incurable physical condition to obtain assistance from a doctor to end his life; and for connected purposes.

It is a rare occasion when the House debates death. I have been here for almost 30 years, and I can remember only two or three previous occasions. At any time, there are 300,000 terminally ill people in this country and there are fewer than 7,000 hospice beds. To give some idea of the size of the problem, 300,000 is roughly the population of Nottingham or Newcastle. It is important that on United Nations Human Rights Day, we take some time to debate the matter.

Those 300,000 people cannot lobby Parliament and they cannot come to our advice bureaux. They will not have a vote in the next election and there is no pressure group. Death will happen to all of us, but we shall not be here to tell others what it is like. It is always left to us to surmise how best we can help the terminally ill, and I am glad that we shall try to do that today.

It is significant that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department made a statement about a Green Paper today, but nothing he said covered my Bill. He made it clear that the Government were against euthanasia. My Bill, however, is not—I repeat not—concerned with euthanasia. The international definition of euthanasia is mercy killing. Under my Bill, nobody will kill anybody. It is important to recognise that distinction. Under my Bill, nobody will take a person's life.

Why am I introducing the Bill at this time? The House will remember that on 28 October, less than six weeks ago, a very brave woman called Annie Lindsell came to the High Court. She was suffering from motor neurone disease and she said that her wish was to live until Christmas. In the event that she could not help herself and because she was terrified of choking to death when there was nobody with her, she asked for her doctor to be given permission from the High Court to administer drugs, even though they would shorten her life.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): A very brave woman.

Mr. Ashton: She was a very brave woman, as my hon. Friend says. She would have been sitting here today if, unfortunately, she had not died two weeks ago.

The Attorney-General was astonished by the case, and he sent his official solicitor to the High Court to say that he could not understand why a patient should have to go to the court to ask for the necessary treatment. The cost of the case, I might add, was £30,000. Annie Lindsell made history. She was a wonderful woman of 47 who had originally expected to live for only three years after contracting motor neurone disease, but who lived for five years. She was determined to try to change history. She may well have done so, because the statement by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department may have opened debate on the subject for the first time.

My other reason for introducing the Bill—I do not want to get personal about this, because every family has been through this sort of thing—is that I saw my mother dying over seven years. She had Parkinson's disease. In the last year of her life, she could hardly move. She could not turn over in bed, she could not talk or walk and she could barely eat. She was virtually living the life of a vegetable. I can remember her saying to me, "I'll be glad when my time comes." She said it not once, but quite a few times. My father nursed her as she withered away to four stone. He died first from a heart attack caused by the stress. She then stopped eating and followed him two months later. I decided then that I did not want to go in such circumstances. I have waited a long time to bring the Bill to the House. People should have the right at the end to say, "I want to depart. I've had enough."

The current situation is a doctor's dilemma. Drugs that alleviate pain, such as diamorphine in the case of Annie Lindsell, also shorten life. As the illness gets worse and creates more pain, more drugs have to be administered and the doses come closer to terminating life. Every doctor knows about that double effect.

There is a huge void in the law. When does it become legal to give more drugs to alleviate pain, even though that terminates life? Some doctors will assist patients who say that they want to die with dignity, but there is no law that says that they can. The patient has no legal right to choose and the doctor has no legal right to administer more drugs. Some doctors refuse for ethical or religious reasons. Some will give only enough drugs to alleviate pain, not enough to hasten death. One doctor in the north-east has admitted that he has shortened life, as have others elsewhere. He is being investigated by the Crown Prosecution Service. One of the reasons why Annie Lindsell went to court was so that her doctor would be covered.

The religious and ethical issues are very difficult. The British Medical Association decided, without balloting its members, that it did not want a change in the law for the time being. As it stands, the law can lead to unofficial euthanasia, but the patient has no choice—no chance of being given dignity to shorten their life by four or five weeks.

There is obviously a religious aspect to the issue. I have searched through the religious policies on the problem. The Catholic Church—this feeling was particularly strong across America—said:

"It is not euthanasia to give a dying person sedatives and analgesics for the alleviation of pain, even though the drugs may deprive the patient of reason or shorten his life."

A famous House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics came out against euthanasia a couple of years ago. However, it said that it

"would have a generally permissive approach to the double effect of relieving pain and shortening life."

A social survey in 1996 showed that 82 per cent. of the population supported the measures in the Bill.

Obviously, there must be safeguards against abuse. Two doctors—a general practitioner and a specialist consultant on the illness—would have to sign a permission form. The patient would also have to be diagnosed terminally ill—that would not be available on request. The doctor could refuse, but would have to pass the patient on to another doctor. Every death under the system would be reported to the coroner's office for

checking and investigation. A code of practice would be laid down by the Department of Health, to ensure that the issues were dealt with in an ethical manner. There would be a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment for abusing the system.

The Bill has been tested by some of the leading legal and medical professionals in the country. It would give absolute safeguards to any patient. A patient could cancel their request at any time.

I understand the religious objections. There are bound to be people of deep faith who believe that life should take its course. I respect their faith, but they do not have the right to take away the freedom of someone who does not share that faith. There are many people of different faiths with different beliefs. We are talking about a voluntary act. The Bill would give the right to a voluntary, merciful shortening of life, giving dignity to an inevitable death. I hope that the House will show mercy and approve it.

4.24 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I trust that the House will not feel that there is a lack of compassion on any side of the argument about such a dreadful and painful subject. Many of us have had experiences similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), either directly in our own families or on the periphery of decisions to turn off life-sustaining machines. Therefore, no one should be seen as lacking compassion.

I find it strange that, having explained the present position in law, my hon. Friend suggested that legislation was required. Even in the case that he cited, the House of Lords has made the position quite clear. If a doctor administers medicine to alleviate pain and suffering and that results in the shortening of a person's life—although that does not necessarily happen—it is not euthanasia or murder. Much depends on the intent of the person administering the medicine.

If one considers the argument from a religious point of view, different people will have different attitudes. I understand that a practising Christian will not convince an agnostic or an atheist, but what is the role of the state? How do we govern ourselves and our society?

We have already outlawed capital punishment and said that it is wrong. It is now being proposed that the state should regulate a death industry in another way by passing such legislation. I immediately concede that the motive is entirely different, but we would be legislating on how people should die, and that is a dangerous thing to do. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Friends around me say that we have a right to die, but I am not sure whether I accept that argument, because rights normally assume duties. What is the duty incumbent on the right to die?

I accept that we shall all face death at one time or another, but have we the right to ask other people to help us die? Have people a duty to help others to die? If there is no such duty—and no one would argue that there is—has an individual the right to say, "Although I do not have a duty to do so, I volunteer to help you to die"? What is the position of a doctor—or anyone else such as an uncle, an aunt or a cousin—volunteering to help someone to die? That right would not relate to a person's status—it would be inherent.

It is significant that the British Medical Association and all the medical societies say that it would be quite wrong for a doctor to seek to assist a person to die. I believe that they have taken the right attitude. However, there are other arguments. Such debates usually mention the Dutch experiment, which is often portrayed as humane, interesting and special—something that could be adopted if we were properly liberal. Yet in 1990, when the Dutch Attorney-General had an inquiry, he found that of the 3,300 registered deaths by euthanasia, more than 1,000—nearly a third—had not been requested by the patient.

That is the real danger that we enter when people take upon themselves the right to decide for others whether they will live or die. There is a slippery slope and sadly, it concerns not only people who are terminally ill but people who are mentally and physically disabled, and even old people. It also concerns questions such as: who will benefit from auntie's will? Those are the real dangers in such legislation.

Finally, I think that my hon. Friend has missed the developments in palliative care that have taken place. Nowadays there is no need for anybody to die in agony. Developments in medical care have shown that to be the case. The proportion of 5 per cent. has been referred to. That 5 per cent., too, need not die in pain. The evidence is there.

When we listen to my hon. Friend's case, we must put aside our religious and other standpoints and ask ourselves whether we really want the state to decide who will live and who will die—a death industry to decide. Do we want to start on the slippery slope that makes the right to live dependent on the often selfish ideas and indulgences of other individuals? Do we really think it better for people to be put in a position in which they may be under pressure to want to die?

I do not think that we want that sort of society. It is a denial of our human dignity and our ability to face problems and overcome them rather than taking what some would regard as a coward's way out and saying, "Let's put an end to it all." Instead, let us look at ways of ending people's fear.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 89, Noes 234.

Division No. 111] **[4.32 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burden, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Colvin, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Drown, Ms Julia
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Heppell, John
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Illsley, Eric
Jenkins, Brian

Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kingham, Ms Tess
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAllion, John
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonnell, John
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Plaskitt, James
Powell, Sir Raymond
Rammell, Bill
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Ashton and
Dr. Jenny Tonge.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Boateng, Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Crausby, David
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dawson, Hilton
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Drew, David
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Goggins, Paul
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hepburn, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickles, Eric
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trend, Michael
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Miss Ann Widdecombe and
Mr. Jim Dobbin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Points of Order

4.43 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance and assistance. Last night in the Aye Lobby the roof began to leak. It leaked through the electric lighting apparatus, thus causing the common risk found in industrial premises where electricity is mixed with water: the risk of fire. Anyone who knows anything about industrial safety knows how dangerous that is.

I have experienced that in a building, so I know what the smell, the flash and the fear are like; the incident has lived with me ever since it occurred 20 years ago. Last night in the Lobby, that began to happen and we began to smell burning rubber. The doors were locked, and there was no way in which the Department of the Serjeant at Arms could conduct the necessary investigation or take the necessary steps.

Would not it be a good idea, in such instances, if the procedures of the House allowed for a short break in proceedings so that the safety, fire and other authorities could make proper investigations?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In support of the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), I should like to say that this is not the first time that that roof leak has taken place. It has taken place at least once, if not twice before. The authorities of the House should put the matter right. It is intolerable that we should be subjected to this experience.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Last night's incident involving a small flood above the ceiling of the Aye Lobby has been reported to me. I understand that, although water entered the electric light fitting, causing some smoke, fumes and shorting, there was no risk to hon. Members during the Division. The fitting was isolated and has now been repaired.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): On a separate point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On a day on which it has been made clear that the Opposition will support the Government on child benefit for lone parents, would it be appropriate for Madam Speaker and yourself to consider allocating the role of official Opposition to another party that is prepared truly to oppose the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is entirely at the Chair's discretion who is called to speak and in what order.

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the assurance that you gave the House in response to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), but are you aware—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already dealt with that point of order.

Mr. Austin: It is a separate matter. You said that the situation was safe, but were you aware that the London fire brigade was denied access to the Lobby after it had been summoned?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not aware of that detail. If that is the case, I am sure that the matter will be noted.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Further to the point of order raised by the Liberal Democrat Member, Mr. Deputy Speaker—*[Laughter.]* He is a Scottish Nationalist, I am sorry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that point of order, and there is no need to return to it.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some of us who are rather keen on International Development questions were disturbed today that there was so much noise in the last 10 minutes coming from hon. Members on the Liberal Democrat Benches. They seemed to think that they were at a Liberal Democrat tea or coffee morning. It was impossible to hear Ministers' answers or supplementary questions for 10 minutes before Prime Minister's questions. Could some attention be paid by the Chair to keeping Liberal Democrat Members quiet and sending them to their coffee mornings, if that is where they prefer to be?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that Madam Speaker made some remarks about the amount of noise in the Chamber today. I hope very much that hon. Members will heed those remarks.

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Ordered,

That the Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses; new Schedules; Clauses 1 to 3; Clauses 9 to 12; Clauses 18 and 19; Clauses 4 to 8; Schedule 1; Clause 13; Clause 77; Schedules 2 and 3; Clauses 14 and 15; Schedule 4; Clauses 16 and 17; Schedule 5; Clauses 20 to 22; Clause 35; Clause 23; Clause 59; Clauses 24 to 34; Clauses 36 and 37; Clauses 39 to 58; Clauses 60 to 69; Clause 38; Clause 73; Clauses 70 to 72; Clauses 74 to 76; Clauses 78 to 80; Schedules 6 and 7; Clause 81.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

New clause 1

CHILD BENEFIT FOR LONE PARENTS

'(1) The Secretary of State shall prescribe a special rate of child benefit for the first, elder or eldest child in a lone parent family which shall be at least 60 per cent. greater than the standard rate of child benefit for a first, elder or eldest child.

(2) In this section "lone parent" means a parent who—

(a) has no spouse or is not living with his spouse; and

(b) is not living with any other person as his spouse.'.—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.48 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in clause 70, page 46, line 35, leave out from beginning to end of line 1 on page 47.

Mr. Webb: The new clause has been tabled in my name and that of some of my hon. Friends and also in the name of Labour Members and nationalist Members, whose support we welcome. With it, we shall discuss amendment No. 1, which is also supported across the House.

I should like to take the House back to October 1992. This morning I read through a transcript of the Conservative party conference—something I often do—and I came across a speech by the former Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). It is a rather famous speech. Shortly after referring to "new age travellers" and to being "sickened" by the sight of "spongers descending like locusts", the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I've got a little list

Of benefit offenders who I'll soon be rooting out

And who never would be missed . . .

And councillors who draw the dole

To run left-wing campaigns . . .

Young Ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list . . .

And I haven't even mentioned

All those sponging socialists."

Today, in clause 70 of the Bill, the right hon. Gentleman's wishes are fulfilled.

I looked at clause 70 and asked myself what possible justification there could be for cutting benefits for working lone parents. It is important that we get our terminology right at the start of the debate: all lone parents are working lone parents, but only some of them get paid for it. This is a cut from waged lone parents—lone parents on income support do not benefit from lone-parent benefit and they often do not claim it—so clause 70 cuts benefit from working lone parents. What possible justification could there be for doing that?

We heard one justification from the Prime Minister this afternoon: "We needed the cash. The Government were committed to spending plans, so we had to abolish the benefit." Does that claim stand up to scrutiny? Clause 70 will raise £5 million for the Government next year, but I calculated this morning that the Department of Social Security can spend £5 million in 25 minutes. That is the magnitude of the cut—it is a drop in the ocean to the Department of Social Security. Ministers cannot be talking about the Department needing £5 million when it has a budget of £100,000 million, so what are they talking about?

Perhaps Ministers they are talking about the sister measure as well, which cuts benefit for lone parents who are at home bringing up their children. If so, and together with the savings derived through clause 70, the saving next year would be £60 million, a worthwhile sum. However, let us consider where else that money might come from. When the Bill was published in July, there was no mention of what was to become in Committee new clause 2—a clause that closed a national insurance loophole. When I asked the Minister in Committee how much that would raise, the answer was "£60 million." The Bill as published in July and the explanatory and financial memorandum contained no mention of that measure. Since July, the Government have found £60 million by closing a loophole, which is the same sum as they will save next year through the benefit cuts. In other words, the Government do not need the money next year, because they have already found it.

What about the year after, when the Government will be taking £140 million from some of the poorest families in the land? Perhaps they need £140 million—but hang on a minute: last week's benefit uprating statement contained a small clause which, although cunningly concealed, was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and which froze employer national insurance thresholds. I tabled a question asking what that would raise and the answer was £125 million every year. Add that to the £60 million I have just mentioned and the Government do not need to make the benefit cut in year two or year three. In other words, it is clear that, when the Government want to find money, there is money to be found.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman may have heard of the resignation this afternoon of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Chisholm), over this issue. Does he share my suspicion that there are many others in the ministerial team who share the views of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, but who have not yet found the courage to speak out?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman is quite right: we are all aware of hon. Members on both sides of the House

who are highly dissatisfied with the proposals. I hope that, today, they will have the courage of their convictions and support either new clause 1, which offers a specific way of dealing with the problem, or amendment No. 1, which would enable all hon. Members who object to this part of the Bill to express their disapproval—provided that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, give us the opportunity to divide on the amendment. I shall argue the case for new clause 1, but I quite understand that it might not offer the right formulation for certain hon. Members, so I hope that we can unite on amendment No. 1.

Clause 70 is not about raising money—the money is there to be found. Why else has it been introduced? Perhaps it is because the Government are doing good things through the new deal. In other words, it is all right to cut benefits, because they are doing something good in respect of incentives—but what are the Government doing this afternoon? Her Majesty's Government are taking cash from working lone parents—waged lone parents.

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that lone parents in work are, on average, £50 a week better off?

Mr. Webb: If the hon. Lady will bear with me, I shall demonstrate why a lone parent who is currently unwaged cannot expect to be, on average, £50 a week better off.

Is the measure a good incentive to help lone parents move off welfare into work—the Government's stated objective? What does the measure do? A new lone parent who claims one-parent benefit next year will have £5.65 a week taken from her or him. Even a lone parent with a very young child would be £5.65 worse off.

It is worse if that lone parent has a low-paid job, because he or she will be nearly £10 a week worse off next year. How is that a good incentive? It gets worse, because the measure runs counter to the spirit of the new deal. Suppose one is a lone parent on income support and one does what the Government want. One gets the letter about the new deal and, next April, goes along to one's adviser. That parent may say, "Yes, of course I'll look at a job." Suppose such a person takes a job but it does not work out. We have all had experience of that. Perhaps the job does not work out because it is available only on a short-term contract, as so many jobs are for the unemployed, or perhaps the arrangements for child care break down. What happens then? The lone parent will go back on income support but, instead of receiving the £84 a week that she got before, she will receive £78 a week. She knows that now, so why would she take a job? That proves that the measure runs counter to the idea of welfare to work.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman is making a most persuasive case. He must be embarrassed even to be associated in any shape or form with such a measure. Will he have the courage of his convictions and urge the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) to come off the Cabinet Sub-Committee and make a real gesture against the measure?

Mr. Webb: I am afraid that it is absurd of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that I am in any sense associated with the measure, given that I am one of the few hon. Members who has systematically voted against it, unlike the Conservative Members who abstained in Committee.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I should like to return to the substantive point that the hon. Gentleman was making before that trivial intervention from the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). Does he accept that, should the legislation be passed, an acute problem will arise in rural areas, often tourist areas, where work is available in the summer but not in the winter? If lone parents do not take the work available in the summer, they will be penalised, but if they then lose that work, they will receive a lower level of benefit. Is that not totally unacceptable?

Mr. Webb: The right hon. Gentleman has given a good example of the type of short-term, seasonal or contract work that, if taken by lone parents currently on benefits, will result in disincentives, should the Bill go through as it is.

We could be reassured about the incentives if we were guaranteed that the new deal will be a triumph and if hundreds of thousands of lone mothers and lone fathers who wanted to work were helped into it. My hon. Friends and I have looked at the pilot schemes on the new deal and I tabled two questions about them. First, I asked what proportion of lone parents on income support with school-age children came off benefit in a typical three-month period. The answer was just over 9 per cent. I then asked what proportion of lone parents on the new deal pilot scheme had come off income support in the first three months of its operation. The answer was just over 9 per cent.

It may be—I hope that it is—that, in the fulness of time, the measures are beneficial, but there is very little evidence so far to support that idea, and certainly not enough to publish a consultation document reporting the triumph of that scheme. It is clear that the measure has not been introduced because the Government need the money or because it offers incentives—clause 70 self-evidently fails to offer any incentives.

Perhaps we could get away with it by saying that the proposals will affect new claimants only. How does one get to be a new claimant? One gets divorced; becomes a widow; or has a baby. All of those changes in life are stressful and that is just the time when one does not want to be worrying about money. Next year, those people will get less money than they would receive this year. It is not just next year's claimants who will lose out; that is a myth. Every lone parent has suffered a real cut in benefit because the lone-parent premium and the one-parent benefit have been frozen year after year. In 1996–97, one-parent benefit was £6.30 a week. If it had been uprated in line with inflation it would now be £6.70, but it is £5.65. That is more than £1 less. Existing lone parents, and not just new claimants, are having their benefits cut.

On the "Today" programme this morning, the Secretary of State said that she did not want lone parents living in poverty on income support, but those who stay on income support will be pushed deeper into poverty.

It seems that lone parents do not need the money. Perhaps, as the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) said, working lone parents are £50 better

[Mr. Webb]

off, so what is a fiver among friends? I asked a few question about that figure of £50. It is based on a sample of 375 lone parents receiving family credit. The statisticians said that if those families were to go out of work and on to income support, on average they would be £50 a week worse off.

5 pm

Fair enough, but those lone parents are not typical lone parents. For a start, they are working. One in three of them are getting maintenance—far more than among unwaged lone parents. Furthermore, 79 per cent. have zero child care costs. How many unwaged lone parents could get their children looked after free if they took a full-time job? Many of the women in the sample have a decent hourly wage. Their average age is 35, which is much higher than the typical age of lone parents on income support. Their typical travel-to-work costs are less than £1 a week, so clearly they are not going into central London. In other words, to find out what a currently unwaged lone parent could get in work, it is no guide to look at working lone parents if they stopped working. The figures do not stack up. The margin is much tighter, and £5 or £6 a week could make the difference.

Many working lone parents are on very low incomes. I received a written answer recently that stated that 200,000 working lone parents and their children are living below the poverty line—below half the national average income. They need the money. The Government do not need the money. The money involved has been found painlessly for years ahead. The cut will hit new claimants at a difficult time, and damage incentives. This afternoon and tonight in the Lobby, there is a choice between opposing an unnecessary cut, or joining the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden in fulfilling his dreams.

Audrey Wise (Preston): May I make it clear at the outset that, procedurally, my advice to my hon. Friends who share my views is that it would be sensible this evening to vote for the deletion of clause 70, and that can be accomplished by voting for amendment No. 1? That is the clear way to express what we want to express. It has the procedural disadvantage that that vote will be separated from the debate. Nevertheless, it is by far the best way for those who think like me to proceed. I gather from the silence from the Chair that it will be possible to do that, and that we will not find, when we reach amendment No. 1, that the Chair says that there will be no vote as there has already been one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps it would be helpful to the House if the Chair expressed a willingness now to accept a vote on amendment No. 1.

Audrey Wise: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Unfortunately, this debate must act as a proxy for a debate on a raft of cuts, some of which have never come before the House. We have never had, and we shall not have an opportunity to vote on them. I very much regret that procedure, because we are dealing with a package. We are facing the abolition of all lone-parent premiums: for those who are out of work, for those who are at work and—the biggest cut of all—for those who are at work on low pay.

I do not see that as a strategy for encouraging people to go to work. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was correct when she said that those were disincentives. In a sense, the strict matter on which we are voting today is the biggest disincentive of all, because it affects only those in work. For those out of work, their child benefit is deducted pound for pound from income support. There is no point in answering our criticisms by claiming that the Government want those parents to go to work, because they will still lose £6.05.

We are then told that existing claimants will be protected: they will keep their current rates. The measure applies only to new claimants. I have news for my right hon. Friend: new claimants are people, too. Who are those new claimants likely to be? A new claimant may be an unemployed lone parent who starts a job that subsequently folds. Perhaps child care ends or a child is ill and that mother must take a break from employment to care for her child. When she re-enters the work force, she will be classified as a new claimant and will be on a lower rate.

My right hon. Friend knows that the Social Security Advisory Committee advised that the measure was a disincentive and should not be proceeded with, but the Government rejected that advice. It will be a clear disincentive to people to start risky jobs that may subsequently fold. Lone parents are particularly prone to those sorts of jobs for all sorts of reasons that I need not spell out.

If a lone parent secures a job, she takes with her her full entitlement to child benefit, which has been deducted from her income support. When it springs into life, she will receive £6.05 more than a two-parent family. That acts as an encouragement for lone parents to take a job. My right hon. Friend claims that lone parents who enter the work force will be £50 a week better off than average. I agree entirely with the analysis by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). Even if that figure is correct and lone parents are £50 a week better off, is that such an enormous sum that it should be reduced to £44?

Let us examine that £50. A progress report for the first three months has been issued. It contains a table that suggests that lone parents are better off by £50, £59, £60 or even £95 a week. That is very encouraging information. However, there is an asterisk on that table and, if one refers to the very small print at the bottom of the document, one reads "Before in-work costs". In-work costs add up to quite a lot.

I refer to an analysis conducted by One Plus, a Scottish one-parent organisation, and to an example from Clyde valley. The official table claims that a woman from that area, who has a weekly wage of £102, is £52 a week better off. However, we should consider the facts. That woman has four kids and her in-work costs reduce her gain from full-time work from £52 to £16.01 during school term time. That is because she must pay full housing and council tax costs, she has no free school meals and she must meet travel and child-care costs.

That woman might also have to spend a little more on herself—perhaps she has to go to a job interview. Perhaps she does not want to feel as though she is wearing a label saying, "I'm a poor lone parent". The One Plus analysis does not take into account any expenditure on the parent.

The cuts planned for next year would cut that lone parent's gain by up to £10.15. Even worse, during school holidays and in-service training days, when kids are off, her child care costs rocket to £42 a week. That makes her £25.99 a week worse off in work. When we look beyond the glib analysis and the £50 average, we find that sort of figure and that is not an isolated case.

To cap it all, that lady's job is not permanent. She receives no sick pay and could not pay rent if she were ill because she is not receiving housing benefit now. So she goes to work when she feels ill, which we all know is not a good idea. That is a little sketch of what lies behind those glib averages.

I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), who made the uprating statement, why child care is work when it is done by a stranger but not when it is done by the child's mother or father. Any reference to *Hansard* will show that I did not receive one syllable of an answer. It is a good question. I am a mother of two children. I remember their early years vividly and I would not have been agreeable to farming them out to a stranger. It was not my way. Some people may be able to find excellent child care and may have interesting jobs or jobs for which much has been invested in training. Even if they have a small child, it makes sense for them to go to work. I do not criticise that at all, but I do criticise the attitude that all parents of small children should be willing to work, leaving their children with someone else while they clean offices or fill shelves.

We are told that 50,000 young people will be trained in child care. I have asked a question about their training. There will be different routes. Some people may train through full-time education and have rather more training, but others will train one day a week for "up to" six months. I do not know what "up to" means—how long is a piece of string?—but I do know that that does not guarantee that a young person, who is probably reluctant anyway and does not necessarily have a great affinity with children, will be a good child carer. Why should a mother be willing to leave her children with a half-trained, reluctant young person? The arguments about child care training are not relevant and do not stand up.

It sounds so impressive—the child care disregard in family credit is being increased from £60 to £100. What does that mean? It means that a parent has to be able to spend £100 on child care. Can a woman with a wage of £100 or £110 spend £100 on child care so that it will be disregarded from her family credit? There is not much point anyway because she probably receives full family credit. The disregard increase does not mean a thing to her. I believe that it will benefit about three families per constituency. It is certainly a small number. I welcome such an increase; I am all for it. I am all for any advance, however tiny, but it should not be an excuse for cutting benefit and for not giving people a path out of poverty.

Lone parenthood results mostly from marriage breakdowns. Lone parents are not mostly young, reckless and feckless, but suppose that a mother is young, reckless and feckless: is she going to be a better mother if we make her poorer?

I was contacted by a foster mother who deals with young pregnant teenage girls and young mothers. Her task is to try to help them to bond with the baby and to found a family. The girl may be an emotionally damaged person who has not been accustomed to love, or she may fall pregnant after being deceived into thinking that she had found love. She can find it with her baby only if she can spend time with that baby. Who are we to say, "Go to work," or, "That is the only way in which a parent should be valued"?

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I realise the enormous pressures on single parents. One in particular in my constituency came to me. She was a woman of the sort that my hon. Friend is talking about. She was under 18 and had had a baby. She wanted to go to technical college because she wanted to train and then to get a job and provide a decent standard of living for her child. Social security and education rules do not allow a 17-year-old mother to receive child care, so she was prevented from going to the college. Should we not consider the needs of lone parents who want to work by providing those child care opportunities, rather than saying to lone parents, "You have to spend your time on benefit for years to come"?

5.15 pm

Audrey Wise: Of course we should provide such opportunities. Is that an alternative to providing decent benefit? Actually, we do not have decent benefit. People keep talking about this as though we are asking for an increase. We have not asked for an extra penny. All we have said is, "Please, no Tory cuts." That is a modest demand.

Of course we should allow for educational opportunity and of course parents should be able to take different options according to their circumstances, the number of children they have and the age and health of their children, but not one of them should be made poorer by the loss of existing lone-parent benefit.

What about those who are lone parents because they have escaped from a violent marriage? Many children have been traumatised. Are we going to make special exemptions for them? No, and I should not like it if we did, because I do not believe in singling them out and stigmatising them. I believe in supplying sufficient money. The current benefit is not really sufficient to live on. That is another issue. I ask for a full evaluation of the impact of the cuts on the living standards of the children concerned.

A Christian religious foundation is doing a study of the amount of money that is needed to provide a reasonable standard of living for lone parents. It expects to report in April and has the services of eminent people and nutritionists. It will consider how much it costs to have a proper diet if a parent is pregnant or cares for a child, and how much it costs to feed the child. Why do we not wait until we find out whether there is surplus money in the pockets of lone parents? We are taking fat off them without finding out whether they are already anorexic, so there is no excuse for removing a penny from any lone-parent's benefit. There is no excuse for freezing the lone-parent uprating, never mind removing it.

I am pleased to say that lone parents have not been taken in by the thought that they are going to be all right. They have shown concern for new lone parents—the woman across the road or a sister who might be a lone parent next year after the cut. I have wondered whether I should put a notice in my local paper saying, "If you think that your husband is going to run off with someone across the road, make sure he does it before next June."

[Audrey Wise]

Many arguments can be made against the cuts. I have only scratched the surface and I am starting to think that I might be wearing out my welcome in the House because I know that many of my hon. Friends would like to make points. We are speaking for children who are already poor. This society already marginalises children. The Government's proposal not only lacks compassion but is dangerous because, of the children who will get ground down, some will go under, but some will take revenge.

If we want social inclusion—a term that will not be familiar to those about whom we are talking—we should make it possible for children to do what my grandchildren can do: go swimming, watch football and have piano lessons. Do hon. Members realise that it costs £20 for a child to enter for the first piano exam? I know, because my grandsons have just done it. It cost 40 quid for two boys. My little granddaughter performed in a concert. There was the cost of the dress and the dancing lessons, and then it cost the doting parents and grandparents 24 quid to go and watch the concert.

Who can afford to do those things on benefit or low pay with only one income? I challenged my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who made the uprating statement, to tell me whether, when the Government said that all children should be supported by their working parents, that was what he intended. As it stands, "work" must mean full-time work, because there is no way in which one part-time wage will support a family. I was given not a syllable of clarification.

I think we are entitled to say that these measures are not in accord with Labour values. They are not economically necessary, they will not lead to good economic results and they are disastrous as instruments of social policy. I believe that we should vote for the deletion of clause 70.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): This is a debate that the Government would clearly prefer not to have. I know that the Government Whips have been extremely busy in the past few days; I only hope that it is not because of their activities that the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) has had to come into the Chamber on crutches this afternoon. The Government would prefer not to have the debate because it shows up what they really are: guilty of the utmost hypocrisy. That is not a word that I use lightly, but it is the only word that can be used to describe the Labour party's action, and the Government's opposition to the new clause and amendment No. 1.

For reasons that I shall explain later, the official Opposition do not support the new clause, but it is worth setting out the history of the proposal in order to put the debate in its proper context and to show the utter hypocrisy of the Government's position. As Secretary of State for Social Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) set about removing positive discrimination in favour of lone parents because the benefit system treated them more favourably than married couples with children. Lone parents are currently eligible for extra child benefit and extra help—the lone-parent premium, which will be abolished on 6 April next year—through income support, the jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit, to which two-parent families are not entitled. We are discussing tonight whether to cut child benefit for new claimants.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The hon. Gentleman spoke of lone parents' being treated more favourably than two-parent households. Does he or does he not accept that lone parents incur more costs than two-parent households? The premium that he mentioned is not to give them an advantage, but simply to raise them to the same economic level as two-parent households.

Mr. Burns: I believe that problems in the benefit system should be dealt with by means of income-related benefits rather than a blanket benefit that is provided regardless of the financial position of the group concerned.

We do not support the new clause because we have long been in favour of redressing the balance so that the benefit system does not discriminate against two-parent families. I doubt whether Ministers agree with the measure in principle, and—as we have observed in recent hours—they certainly cannot say that it commands the full support of their parliamentary colleagues.

However, I have considerable respect—although I do not agree with their view—for the Labour Back Benchers who have had the courage, consistency and decency to stick by their principles both in opposition and, now, in government. I pay sincere tribute to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Chisholm), to the parliamentary private secretaries who have put their consciences before their careers and taken the only honourable course, and to all the other Labour Members who feel that it would not be consistent with their position to support their party tonight.

It is notable that the Secretary of State, for so long the self-appointed champion of single mothers, had, before taking office, established a record of supporting increases in benefits for lone parents. I remind hon. Members that, in 1990, she co-wrote a paper for the Institute of Public Policy Research, entitled "The Family Way", in which she urged:

"A more efficient means for raising the living standards of parents and children on welfare is a substantial increase in the lone parents' premium".

That is exactly the opposite of what she now proposes. It is interesting to note that the first thing that the author of those words proposes when in office is to cut the very benefit that she believes should be increased to improve the quality of life for lone-parent families.

The right hon. Lady's attachment to her views had not receded six years later, when she was confronted with plans to equalise lone-parent and two-parent benefits. That simple and overdue change to the system was fiercely attacked by her when it was proposed by her predecessor. On 28 November last year, she told the House in unequivocal terms that the measure would impoverish lone parents. She said:

"The Secretary of State"—

my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden—

"says that he is cutting benefits to lone mothers because they are at an advantage compared with married couples. The truth is that they are at a disadvantage. Perhaps he does not realise that when people move from being in a couple to being a lone mother, they become worse, not better, off."

Those were the words of the current Secretary of State just over 12 months ago.

The right hon. Lady told the House then that the measure that was being introduced would have a negative impact on the family. She said:

"it is not fair to the families of women who bring up children on their own. They will be worse off."

Her rhetoric against cutting child benefit was unequivocal. She also said that the proposals to cut help to lone parents would

"make hundreds of thousands of the poorest children worse off."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 501.]

The new clause, which the Secretary of State will oppose today, is designed to stop the very cuts that she said would increase poverty.

Does the Secretary of State now believe differently? Does she think that the measure is pro-family and anti-poverty, or does she, in her heart of hearts, hold the view that she took in opposition when she was seeking votes for the Labour party from as many people as possible, and said that the measure was anti-family and pro-poverty? I fear that we already know the answer, for the soundbite that the Secretary of State uses to justify the measure seems never to have wavered since 1 May. It involves repeating the commitment to keep to the last Government's tight public spending limits. That is the reason cited; but will the Secretary of State tell us unequivocally whether the policy will be reversed when the two-year commitment to prudent public spending ceases? Surely the logic of her arguments leads to the conclusion that the measure will be overturned when those two years are over. Will she give a commitment now to reverse the decision in two years' time? I am more than happy to sit down and allow her to intervene. Will the right hon. Lady intervene? I am afraid that the answer is no. She sits there like a stone. Clearly, the decision will not be reversed when the spending ceiling is reviewed in two years' time. If it is not, the right hon. Lady's repeated arguments are and were bogus.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the main reasons for the resounding defeat of the Conservatives at the polls on 1 May was the scandalous level of child poverty which was brought about by the policies of the previous Government?

5.30 pm

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman repeats the argument that was made throughout the country by the right hon. Lady before the election that a cut in lone-parent benefit would continue or increase the poverty of children and lone parents. If that is true, why has the right hon. Lady reversed her argument?

This sorry tale takes another twist that is embarrassing for the Government and a damning indictment of the Labour party which, before the general election, promised anything to anyone to win power. The Secretary of State attacked the measure when it was introduced and promised to reverse it if Labour was elected. On 22 January in an interview with Polly Toynbee of *The Independent* the right hon. Lady said categorically that she would not implement the cuts that were proposed by the Conservative Government. That interview contained a black and white, categorical commitment not to introduce those changes, but the Secretary of State has broken that commitment by asking her hon. Friends to vote against the new clause and amendment No. 1.

It would be wrong to single out the Secretary of State for Social Security and not mention her right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I assure the House that his hands are not altogether clean on this issue either. As Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Gentleman was just as guilty of raising the electorate's expectations. There is no point in the Prime Minister trying to justify his behaviour on the policy with speeches such as the one that he gave on Monday at Stockwell Park school, where he limply said:

"We are accused of breaking promises we never made, often by opponents who introduced the very measures they now criticise us for not reversing."

But the right hon. Gentleman did make a promise to lone parents. He went on to say:

"Do not let anyone fall for the nonsense that Labour priorities are Tory ones or that we have done just the same as them."

The Prime Minister has done the same as us over lone parents, and he cannot escape from the mess as easily as that because he made the commitment to lone parents that he would not force through the changes. When asked on "The World at One" on BBC Radio 4 in January whether he would stick to the plans to equalise benefit payments, he replied:

"No . . . we believe we can avoid that situation within the existing budgets."

I repeat that he said "within the existing budgets." The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security have both given personal pledges that the cuts would not be introduced. Both are guilty of breaking personal pledges and are condemned by that breach of faith.

Recently I read an extremely interesting article in the *Morning Star*. *[Interruption.]* I confess that it is not my usual reading, but I am glad that I read it on that occasion. The article was an extraordinarily honest and straightforward piece by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), in which she wrote about the cuts in child benefit. Apart from the hon. Lady's frank, honest comments, my notice was particularly caught by the last paragraph because it summed up the Government's hypocrisy on the issue. The hon. Lady wrote:

"People voted Labour because they believed that there were alternatives. Lone parents took heart from our stance when these matters were debated during last November's budget".

She is speaking about the proposed cuts in lone-parent benefit. She went on:

"Labour members spoke passionately against these cuts, aided by a very useful briefing issued by our shadow social security team".

I think that I am right in saying that that team included the Secretary of State, and I must assume that at that time she agreed with the briefing. According to the hon. Member for Maryhill, the briefing stated:

"Since One Parent Benefit is not taxed, it helps to bridge the gap between welfare and work. Its abolition will make working lone mothers worse off and will discourage work amongst this group. Lone Parent Premium recognises that lone parents face additional costs in bringing up their children. They do not have a partner's time or income to help with children."

That was Labour's briefing before the election, but it has all been forgotten by the Government who have done a U-turn.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I hope that in reading the left-wing press the hon. Gentleman will learn

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

something. I want no congratulations from any Tory because the Tory party spent 18 years fostering a climate of opinion that blamed lone parents for all society's ills and it created an attitude in society that greed was good. He should not say such things to me.

Mr. Burns: I appreciate the hon. Lady's comments. I was not seeking, in the nicest possible sense, to congratulate her. I simply respect the consistency, honesty and bravery of the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) in another left-wing publication, *Tribune*, last week wrote:

"When the Tories first proposed lone parent benefit cuts last year, Labour described them as 'particularly spiteful' and argued that the way to get lone mothers out of poverty and cut spending on benefits to them is not by cutting the amount on which they have to live year by year and further plunging them into poverty."

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Ms Harriet Harman): But—

Mr. Burns: I am afraid that the right hon. Lady is wrong: there is no but. The next sentence reads:

"That argument was absolutely right then and is absolutely right now."

That is the end of the quotation, and there are no buts or ifs. The hon. Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) made an extremely eloquent speech. Also writing in *Tribune*, she described the Government's U-turn in terms of

"a family whose children go shoeless while we pay for a trip to the Bahamas for a rich uncle . . . impoverishing children is no way toward a fairer Britain".

Those are the views of true Labour rather than new Labour. New Labour made trust the key issue for five weeks during the general election campaign. It spent months before the election telling every special interest group that if its members voted for Labour candidates they would reverse the Conservative Government's policies on lone parents. Many people voted for Labour candidates in good faith because they believed those comments. However, as soon as Labour came to power it U-turned and the expectations that were raised among those electors were cruelly dashed. That trust has been broken. The current rhetoric of Social Security Ministers seeks to avoid this thorny issue and to talk around it. They talk about the "new deal" for lone parents.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, I will not.

Ministers are never shy of reminding the House that that project has been awarded more than £2 million from the Treasury. However, by equalising benefits for lone-parent and two-parent families, the Treasury will save about £400 million. The Government will reject the new clause and the Secretary of State will repeat yet again her mantra that her new policy is to help lone mothers to get into work.

Mr. Cook: Will the hon. Gentleman please give way?

Mr. Burns: No, I will not.

Let us examine the reality behind the soundbite. The *Yorkshire Post* recently carried an interesting editorial on the subject. It stated:

"It was all too easy for Labour in Opposition to ridicule Tory attempts to curb benefits for single mothers . . . However, if the Labour leadership did not realise the vacuity of this argument then, it does now."

The editorial continued:

"It would, of course, be asking too much of the Social Security Secretary to present her own policies with any kind of coherence, but her insistence that there is a pent-up demand for work among single parents is not borne out by statistics. Although most single parents do admit to a desire to work, the vast majority say that they do not want to work immediately. This is reflected in the American experience, where the provision of child care has not resulted in a large number of lone parents taking jobs. Also, there appears to be no firm foundation for offering more help to single mothers than to poor married couples."

Let us consider the only real evidence so far available to see whether the Secretary of State's platitudes live up to reality. Eight weeks ago she was busy telling everyone that the results of the pilot schemes for lone parents were very promising. The soundbite was soon exposed for the sham that it was.

The right hon. Lady argued that a promising start had been made, because out of a total of 8,651 lone parents contacted by benefits agencies, 433 had found work. It is arguable that at least 50 per cent. of those 433 people would have found work regardless of whether they had been contacted. She failed to say that the figures showed that, of the 8,651 people contacted, almost 75 per cent.—about 6,500—failed to respond to the letter. Of just over 2,000 who responded, about 1,600 agreed to participate, and 433 found jobs, which is a mere 5 per cent. of the total as opposed to one in five. The right hon. Lady tried to convince the country that one in five lone parents had found work.

A month previously, on the very same day in September on which I was visiting a pilot scheme in Sheffield, the Secretary of State issued what I can only describe as a premature press release, which stated:

"Early information on the New Deal for Lone Parents has been very encouraging".

I am not sure how the right hon. Lady defines the phrase "very encouraging", or how she can reach that conclusion coherently.

During the summer, my right hon. Friends and I visited those pilot schemes—courtesy, I gratefully acknowledge, of the right hon. Lady's private office. To my amazement, in Sheffield I was given the data on performance and achievements to date. The information was broken down in great detail. Of a total target population of 2,870, 13 people in the area had found work, which shows that performance and achievement did not live up to the Secretary of State's claims about lone parents in her premature press release that morning, or to the soundbite.

I also find it extraordinary that a point will soon be reached at which we will have to sort out whether there will be compulsion, as there will be for young people and others under the welfare-to-work scheme. Will there be compulsion for lone mothers? The Secretary of State and civil servants in her Department have been in touch with officials from Wisconsin about the Wisconsin project, the success of which is based on compulsion. It would be interesting to know whether Ministers will categorically rule out compulsion. Whenever the right hon. Lady and

the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), have been asked point blank whether they will make the scheme compulsory at a later stage, they have always side-stepped the question by saying that compulsion is not an issue. That is not an answer to the straightforward question, "Will the right hon. Lady, yes or no, in the next two or three years, bring in compulsion for lone mothers"? If she wants to give us a yes or no answer to that question, I will be more than happy to give way to her. Will the right hon. Lady intervene? No, she will not. She disappoints me.

Mr. Frank Cook *rose—*

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Burns: I shall give way out of a spirit of generosity.

Mr. Cook: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene briefly. I would not question the hon. Gentleman's sincerity in the Chamber, but if he truly despises these measures, as he has said, why does he intend to vote for them?

Mr. Burns: I am awfully sorry, but the hon. Gentleman seems to be under a misunderstanding. I shall explain towards the end of my speech why he has misunderstood. *[Interruption.]* I have almost come to the end of my speech, and I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's question then.

5.45 pm

Ironically, the Government's proposal will provide a major disincentive. In recent weeks, we have seen exposed in the raw the sheer hypocrisy of a Government who were prepared, during the six months leading up to the general election, to go round the country briefing journalists that the previous Government's proposal was totally wrong and that they would not implement it. Once elected, the very same people, including the right hon. Lady and her right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, abandoned their promises, broke their faith with the people to whom they had made those promises, and in a matter of weeks reintroduced the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden.

In answer to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), we have remained consistent, which is why we shall vote against the new clause. Like those of his hon. Friends who will also not support the Government, we are being consistent. In fairness to the Liberal Democrats, they, too, in their own way, have remained consistent, because they have always opposed the policy. Some of the Secretary of State's hon. Friends have remained true to their principles and beliefs, and are not prepared, despite the arm twisting, to compromise their consciences.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, because I am about to conclude my remarks.

I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) listening to the debate. I gather that he is an expert on this subject, and that his views and comments are widely respected in the Chamber and in his party.

Long after this debate, when the arguing and the soundbites are over, unlike the Government, those hon. Members who have been consistent and remained true to their beliefs will be able to say that they at least have kept the faith.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I listened with some interest to the comments of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). It takes much more than one speech in opposition to make up for Conservative policies during 18 years in government. All we have heard from the Opposition thus far are hollow words and empty rhetoric. That should come as no surprise. However, I shall also refer in some detail to comments made by Labour Members.

I wonder whether Conservative Members will intervene during my speech or at any time during the debate to refer to their current or previous record on the issue of lone parents. Like many hon. Members, I carried out research before the debate. I had not previously read the Conservative manifestos of 1987 and 1992, or the 1997 manifesto entitled, "You can only be sure with the Conservatives". As far as I could ascertain, those documents did not refer to "lone parents" or "work" in the same sentence or in the same section. Conservative Members may be able to refer to a relevant occasion during the previous three or four general election campaigns when they identified a plan to improve the welfare and opportunities of lone parents, but the issue was not mentioned once in their manifestos.

The 1997 manifesto was entitled, "You can only be sure with the Conservatives". Lone parents have been sure for many years that with the Conservatives opportunities will be lost and futures will be frustrated. The electorate took the opportunity to remove the Conservatives from office, denying them the opportunity—which they would have taken with some enjoyment—to reduce benefit levels for lone parents.

The new Labour Government inherited the previous Administration's spending plans—which may not make all Labour Members happy—but we have absolutely disowned their strategy, moving towards job and child care opportunities.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): The hon. Gentleman said that the Government have inherited the previous Administration's spending targets; we have heard that often enough. Why is it that the Secretary of State for Scotland, at a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee that the hon. Gentleman and I attended last week, boasted of having greater expenditure to hand—the Chancellor has done the same—whereas the Secretary of State for Social Security is not prepared to move on her proposals? Why does she hold that position when more money is available?

Mr. Murphy: It would be better to ask my ministerial colleagues directly. As the hon. Gentleman said, we both attended that Scottish Grand Committee meeting, at which it was pointed out that there is a new opportunity, and that the Government are trying to redress the previous imbalance. As I said, although we have inherited the spending limits, we have disowned the strategy.

[Mr. Murphy]

The hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Scottish National party, sits on the same Benches as the Liberal Democrats, which brings me to the speech of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). It was a very thought-provoking speech, and I am sure that my ministerial colleagues and other hon. Members will have listened carefully to some of the points that he raised. Nevertheless, on the issues of opportunity and equality, it is uncomfortable for me to be lectured, patronised and condescended to by Liberal Democrats. They voted against the windfall levy, and, rather than provide financial opportunities for young and long-term unemployed people, they wanted to protect the profits of the privatised utilities. That was an absolute shame.

Other hon. Members have spoken of their own experiences, and I will attempt to do the same. Before being elected to the House, for more than two years, I was on benefit. Those two years were among the most depressing in my life. I was not seeking a benefit increase; I needed a job. Fortunately, I got that job opportunity. I went on to further education college and university, and then to beat the Conservative candidate in what had formerly been the safest Tory seat in Scotland. Is that not a great example of welfare into work as practised in Scotland?

In supporting the Government's strategy, I want to speak not only about the benefits reductions but about the overall package. We have inherited the previous Government's spending limits, but we have moved on and created a package that is based on job opportunities and child care support. The new deal on job opportunities is based on skills and motivation.

Motivation, however, is a matter not merely of the stick or of the carrot but of the work ethic—which must be imbued not only into those who are unemployed, as I was, but into the Government. The Government must hold a work ethic that entails creating job opportunities and programmes to enhance work and enrich the individual. The work ethic will be supported by opportunities for child care and the kids club network. In Scotland alone, £28 million will be spent on those opportunities.

I say again that we inherited the previous Government's spending plans. I do not take joy in voting for an income reduction for future lone parents.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Murphy: I shall not give way, because I am just concluding my speech. I am on my last sentence. I have also read what you think, and, in recent weeks, I have watched you on television. Therefore, I am well aware of your comments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat when I am on my feet. I wish to correct him by reminding him that he is addressing the Chair, even in a heated debate.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Livingstone: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Murphy: I have already said no. I am sure that you will have an opportunity to participate in the debate.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): No, he will not.

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend says, "No, he will not", but my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) has been participating in it for some weeks.

I support the Government's policy, but, unfortunately, because of our inheritance from the previous Government, there will be an income reduction for some future single parents. However, I support the overall package, which provides opportunities that, some years ago, many of my peers in my further education college and university would have welcomed.

Mr. Wigley: I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on a very thoughtful speech. I support new clause 1 and amendment No. 1. After our change of Government on 1 May, it is appalling that we are still saddled with such a measure. It was proposed by a Conservative Government, and many people thought that after the general election we would turn our backs on such policies.

The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) said that he would vote for the whole package and emphasised job opportunities. I am sure that when he was searching for work he was not doing so as a lone parent. I can tell the House that the Government's proposals will make it less likely that lone parents will search for work because if they look for work, find work and then lose it, they will be worse off. The provision will be a positive disincentive to achieving the Government's stated aim.

In an earlier intervention, I mentioned the situation in areas such as mine, where employment is highly seasonal and where it may be possible for a lone parent or others who are unemployed for a good part of the year to succeed in getting work for a few weeks or, at most, a few months in summer. Surely that is something good, if they are able to do so. Now, however, the disincentive will operate. Those people know that, when they return to the unemployment queues, in the autumn or the winter, they will be worse off. That will be the effect of the changes.

Surely the basic problem that we face in considering such a package is the Government's adherence to the Tory spending programme, but if we believe in supporting the most vulnerable people in our society—among whom I include lone parents, and particularly the children of lone parents—we must believe in our wherewithal to raise the necessary taxes.

I should have thought that it would be much more acceptable to those who elected the Government if Ministers were examining ways of raising a little more tax—by higher income tax or national insurance payments—so that we had the revenue for a decent package for the most vulnerable. I should have thought that the House's priority would be to turn our thoughts to the needs of those children. Surely any single parent who is bringing up children on benefits must be in the most difficult financial position.

The strategy is not working and it is counter-productive. In addition, we are penalising some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I feel that that

is an indicator of an approach to society. A few years ago, we had the right hon. Member for somewhere in the Thames valley—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wokingham."] Of course, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). How could I forget? The right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for Wales and we well remember when he came to Cardiff and pilloried single mums. That was an indication of his approach to life, his approach to politics and his values. God help us if a Government who kicked out that lot who misgoverned us for 18 years decide to pursue the same approach.

6 pm

This morning, sitting in the No. 44 bus on Battersea Park road, I was tapped on the shoulder by a lady sitting behind me on the top deck. She said, "You will be voting against the Government's proposals tonight, won't you, Mr. Wigley?" I hardly expected to be recognised on the bus, but I was. [HON. MEMBERS: "She works here."] The lady does not work here. What she said was revealing. She said, "I didn't walk the streets canvassing in April to have policies that will take money away from the most vulnerable people in our community imposed by a Labour Government."

I appeal to all Labour Members who have a conscience to act on it tonight and to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people are protected.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): This issue has caused considerable and understandable concern, and I know that it has not been an easy matter either for members of the Government or for Labour Back Benchers. I believe that lessons have been learnt from the way in which the problem emerged and from the way in which it has been handled. If I did not believe that, I would not be speaking as I am today.

I want to put the issue in a wider context. The cut was proposed by the previous Conservative Government to save money and in response to a moral panic attack in the Conservative party and some elements of the press about single parents. One might think that that was a bit odd as the Conservative party at that time had added to the sum total of single parents on one or two occasions. Considerable hypocrisy was involved.

It is true that the new Government face tough choices because of the situation that we have inherited, but there is a far more important issue involved. I refer to the Government's vision of rebuilding the welfare state in the context of a radically changed economy. It is a fundamental mistake to believe that the welfare state as constructed in 1945 by the then Labour Government has survived the past 18 years. It has not. The Tories ripped it apart and introduced gross inadequacies and contradictions into the system. We can either bail that system out or try to build a new welfare state which is relevant to the modern economy.

We should remember that the 1945 Labour Government, using the models proposed by Keynes and Beveridge—two Liberals—built a welfare state which assumed that there would be full employment for men and that women would stay at home for most if not all of their lives, washing up and looking after the kids. That economy has gone and I hope and believe that it has gone for good.

We have to be very conscious of the fact that we must rebuild a welfare state that is relevant for the modern economy. That means, among other things, getting people back into work; that is crucial. The employment option must be our first priority. That does not mean that there will not be problems, because moving from the position in 1945-50 or the position in 1979, when the Labour party was last in government, to where we would like to be in five or 10 years' time will not be easy.

I accept that this policy issue should not have arisen as it has, but I believe that it is important to see it in the context of the aim to create more employment opportunities and a fairer society.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, for whom I have the greatest respect. Is he aware that one reason why I cannot support the Government today is that I believe, as do a number of colleagues, that the cut is a wrong, Tory policy? I also fear that other cuts in areas such as disability allowance may be introduced. Tonight should be a warning to the Government, and particularly to the Treasury, that disability benefit should not be taxed or means-tested. Those who are disabled have enough difficulties, even those who receive the upper limit of disability allowance. I believe that, in those circumstances, the Government should take note of our concerns.

Mr. Soley: I believe that the Government have already taken note of that point and I do not think that they need messages in the Lobby tonight. I understand, however, why people feel as they do and I will address that point in due course.

Welfare to work is an idea that has universal support within the Labour party and the labour movement because it is a move back to some form of full employment, but one that recognises the importance of women to the economy. When I hear Liberal Democrats or Conservatives talk about benefit cuts, I feel that they have not addressed the real issue. The issue is not whether this cut is good, bad or indifferent, but how we get from the mess we inherited from the previous Government to where we want to be without in the process hurting people who do not deserve to be hurt. That is the difficult issue.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in the speeches that my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and I made in Committee and on Second Reading, we consistently supported welfare to work as being an excellent attempt to give opportunities to young women and others who are lone parents so that they can get back into work? That is entirely consistent with our manifesto, which was fully costed. We would have provided the money for a very similar programme. What we are debating tonight, however, is not welfare to work—on which we all agree—but benefit cuts for those who do not go back to work. On the Government's own figures, that will mean half of all lone parents.

Mr. Soley: I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). It became a wish list for more spending on everything; yet the Liberal Democrats complained about

[Mr. Soley]

the windfall tax—the biggest way in which we have raised money. Where else were we to get £3 billion? Were the Liberal Democrats going to print the money for us?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that only a tiny fraction of the windfall tax goes to lone parents and that most of the money for lone parents is coming from the lottery. By no stretch of the imagination is that a hard choice.

Mr. Soley: That is precisely the problem that the hon. Gentleman does not understand. The movement away from the disaster of the past 18 years into a new and better system requires a range of expenditure to be looked at. A figure of £5 million can be multiplied 10 times, 20 times or 30 times. It would have been more honest if the hon. Gentleman had said that in his speech and then said, "Yes, we want to raise taxes to a greater extent than the Liberal Democrats proposed at the previous election." That at least would have had the virtue of consistency and openness.

If we all accept that welfare to work is a good policy, it is important to see it in the context of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor have done in recent weeks. There have been significant moves, not least bringing forward the welfare-to-work package from October to April as a result of the recognition that there was a mismatch in the dates on which the two issues came into play. I look forward to seeing that in action.

I also recognise that there is an important additional factor. I ask my hon. Friends to listen. The Government have accepted the strength of feeling on the issue and the concerns that there could be losers. That is why they have undertaken to keep it under review. In my judgment, there will be potential losers under the current proposals. I fear that they will include those with very young children, those who take the package and then lose their job and go on to welfare and also the more difficult group—identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) in an important and effective speech—containing those who want to be full-time parents and do not want to work in the early years of their children's lives.

We know of those potential losers. However, before anyone, particularly any Opposition Member, says that the Government do not care about families, they should bear it in mind that we now have the first Government not just to set up a social exclusion unit but, more importantly—perhaps this has been undervalued so far—to set up a Cabinet Committee on the needs of the family. The needs of the family cannot be considered without taking into account the needs of children in lone-parent families and others.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): In view of my hon. Friend's assurances that the Government will keep the issue monitored and in the light of the concerns that he has expressed, may I suggest that he uses his good offices as chairman of the parliamentary Labour party to meet those on the Government Front Bench during the debate and agree on a free vote?

Mr. Soley: I have been using my good offices for some time. The idea that the only way to get out of a difficult situation is to reverse it is a fundamental mistake. That is the mistake that the Liberal Democrats are making. I had the advantage of warning about this when I was in opposition. When a difficulty emerges, it has to be addressed in a number of different ways if it is to be dealt with effectively without knock-on effects.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I am concerned about the Government keeping the matter under review. Governments keep enormous matters under review from time to time. We are concerned about the families that will be disadvantaged, as my hon. Friend has eloquently told the House. We want an undertaking that they will not be disadvantaged in cash terms.

Mr. Soley: My hon. Friend needs to listen carefully to what I am saying. I am not speaking for the Government. The entire parliamentary Labour party has seen the note that has been sent round saying that the matter will be kept under review. I am not saying anything new on that.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): My hon. Friend raises an interesting prospect. Will he have discussions with the Government? It would be nice to have an assurance that none of the cuts will be implemented pending the review and that the results of the review will be brought back to the House so that we can have a vote on the matter.

Mr. Soley: I cannot give that assurance—not least because I am not in a position to do so. However, I am not sure that what my hon. Friend suggests would be the best route, although it is an option that could be considered.

Mr. Frank Cook: What my hon. Friend has said is reassuring to an extent. I believe that a broad review of the whole benefit system is already taking place. It would be common sense to wait for the conclusions of the broad review before introducing any measures. Then we would know more about the package that we were buying.

Mr. Soley: My hon. Friend is not listening to what I am saying. A note has already been circulated to every member of the parliamentary Labour party that the issue will be kept under review. My judgment is that we can move forward because some of the initial concerns have been partly met by bringing forward the welfare-to-work packages. Other concerns still need to be addressed. As I have said, in my judgment there will be some potential losers. I call them potential losers because I am told that the measure may work better than people think. That may be true.

6.15 pm

The review is important. Conservative Members may have been used to reviews that were merely cynical, but we have a different Government now. As we examine the issue over the coming months, we must try to identify the potential losers and find out whether any of them are genuine losers after the measures come into effect in April. If they are, I hope that we shall remain true to our long-term aim of creating greater fairness and ensuring that families and children are given the necessary help to succeed. In many ways, not doing that would run counter to our family policy and our social exclusion policy.

We should all learn the importance in government—we have not been in government for 18 years—of identifying difficult policy decisions well in advance and alerting the parliamentary party and Ministers to those difficulties. That is not an easy lesson, because there are bound to be areas of difficulty when we have been in government for only a short time.

No one should doubt that the pressure brought to bear on the issue has been strongly felt and recorded. That pressure should not cloud our judgment on the long-term aims, objectives and principles that continue to determine the Government's policy. We must keep the issue in the context of the long-term aim of ensuring that the majority of lone parents have the opportunity of paid employment, to build a new welfare state based on a modern economy in which women are truly equal to men and in which parenting by men or women is seen as a vital role in creating a stable and contented society in which children are not damned by poverty. That is the Government's long-term aim. We are not interested in short-term quick fixes or ways of getting out of difficulty that will derail the project.

I believe that the Government have learnt from recent problems and are prepared to review the needs of parents who fall through the net of welfare to work. They should be supported in the Lobby tonight. My hon. Friends should not lose sight of the Government's long-term aims. They should not make the mistake of casting doubt on the Government's intentions and turning an immediate issue into a longer-term problem. We are at the beginning of a project that will be radical and long remembered—a genuine attempt to rebuild a new welfare state fit for an economy that recognises the importance of women. That has always been part of the socialist vision. My message to Labour Members is, "Do not forget that. Do not lose sight of the long-term aim. Keep your heads and be sensible tonight and on every other occasion."

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) speaks with great authority and meets more important people than I am used to meeting. Having heard the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy), I wonder whether it is wise for anyone to listen to me; the hon. Gentleman will obviously go very far, very quickly, whereas I have been here for 33 years and have got nowhere.

The problem is not so complex as some hon. Members think. If the Labour party does not support the new clause, the standing of Parliament and democracy will go down even further. I was proud to come here 33 years ago. Sadly, the standing of Parliament has gone down a great deal since then. I appreciate that Governments have made a mess of many things. The previous Government displayed a lack of understanding of the special problems facing single parents. On the other hand, when the previous Secretary of State for Social Security made the same proposals very sincerely, he did so specifically and clearly. The current Secretary of State said that there was no question whatsoever of the same proposals being implemented by a Labour Government.

In the past few weeks, only five single parents have come to see me about the problem and to express their opinions. I told them in all fairness that the idea was first put forward by the Conservative party and they felt extremely let down. Many of them had voted Labour because they believed that the Labour party had a totally different attitude from that adopted by my party and that its dogma was based on understanding and good will. They felt that they had been given a clear and specific assurance that a Labour Government would not adopt the same policies as the Conservatives.

In the past week I have received seven phone calls from disabled people. I could give the Ministers their names, addresses and phone numbers. I know that at least five of them voted for the Labour party because they thought that it sincerely cared and was concerned about disabled people. They, too, would probably feel very let down if there were a change of policy which affected them.

In the past five weeks, I have had the pleasure of speaking at three universities. I have not seen such anger among students for a long time. Students believe that they were blatantly and completely misled about student finance. All new students could end up with a debt of about £10,000 at the end of their studies. I predict that there will be a collapse in the number of students at university and some universities may be threatened. *[Interruption.]* However, that is an issue of policy and, as the Secretary of State rightly says, we are not discussing it tonight. We should be discussing not issues of policy, but the public regard for the House of Commons and political parties.

As hon. Members know, I have had plenty of problems with my own party, but having come from Glasgow and lived in Southend for 17 years, I have a high regard for the integrity, devotion and commitment of the Labour party. As hon. Members are well aware—even if they live in Eastwood, which is a rather more affluent part of Glasgow—although I have fundamental disagreements with the Labour party, it is represented by people of integrity who are respected for being straight and honest. *[Interruption.]* It is not a laughing matter—I believe that it is true.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): It is safe to praise them now that they are all dead.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I hope that they are not all dead. If they were, I would be very sad indeed.

Mr. Snape: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in such a serious debate the last thing that Labour Members wish to hear is praise for the Labour party as it used to be from someone who has spent all his political life attacking it?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that although I have always attacked Labour policies I have great respect for people who, in all sincerity, say what they believe and fight for it. As he well knows, I have also had a few problems with my own party. I am not trying to score points against Labour—or the Conservatives. I hope that hon. Members will appreciate that if Labour Members vote for something that they promised the people they would not do, and thereby impose hardship on individuals, the Labour party may suffer a little but the integrity of politics, Parliament and democracy will suffer far more. I would say the same to any Government. If they promise before an election not to do something and then do it two or three months later when there has been no fundamental change in the economy, they will simply lose respect for our democracy.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

I shall not take up much more time as I appreciate that there is more to be said on both sides of the argument, but if a political party makes a promise to people who trust that party, and within three months of coming to office the new Government break that promise, that will simply undermine faith in the Government and the democratic system.

I hope that the Government will not provoke a big political row tonight, with people shouting at each other, but will simply take the matter back for the famous review that the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush—who meets all the important people—said would happen. If there is to be a review, the Government should withdraw the proposals and think again. What bothers me is that tonight will be not a victory for the Conservatives—it will certainly not be a victory for single mothers—but simply a defeat for the democracy and integrity that all parties should support.

Mr. Livingstone: I listened with interest to the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) and I heard nothing to persuade me to change my mind. I shall vote against the proposal.

I have no doubt that thousands of the votes that I received were from single parents who, given the ferocity of our attacks on the previous Government's proposals, can have been in no doubt that they would be safe in voting for a Labour Government. It sounds too much like a used-car salesman drawing attention to the small print to continue making generalisations about inheriting the Tories' spending limits. Certainly none of the single parents in my constituency would have paid £5 for the Labour manifesto and read the small print and the get-out clauses.

I also have to say to the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party that when the new rules of conduct for Labour Members, which forbade us to vote against the Government in any circumstances, were introduced, we were told that it was part of a package deal and that we would be involved in drawing up policy and be consulted at all stages. We were told that we were turning our backs on the past when one opened the papers and read about a new policy and that we would therefore avoid the damaging splits of the past. What nonsense that has been shown to be. If the leadership are not prepared to honour their side of the deal about honest and open consultation before decisions are made, I do not have the slightest intention of honouring their rules that I should not vote against them.

No Labour Member can be in favour of the policy. When I went with other hon. Members to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, she made it absolutely clear that she was not in favour of it. We are doing it not because we think that it would be good for lone parents or because it will advance our policies, but because we are bound by the outgoing Government's spending limits. No one is absolutely in favour of it.

Rather than turning on single parents, when will the Labour Government start taking on people who are bigger and more powerful than themselves? Why is it that whenever we have to make difficult decisions, they always involve cutting somebody else's standard of living? The students are next in line. Why are we not prepared to stand up to the hard-faced men and women who have done very well out of the past 18 years and have gone from being well off to being millionaires?

The Guardian poll revealed that rather than the new Labour Government being in tune with the people, they are in a small minority, and the overwhelming majority of the British people are opposed to what they propose tonight. We have the vast majority of the public with us. Most people believe that it is time that those who have done so well out of the past 18 years should pay a bit more towards the running and rebuilding of Britain and not let that burden fall on the poorest children in the poorest families.

The argument is all about money. We are talking about £62 million or £65 million out of a Government budget of £300 billion. What nonsense it is. We should be able to cope with this. I accept that the leadership have set their face firmly against any increase in the top rate or the standard rate of tax, but that does not prevent us from asking why higher earners pay no national insurance contributions on their earnings over £50,000 a year. Changing that would enable us to find the money. Why are we putting the burden on the poorest children in the poorest families in Britain?

Many of my colleagues have been seduced by the silken fantasies that have been woven by our Chancellor—the idea that we will be restrained in the first two years, but that in the run-up to the next election when we have more money we shall start spending here, there and everywhere. I must remind the House that all the economic prognoses are now moving towards a difficult mid-term for the Government, and I am not certain that there will be a lot of money available to make life easier in the second half of this Parliament.

We can already see the signs. How are single parents to find jobs when firms throughout Britain are starting to lay off workers because the high interest rate policies that the Chancellor is following make it more and more difficult to export goods? As those policies begin to bite in a year's time, we shall face the real prospect of unemployment figures beginning to turn up again in response to the Government's high interest rate policies.

I see no basis for introducing the changes, and I cannot in any conscience vote for them.

Ms Patricia Hewitt (Leicester, West): Will my hon. Friend share with some of his colleagues his reasons for voting with the Government on precisely this issue, on an amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrat party, on 22 July? At that stage, when the decision was being made, why did he not share his concern either with his colleagues or with Ministers, who were making what by every account was a difficult decision?

Mr. Livingstone: If my hon. Friend is inviting me to undertake daily trench warfare against the Labour Government, I would be prepared to do it. I was working on the assumption that I would be reluctant to join Opposition parties in any Lobby. We are forced to do that tonight because, despite the fact that we were promised an open consultative Government, all the representations that we have made in private letters to members of the Cabinet, and all our private delegations, have achieved not one jot or tittle of change in the policy. We have been talking to a brick wall.

Today, the spin doctors have been running round the Lobbies and the Lobby correspondents are going on television to say that the Government realise that they have made a great mistake. We are assured that they know that they have made a mistake, but apparently they cannot be seen to give in. Is that what we have come down to? It cannot be a matter of finance, when we are talking about £62 million out of a budget of £300 billion.

I have a horrible feeling that all this is about demonstrating to the international markets that we can be as brutal to the poor as the Government we replaced. I see no other justification for the measure. There has been no convincing argument that it will advance the situation.

6.30 pm

When my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) declined to let me pop in and help him to develop his argument, he was telling us about his time on benefit and his search for a job. Is he seriously telling us that he would have found a job more quickly if his benefit had been cut by 10 quid a week? I would be prepared to give way to him now if he would like to expand on that illuminating view.

I shall vote against the cut, and I am prepared to take the consequences. What worries me most is the fact that the people who will really bear the consequences are the people who voted for us in good faith. When we speak to them in the Central Lobby and the place where they are meeting in the House today, we realise that they feel betrayed by the Government. I feel ashamed of what we are doing.

Mr. Swinney: We need to be clear about the basis of the issue that we were talking about. It has been well established for many years that, compared with couples, lone parents face differential costs in bringing up a family. The evidence from the family budget unit, the Policy Studies Unit and the Social Security Advisory Committee all points in that direction.

Until the previous Government reached their agreed protocol, successive Governments had respected that advice. In one of the pieces of information provided by the Library for Members to use in the debate there is a quotation from a publication issued by the National Council for One Parent Families, which illustrates the point:

"There is a good rationale for designing a benefit structure for one parent families which takes account of the now quite well established fact that the removal of one adult from the household does not reduce all normal costs proportionately and may add costs which are specifically related to one parenthood".

That information is in the public domain.

The Policy Studies Unit says:

"One of the outcomes of this analysis is that the needs of lone parents appear to be at least as great as, or more than, those of couples with children."

The Social Security Advisory Committee, in its advice to the Government, says that there are

"insufficient grounds for concluding that a Lone Parent on Income Support is overcompensated financially compared with a couple with children".

In the face of all that evidence, it is bewildering that the Government propose to take the route before the House.

Much of the argument hinges on whether the Government are making the move as an incentive to get people into employment, or as a compulsion. I am sure that when the Secretary of State speaks, we shall hear all manner of justification for the additional support being put in place to compensate for the draconian cut. We shall hear about welfare to work, child care and the other measures.

None the less, nobody can hide from the fact that there is the strongest hint of compulsion. The Labour Government are accepting some of the rather unpleasant arguments of the previous Administration to the effect that people must be dragooned into employment whatever the cost.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) snatched what I thought would be my best line of the evening when he quoted the song that the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) delivered to the Conservative party conference in 1992. If ever there were a set of unpleasant words, it was that litany of abuse of people, some of whom probably are scrounging from the system—we hear complaints about that from our constituents—but among whom we have obscured the genuine cases of hardship experienced by many people, including lone parents, who live in a benefit climate.

I intervened on the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) to comment on the central argument advanced by the Government, of which I am sure we shall hear more tonight. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) also challenged that argument, which is that the Government inherited from the previous Administration spending targets that are somehow sacrosanct.

A week ago, the Secretary of State for Scotland berated me in the Scottish Grand Committee for not being sufficiently enthusiastic about the increases in spending that he was delivering in Scotland as a result of the settlement agreed by the Chancellor. In his pre-Budget statement on 25 November, the Chancellor also talked about additional resources being available.

If we boil the figures down to the sum of money that we were talking about, we see that it is a tiny proportion of the budget at the Government's disposal. Yet the argument is that this Government, alone of all the Governments of the past, will stick to the spending targets of their predecessors in a way that the Conservatives never stuck to the targets of previous Administrations of their own party. Moreover, the idea that the Government have a legitimate argument for adhering to the previous Administration's spending targets has been comprehensively discredited by the Chancellor's statement about the current condition of public finances.

During Prime Minister's questions today, I could hardly hear the exchanges because of Conservative Members behind me shouting, "Trust me, Tony." Much has been made of the issue of trust, and one reason for the demise of the Conservative Administration on 1 May was the public's failure to believe anything that they ever said. The public must now be agonising about what on earth they can believe from the Labour party, as a result of the events that we are witnessing.

The Labour manifesto made bold commitments to people in our society. There was a strong commitment that Labour would not undertake the measure that we are debating now. Let me share with the House some words said before the election by the Secretary of State:

"The way to get lone mothers out of poverty and cut spending on benefits for them is not by cutting the amount on which they have to live year by year and plunging them further into poverty."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 500.]

[Mr. Swinney]

On 19 February this year, just a handful of weeks before the election, the right hon. Lady said:

"Our approach will not be to cut the social security budget by making the poorest poorer."—[*Official Report*, 19 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 944.]

When people went to the polling stations on 1 May in what are now the constituencies of Labour Members—this applies to Eastwood, too—they believed that they would no longer be subject to the harassment to which they had been subjected by the Conservative Government.

During the run-up to the election, there was an important conversion on the road to Damascus. The current Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), left the Conservative Benches to join the Labour party. On 19 February 1997—an auspicious day—he said:

"Reducing one-parent benefit will again reduce incentives to work."

He also told us:

"The freezing of lone-parent benefits is a triumph of harsh moralism over humanity . . . and . . . dogma."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 978-79.]

I absolutely agree with him. However, he has managed to leave the Conservative party when it was in office, go to the Labour party and get back into office an awful lot quicker than any of his former colleagues—and he has not had to change his views or actions. Tonight, when the Under-Secretary votes for the Bill and against the new clauses and amendments, he will rub shoulders with all his former colleagues—as many Labour Members will do—to support the policies of the previous Administration. Surely that cannot be correct.

Earlier today, we heard of the resignation from the Government of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who has earned respect among Scottish Members of Parliament as an individual who carried out his ministerial duties with diligence and integrity. He has demonstrated that integrity by confronting the difficult situation with which he was faced—having to support a policy which, fundamentally, he did not believe he was elected on at the general election.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the hon. Gentleman, who is making an interesting and fascinating speech, accept that the root problem with this matter is that the proposals are Treasury driven? Why are they Treasury driven? Is it not because Government Members know perfectly well that the Maastricht criteria—*[Interruption.]* Yes! The Maastricht criteria are the reasons why the Government cannot escape the continuing cascade of public expenditure cuts to comply with the policies set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the single currency issue. Therefore, they stand condemned for going along with the Maastricht criteria, and they know it.

Mr. Swinney: You will appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am a new hon. Member. I do not know whether any prizes are available to new hon. Members, but to manage to engage the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) in a debate on the Maastricht criteria during a debate on lone-parent benefit is a triumph.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would not have been a very long debate.

Mr. Swinney: Thank you for your helpful advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will not try that one again.

I was advancing the argument that many Labour Members must be debating with their souls. We heard a curious explanation from the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party as to why they should be loyal tonight. It did not sound to me to have a lot of substance; we then heard the speech from the hon. Member for Brent, East.

Tonight is a night when the views of the people who voted Labour on 1 May should be taken into account. On 1 May—semantics aside—the people voted for political change. They are not getting political change tonight—they are getting a continuation of the priorities of the previous Government.

I have commented on the Government's response, which has been to talk about child care and welfare to work. Part of their justification has also been that they are to take the Child Support Agency by the scruff of the neck to solve every problem. As a constituency Member dealing with various cases from the CSA, I have absolutely no confidence that the Government will be able to do anything with that agency to make a meaningful impact on this problem.

The hon. Members for Northavon and for Preston (Audrey Wise) have questioned the substance of the Government's argument, "You will be £50 better off under Labour." If any opinion pollster came forward with an opinion sample of 395, predicting enormous benefits for everybody from that sample, he would be laughed out of court. The Government's explanation on that point begs as many questions as it attempts to answer.

Tonight is about the way in which people voted on 1 May. They voted for change and, so far tonight, they are not getting it. I urge all honourable Labour Members who are concerned about this issue to support new clause 1 and amendment No. 1, as we are presiding over a great injustice in the House of Commons.

6.45 pm

Ms Hewitt: Seven months ago—like every one of my right hon. and hon. Friends—I was elected on the basis of the new Labour manifesto. In that manifesto, we promised to give priority to health and education, and that is what the Government are doing. We promised to provide extra help to the poorest elderly people, and that is what we are doing. We promised to reform the shambles of the social security system to enable people to move from welfare to work, and that is what we are doing.

We did not promise to reverse the cut that the previous Government made in lone-parent benefit. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, you did."] Opposition Members should consult our manifesto. We did not promise to reverse all the cuts that the Conservatives made; for instance, the cuts in the living standards of millions of elderly people in this country.

We did not make those promises for the simple reason that we knew that, in government—and inheriting the deficit and the public sector debt from the incompetent

Administration we defeated on 1 May—we would not be able to afford to reverse all those cuts. We knew that we would not be able to put right in a matter of months, or even years, everything that needs to be put right in this country. It is nonsense to suggest that millions of people voted for us in the belief that we would wave a magic wand to solve all these problems overnight.

I have no doubt that many of my constituents, and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends, would have liked us to promise more than we did. It was only at the beginning of this year that we were being criticised for not making more promises. We were criticised for not promising to spend billions or to reverse every cut. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who is leaving the Chamber, stood and was elected on the same manifesto as every other Labour Member.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Does my hon. Friend recall that we were elected with the slogans "New Labour, New Britain" and "Things can only get better"? We were not elected on the slogan, "Things can only get better, except for lone parents". I accept that we may not be able to put everything right overnight, but surely we should not penalise the very poorest in society before we make things better for them.

Ms Hewitt: I agree with my hon. Friend's underlying point—that this debate is fundamentally about children growing up in this country with their life chances blighted. The worst aspect of the Britain that we inherited on 1 May is that, in the 18 years of Conservative Administration, the numbers of children in Britain growing up in poverty more than doubled.

We know that children growing up living with only one of their parents are more likely to be poor, for the obvious rerason that, in almost every case, there is no father at home contributing to their maintenance, and only one in three of fathers not living with their children pay maintenance under that other shambles that we inherited from the Conservatives—the Child Support Act 1991.

It is also the case that children in lone-parent families are more likely to be poor because their mothers are so much less likely than those in two-parent families to be in part-time or full-time work. Much as I should like to accept the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) that the lone parent premium is an effective work incentive, the reality is that we have fewer lone mothers in work than any other country in the European Union.

As I said, children of lone-parent families are more likely to be poor, but, among the totality of children growing up poor in Britain today, there are even more growing up poor with both parents at home than there are with only one parent at home. The Government and the country need a strategy to transform children's life chances, be they in one-parent or in two-parent families. When my hon. Friend spoke of the opportunities denied to children in poor families—the chance to participate in sport, music and social activities and to have the same kind of clothes as the majority of children—she seemed to imply that by reversing the cut that we inherited from the previous Government we could solve the problem.

It is absurd to pretend that any improvement that we can make in the benefits system alone will include those poorest children—I represent many of their families—in the wider opportunities in society in which we want to include them.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does my hon. Friend accept that we have not inherited those policies but have chosen to carry them on, and that, because there is an element of choice, we can say no tonight?

Ms Hewitt: The manifesto on which my hon. Friend and I were both elected set out our priorities and said that we would stick to the departmental budget totals that we inherited, and that is precisely what the Government are doing.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Why is it not possible for the Government to tax child benefit—a universal, non-means-tested benefit that goes to both the poorest and the richest in the land—at the top rate, and use the money to avoid penalising the very poorest who are in single-parent families?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend anticipates a point that I intended to make in a couple of minutes, so I shall make it now. The benefits system by itself cannot close the gap between children in the poorest families, whether lone-parent or two-parent, and those in the majority of families. The Government are creating a strategy that uses every possible weapon to transform children's life chances.

One of the policy options recommended by the Commission on Social Justice, of which I was deputy chair—I hope that it is under consideration in the benefits review now taking place—is precisely to tax child benefit for the best-off families, such as the one to which I belong, in which the mother pays top-rate tax on her earnings, so as to free resources to give to the majority of families on average and below-average incomes. I hope that the Government will consider that policy, but it cannot be introduced without a change in legislation.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Lady has just proposed a change in Government policy. That may be welcome throughout the House, but if it is possible for her to contemplate a policy—taxing child benefit—that is not mentioned in the manifesto, why is it not possible to have a change in policy in order not to penalise the poorest people in the country?

Ms Hewitt: As we have heard, the Government are reviewing the entire benefits system, constructing from the shambles that we inherited a system that will do what is needed in the 21st century. I am simply saying that I hope that they will consider, as part of that review, a radical reform of child benefit to enable significant new resources to go to all children in families with low and average incomes, be they lone-parent or two-parent families.

Even more important are the strategies needed to close the gulf between work-rich and work-poor families that opened up in the 18 years of the previous Administration. That means giving lone mothers, as our new deal will do, the same opportunities to enter part-time or full-time work that mothers in two-parent families now largely take for granted.

[Ms Hewitt]

Much of this debate casts lone mothers in the role of passive victims, rather than seeing them as they are, certainly in my experience, and not simply as a constituency representative—as women who want to change their lives and who welcome, as many have at my surgery and in my constituency generally, the fact that, at last, we have a Government who are saying that we want to help them, as we want to help other families, to combine earning a living with bringing up children. It is a shame that the constructive Opposition, as they like to dub themselves, are not interested in a strategy to close the gulf between work-poor and work-rich families.

The fact has been completely overlooked so far in the debate that the child may be living with only one parent, but, in most cases, there is a second parent: the non-resident father. Our new deal for unemployed people under 25—and, next year, for the long-term unemployed over 25—will bring into employment, often for the first time, many of the fathers of the children now living in lone-parent families. Combined with fundamental reform of the child support Acts and the Child Support Agency, which is also in train, that new deal will begin to bring into those families the kind of money that is needed to give children decent life chances.

By making work pay, by introducing as we did last week a Bill for a national statutory minimum wage—something which the previous Government destroyed—and by building on family credit, by introducing, as the Chancellor proposes, a working families tax credit, we will support further the children currently in work-poor families and enable parents to transform their own position and that of their children.

I have no doubt whatever that, by the end of the first term of the new Labour Government, children in the poorest families in the country, be they lone-parent or two-parent families, will have seen their life chances transformed. They will be better off after one term of the new Labour Government than they ever were in three terms of the previous Government. In that firm belief, I shall vote against the new clause. I urge my hon. Friends to do the same.

7 pm

Mrs. Jackie Ballard (Taunton): The speech of the hon. Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt) made me feel, not for the first time in this Chamber, that this was a little like Alice in Wonderland. In one breath she talked about the shambles of the benefits system inherited from the previous Government and said that it needed urgently reviewing and then in another breath she said that the Labour Government had to keep to that inheritance and implement a cut proposed by a Government whose shambles they so despised. No wonder people out there cannot understand half the things that go on in this place.

This afternoon, the Prime Minister spoke about putting lone parents to work. In the 1950s and 1960s, women fought for the right to work outside the home. They wanted to have choices in their lives. Now, the Secretary of State for Social Security and, apparently, the Prime Minister are saying that to choose to stay at home and bring up children is not a valid choice and that parenting is not work. Therefore, women and their children are to be further driven into poverty and debt, to force them to go to work outside the home.

All hon. Members who are parents know that bringing up children is hard work, and those of us who are single parents know that having sole day-to-day responsibility for a child is even harder work, and is more expensive. There is not a partner to provide free child care or undertake jobs around the house. Millions of women thought on 1 May that not only the face but the heart of Parliament would be different, because more women had been elected. Those women cannot now believe that the person who is supposed to speak for them in the Cabinet is the same person who is defending this mean attack on lone parents and their children.

I wonder how many of the women's groups that the Secretary of State has consulted support her action. We know from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) that of the 40 women's groups in Northern Ireland to which he spoke, none of them supported this action. I suspect—we heard from the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)—that few Labour Members support this action either. Although some of them may vote for it, it must be with heavy hearts and a guilty conscience.

The Government talk repeatedly until we are all fed up about what they inherited from the previous Government. People voted on 1 May for what they hoped would be a change for the better, not for a Tory inheritance written in concrete. The inheritance is not written in concrete. The Tory Government are dead, or so we thought. The Labour Government can choose how to spend the inheritance. They have already chosen to change a number of Tory policies, and the Prime Minister spoke about them this afternoon. They have chosen to change some of the Tory spending priorities in the past seven months. Labour Back Benchers are now being seduced or bullied into the Lobby with promises of a review or a committee, but a review, a social exclusion unit, a Cabinet Committee or a departmental committee will not put shoes on the feet of children. I am sorry that the Secretary of State finds this funny.

To change one's mind is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength, a sign that the Government have listened and a sign to the public that democracy works and that this steamroller of Tory discipline has not been replaced by the Labour steamroller. I cannot believe, and I suspect that millions of other people cannot believe, that people in this place who earn more than £800 a week can vote with a clear conscience to take £5 a week away from the poorest people in our society and their children. There is no economic, moral or political justification for it.

Mr. Snape: Twenty-five years ago, when I was first elected as parliamentary candidate for West Bromwich, East, the area of the black country that I have had the honour to represent since then was regarded as a fairly affluent part of the United Kingdom. Unemployment was 3 or 4 per cent. and British manufacturing industry regarded the black country as its heartland. Before I come to the central point that we are debating, I want to say to some of my hon. Friends that none of them should underestimate the damage that 18 years of Toryism have done to the fundamental nature of British society and to pride and especially working-class pride in areas such as mine.

In the early 1970s, single parents had the option of working or staying at home. For too many of them, that option has not existed for many years. Especially in the

early 1980s, the Tory party's economic policies virtually destroyed our manufacturing base. The work ethic is all too often missing in the various estates that I have the honour to represent, because whole generations have never had the opportunity to work. So anything that the Government can do to bring back the work ethic and working-class pride, I am prepared to support. Having said that, I must say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that this issue has not been well handled.

For single parents to be penalised financially if they go into work and then, through no fault of their own, lose their job is not an outcome that was intended in our manifesto. That aspect of the proposals ought to be reconsidered. It is not fair to penalise those who lose their job through no fault of their own.

There are no benefits to getting old, as some of us can tell the House. One of the drawbacks is that we are apt to lecture our hon. Friends. I hope that I shall not be accused of doing that tonight. I urge caution when the time comes to vote this evening.

I have listened to the speeches of Opposition Members this evening. It is easy for the Liberal Democrats. They are always in favour of greater expenditure. They never have to pick up a bill. They have not been in government in my lifetime and, looking at them, pray heaven they never are. As for the Conservative party, let me say this after 23 years in the House. When the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—what a lousy speech that was—praises my hon. Friends for their courage and consistency, my hon. Friends should dip their handkerchiefs in perfume, because there is a sharp stench of hypocrisy in the Chamber.

I put one point to those of my hon. Friends who are tempted to vote for the new clause, so ably supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise). If my hon. Friends vote for it, it will not be carried. The Conservatives will see to that. Tomorrow's newspapers will not concentrate on the fate of lone parents. We could write the lead stories in the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* ourselves. They will say, "An ashen-faced Tony Blair was left contemplating the smoking wreckage of his party as the left took 40 or 50 Members into the Lobby." The stories will not be about lone-parent families.

Let me say this about the events of the past 18 years. When I knocked on doors in what was until May a marginal constituency, people said to me time after time, "I am not going to vote for you, Peter. I will not vote Labour because you are hopelessly divided." If we demonstrate that we are divided on issues such as this, we do not provide succour and hope to lone-parent families. We merely provide succour and hope to the Conservative party, which was so soundly rejected on 1 May.

Mr. Swinney: Are we to assume from the hon. Gentleman's last remarks that the headlines are more important than the issues? Are we to assume that the *Daily Express* is more important to him than the lone parents? If that is the case, the Labour Government are in a sorry state.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman may get cheap plaudits from his hon. Friends. They are used to giving cheap plaudits to their colleagues. They have rarely had quite so many hon. Friends to give them. The hon. Gentleman was obviously not listening. I said that the story would not be about lone parents and that they would not be helped by the vote tonight. The Government will have their way, whatever happens. What the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends wish to do, as the Liberal Democrat party always does, is to portray themselves as the friend of the oppressed, unless of course there is nothing especially controversial about the legislation. Then they have impeccable tactics. One third of them vote in one Lobby, one third vote in the other and one third stay in their places.

Mr. Swinney *rose—*

Mr. Snape: I will not give way again. I have heard enough nonsense from the Liberal Democrat party. In that way, Liberal Democrats can assure everyone that they are on their side, whatever the issue.

We have had not a word from the Liberal Democrats about the benefits budget as a whole. It has been claimed tonight that that this debate is a precursor of debates to come. Are we saying that the benefits budget cannot be touched in future years, but must increase year after year? Some of my hon. Friends shake their heads.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) has said that there would be a debate on disability living allowance. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who has never been known for his compassion, talked about the disabled. Yet we all know full well that, in the last two or three years of the Conservative Administration, people were actively encouraged to apply for disability living allowance, so as to get them off the unemployment register. Are all those people to receive disability living allowance in future? Is it to be increased or index-linked, as some of my hon. Friends want? Those are the hard choices.

I have one or two words to say to those of my colleagues who came in at the general election and who are passionately and genuinely concerned about the future for lone parents.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): For benefit of the House, would the hon. Gentleman care to repeat and elaborate on his allegation that a significant number of disabled people claiming disability living allowance are not disabled, but are perfectly fit and able-bodied? Will he take this opportunity either to withdraw that allegation, or to confirm and justify it?

Mr. Snape: Many of those people had previously claimed incapacity benefit and were encouraged to switch to disability living allowance. Hon. Members who had any dealings with such people know full well that they were encouraged to do so, and we know why that was—it was so that the outgoing Prime Minister could boast about the falling unemployment figures. That is the simple fact and if the hon. Gentleman thinks that it is a dramatic revelation, he is even sillier than I thought he was when he was first elected.

All of us—including those of my hon. Friends whose names are on the alternatives to the Secretary of State's proposals—worked extremely hard during the election campaign to get a Labour Government elected. I have

[Mr. Snape]

heard one or two of my colleagues say that we should never have pledged that we would abide by the outgoing Conservative Government's spending totals, but that is not what they said during the election campaign, and with good reason. Like me, in a marginal seat, they heaved a sigh of relief because they knew that the central weapon in the Conservatives' armoury, which they used to cheat their way to power in 1987 and 1992—saying that voting Labour would mean tax increases—had been neutralised by that single pledge.

Having made our bed, we shall have to sleep in it, especially because voting against the Government tonight will bring no change and no benefit to lone mothers. It will merely give enormous comfort to the Conservatives and to the Liberal Democrats, who have never been known to do anything other than opt out of a hard choice.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): First, I do not see that the financial arguments in favour of the measure before us tonight stand up. This afternoon, we heard the Prime Minister catalogue hundreds of millions of pounds of expenditure that the Government have introduced. Welfare to work and lone parents are related matters, and the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) was right to say that it is not enough simply to argue the case for staying within the pledged spending levels.

Secondly, the measure does not apply to people who at present receive the benefit, but applies only to future claimants. One is forced to conclude that there is an argument of principle as to why lone parents are to be denied the benefit. It is to put strong pressure on them to go to work and to take up the inducements to work that the Government are introducing.

There seem to be massive contradictions here. It is working parents who will be hit by the measure. If one is a non-working lone parent who is currently on income support, one will receive no benefit from the double child allowance. If one takes a job, but loses that job, one will receive reduced benefit under the new rules. Where is the consistency in saying that, on the one hand, we are taking this measure, which represents a stick to force lone mothers to go back to work, but on the other hand, we are introducing a fiscal structure that, for the great majority, will represent precisely the reverse incentive?

Mr. Bayley: If the measure is such a bad idea, why did the hon. Gentleman's party support it before the election?

Mr. Flight: The position of the Conservative party has been made clear. We do not in principle agree with there being differential rates of benefit as between married people and single people. How to tackle poverty and lone-parent poverty in particular is a broader issue, and there are other ways of doing this. It is a question of principle, not one relating to the drafting of the Bill.

In addition, as the hon. Gentleman knows, Conservative Members will vote with the Government on the new clause, because it would be hypocritical for us to do otherwise, having proposed the principle. I am only pointing out that the way in which the principle has been set down in the Government's Bill—the Bill before us is not the one that we drafted—does not achieve the Government's stated objective, which is to put strong pressure on new lone mothers to go out to work. As he will also be aware, the arrangements will reduce coverage of people's travel-to-work costs, which is another disincentive, especially for those who live in areas where there is no work close by.

7.15 pm

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend concede that the principle at stake is one that does not stigmatise individuals in specific categories, but looks at poverty in terms of income rather than in terms of broad and bland categories? That is the difference between the Conservative approach and the Labour approach: it is not that we do not care about the poor, but we want to identify the right people to whom we should pay benefits.

Mr. Flight: I thank my hon. Friend for pulling out further the point that I was making. I would add that one also has to see things from the point of view of married couples who are on low incomes. There was great resentment about the way child benefit applied: people saw lone parents receiving what they thought was an unfair benefit. There is a different view of how we deal with the problem of poverty.

My point is that there is massive inconsistency as to the stated objectives and as to the way in which the Bill will work. I trust that the Government will address those inconsistencies in the promised review, otherwise they will not even meet their objective of driving lone mothers back into work.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I first through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, appeal to the Opposition not to pay me a compliment tonight? I can get into quite enough trouble with the Whips without any help from anyone else.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) on her excellent speech. I am, very sadly, making a hard choice tonight, because I shall not be supporting the Government. I shall support the family. I believe in the family as an institution, whether it is a single-parent family or a two-parent family. The family gives us our values—it is our rock and the place where we all go for comfort. Throughout my life, I have greatly appreciated the fact that I have a good family, and it is therefore incumbent on me to support the family tonight.

The effects of the Bill, if it goes through tonight, coupled with the cuts that went through in November, mean that hard choices will be imposed on some of the poorest people in the country and their children, all because that is what a Labour Government—the first Labour Government in 18 years—have decided will happen. These are the most disadvantaged families and children in our extremely affluent society. We should not kid ourselves about how those people are managing now—they are living on the margins of society, only just surviving. I am sure that someone will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that it was R. H. Tawney who described poverty as "someone standing up to their neck in water and a slight wave could drown them". The cuts represent a tidal wave for lone parents.

I should also like to repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said when she was shadow Secretary of State, when the decision to cut benefits was taken last year. She spoke for us all when she said:

"The way to get lone mothers out of poverty and cut spending on benefits for them is not by cutting the amount on which they have to live year by year and plunging them further into poverty."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 500.]

She also accepted that the majority of those who became lone parents were subsequently worse off, not better off. I must ask her what has happened to make her change her mind. How is it that she could argue with such passion and certainty 12 months ago about something that she now denies?

We are told that the cuts are about saving money—about £400 million. It has also been argued that we said in our manifesto that we would stick to the Tories' spending plans. I do not remember taking part in any debate in which we said that we would do that. I do remember reading about it one morning in a newspaper and thinking, "Oh my God. What have we done now?" If we are to be so meticulous about the manifesto and look at every word in it, where did it say that we would cut benefits to lone parents? How many Labour Members can put their hand on their heart and say that when they knocked on any door, addressed any meeting, or appeared on radio or on television, they said, "By the way, the lone parents will be the first to be attacked"? We did not do so, because not in a million years did any of us expect that we would be faced with the choice confronting us now.

In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt), I support the new deal to get those lone parents who want to back into work, because I have survived on benefits as a lone parent. I was also the child of a lone parent, because my father was away in the second world war.

I should like to ask the Secretary of State an important question. It is one that neither she nor her Ministers have answered. I should appreciate a straight answer and not the usual mantra, "This is not an issue at this time," because that simply will not do. Will the new deal eventually become compulsory? If so, it is a piece of social engineering of which Stalin would have been proud. If the new deal becomes compulsory and a woman is unfortunate enough to become widowed, divorced, abandoned, a battered wife, or is a young girl literally left holding the baby, she will not have the choice to look after her children. Those who are wealthy and enjoy a different life style, however, can stay at home with their children. I stayed at home with my children.

The disincentive inherent in the scheme has already been well aired, so I will skip over it, because I know that many hon. Members want to speak. We must have an answer about the element of compulsion. It is all very well if women want to go back to work. That is fine, and it is excellent if affordable child care can be provided. Women must be given the choice. I received a letter that particularly moved me, and I think that that lone parent should speak to the House tonight through me. She wrote:

"Whilst I fully appreciate the current moves to assist those parents who wish to return to work, there are also those of us who feel unable to do this because we feel that if the only adult presence in the home is forced into work, many children will be deprived of their only source of stability and security. This can only cause more problems than it will solve.

A parent who has to leave home before the children do each morning cannot also ensure that they will leave for school at the required time"

or get there at all.

"A parent who does not get in at night until after children have gone out to meet friends cannot ensure that they have done homework, know where their children are . . . Children do not need curfews—they need a parent with the time and the energy to do his or her job of parenting properly.

Lone parents and their children are already one of the most deprived groups in society, having to function in an economy which is often inflated by two parents working. Moreover, a lone parent is already trying to do a job; the work of two people. Many people, like myself, did not bear children 'out of wedlock' but simply escaped from abusive situations, or indeed, were widowed. As a result, many of us are already suffering from stress, are over-stretched, and struggling. A doctor once informed me that the new generation of anti-depressant drugs . . . are very expensive . . . £1 per tablet".

Look at the number of lone parents who end up in psychiatric units because of breakdowns and those who simply give up when the poverty gets too much and their children end up in care.

The Bill, which could make people increasingly impoverished, could create a great burden for the NHS, the social services and the police. The social exclusion unit will have an even more difficult job to do.

I understand that people have different life styles. A woman may have been fortunate enough to have had a good education and professional parents. She may have married a good, supportive husband and, having had children, she may have afforded a nanny or cleaner while pursuing an interesting career. Such a woman, who has never had to worry about money, may simply not understand what other women or single parents have to go through. I do not believe that ignorance should dictate Labour party policy.

Labour Members, especially women Labour Members, have always felt a special responsibility and duty to make the lives of those who are poorer better. "Things can only get better" we all sang on 1 May, but I must have missed the verse that ran, "excluding lone parents". It defies common sense and decency to support the cuts. I simply do not know why we are making them. I do not know what I am missing. There must be another agenda at work, because I am now receiving letters from people who are fearful about losing disability benefit. We are now reading about the benefits integrity project. It appears to be a hit squad, whose remit is to harass claimants and put them off claiming disability benefit. But disabled people and lone parents voted for us in their thousands on 1 May.

I have been supportive of a number of the Government's initiatives, and I want to mention a few of the good things. We are tackling the mess in which our schools were left. As the Prime Minister said today, there is a lot of good news. I particularly welcomed the White Paper launched by the Secretary of State for Health. We all did a little dance when we heard about our support for the ban on land mines. We have also banned handguns. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has promoted many exciting projects that will come on stream in the future.

I cannot support the Government tonight and I know that many of my colleagues will do so with a heavy heart. Since the summer, I and many others have sought to reverse the proposed cuts. My hon. Friend the Member

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) has spoken about quiet diplomacy. That may have been the practice on her part, but I have gone through every route possible from the parliamentary Labour party to Ministers, and I even discussed my concerns with the Whips. I even removed my name from a critical early-day motion, and I must tell the House that I did so with great difficulty.

Our pleas have not been heard. We have won the argument time and again, but we have been ignored. We have been told over and over again that lone parents in work, on average, will be £50 better off. Today I learnt from the House of Commons Library, not a place known for left-wing rebels, that that £50 gain is based on lone parents currently in work. It states that once travel and child costs are taken into account, lone parents seeking employment will find that the net gain of gaining a job will be reduced to £10. The Government's claims do not add up. The money is available to avoid the cuts.

The Government have lost the argument, but they seem determined to carry on. On 1 May, I said that the people voted for a change because they were sick to the stomach of the sleaze and arrogance displayed by the previous Government. In particular, they were sickened by the stigmatisation and scapegoating of lone parents. There is something rather punitive and cruel about the cuts, and something rather arrogant. Of course they will be approved with the support of the Tories, but they will not go through with mine.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I thank the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) for her speech in defence of the family and single parents. I have no wish to embarrass her, but her speech was a fine one. I also welcome back to the Chamber the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). I trust that his injuries were due to natural causes.

I want to share with the House my years of experience as a doctor dealing with many young women who have become pregnant and raised families as single parents. They are not by any means a group typical of lone parents; I do not claim that, but they are frequently vilified.

I want to dispel the myth about those women—a myth perpetrated by the bunch of reprobates who call themselves Her Majesty's Opposition, who are all apparently now having £30 dinners, as they are not in their places. When they were in government, they promoted the myth that a reduction in benefits would discourage women from getting pregnant. The women's entitlement to housing has already been eroded; that did not work. Now their income is to be reduced, so why do they become pregnant? It has not been said very often tonight, but I know that in private that is often said.

Some women, in my experience, have never had a proper home or a family. They have never known the love or security of a decent home. I repeat that those women are not typical of lone parents, but they are a big group. Their lives have been spent in a series of unsatisfactory foster homes or residential care.

7.30 pm

I well remember one such patient of mine, who got pregnant at a very early age and, because of ill health, decided eventually to have a termination of pregnancy. Within a very few months, she was back, pregnant again, and she told me that time that she wanted to keep the baby, because above all she wanted someone to love and someone who would love her—something that she had never experienced, after a lifetime of rejection. Cuts in her benefit would not have deterred her.

Other, older women go on having babies because it gives them a brief respite from poverty and degradation. They may have a partner who abuses them; they may have many partners, but they have babies for the same reason—someone whom they can love and who will love them.

Pregnancy and childbirth give women attention. They may even get a bunch of flowers from the child's father before he disappears into the great blue yonder. I would be encouraged if the Government would hurry up and do something about the Child Support Agency, which has so little success in getting those men to support their partners.

Those mothers get a little attention. It does not last, but it provides a break. They have no concept of the difficulties and responsibilities of parenthood. Threats of a cut in benefit will not deter them; it is all that they have.

Many more of the women whom I saw got pregnant through ignorance and carelessness. Sex education in this country is patchy and woefully inadequate. I have seen many patients in family planning clinics whose first knowledge of how their reproductive system works is gained when they come to the clinic, and many are already pregnant by that time. Cuts will not deter that group, either.

Yes, by all means, let us encourage lone parents to work if they wish, and let us also give them a good education, especially a good sex education, some lessons in human biology and some teaching and experience in parenting. They also need good social services and good child care now, to prevent the same old cycle repeating itself in the next generation.

However, we must not at the same time wield the stick of benefit cuts for those women and children. It is cruel and senseless. I appeal to the Government to consider the quality of mercy for those people—if not for the single mothers, let it be for their children, who need a better standard of living, not a worse one. Only mercy and compassion, and benefits now, will stop those children becoming single parents in their turn, in a few years.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: I have been asking myself why we are doing what the Government propose. On the radio this morning, John Humphrys asked the Secretary of State whether we are doing it because we have to or because we want to. I was not satisfied with the Secretary of State's reply.

Having reflected deeply on the issue, I have come to the conclusion that there is no need to do what we are being asked to do. It has been turned into an insane loyalty test, in which my colleagues are being invited to support the Government, when they know in their hearts that what the Government are doing is wrong. That grieves me, because I want the Labour Government to succeed.

Every time that I hear the Minister try to persuade the world outside, it is as though we live in a parallel dimension in the House—as though we do not connect with what people outside are thinking. They think that we

are wrong. The Labour Government think that we are right. We know that the Government are wrong. Nothing will happen. It is an incredible state of affairs. We are told that there are hard choices, but the hardest choice of all is to vote against the Government, even though we know that they are wrong.

I shall focus on just one aspect, as many of my colleagues want to speak. The Bill deals with lone parents in work. Many of the contributions have been about getting lone parents into work. That is not what the Bill does.

In my constituency of Pendle, in north-east Lancashire, we are not work poor—we are cash poor. North-east Lancashire is a low-pay black spot. The area is scarred by poverty pay. There are 3,100 one-parent families in my constituency, many of whom are working and many of whom are living in deep poverty.

The Minister says, and we are invited to believe this as a truth, that a lone parent in work will, on average, be £50 a week better off than one on income support. That assumes that the lone parent is getting family credit. Even the child care disregard, which my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) mentioned, is predicated on the assumption that the lone parent in work, in a low-paid job, is getting family credit.

The reality is that in Lancashire, one third of all people who are entitled to family credit do not take it up, for whatever reason. They may be in isolated workplaces, or there may be a non-unionised work force. Thousands of people could be lifted out of poverty by claiming family credit, but they do not do so. They depend on the non-means-tested benefits—the child benefit for lone parents, which is being snatched away from them.

Two out of three people who do not claim family credit but are entitled to it would get at least £10 a week. The average amount unclaimed is £21.80. Such ignorance is expensive. Nationally, 80,000 one-parent families in severe hardship are not claiming family credit.

What is needed is a national minimum wage to help people in work. The tragedy is that this excellent proposal—the National Minimum Wage Bill has now been published—will not kick in until the spring of 1999 at the earliest. We are proposing cuts that will kick in next June, so the cart has been put before the horse.

I am sad about what has happened. I consider myself not as one of the usual suspects, but as someone who desperately wants the Government to succeed. For many of those in the Chamber and outside, this is a defining moment. If people believe that what we are doing is wrong, they should join us in the Lobby and vote against the Government's proposal.

Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): This is an understandably emotional issue. My constituency of Rochdale has one of the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in Europe, so the issue has evoked much emotion not just within the constituency party but among my constituents.

My contribution will be brief. There have been some heated speeches this evening. As one of the younger new Members of Parliament and a woman, I feel that, on my head and on the heads of my female colleagues, has been heaped a lot of responsibility for addressing the position of women in society and what the Labour party has or has not achieved in that regard during six months in government.

I remind the House and the world outside it that those hon. Members who pass through the Government Lobby tonight will do so not because we are naive and unaware of the problems, but because we can only hope and trust that the Government are looking to the bigger picture. That is the reason why my colleagues and I stood as Labour candidates in the general election and supported the election of a Labour Government. Let us be honest: whether we agreed with the decision from the outset or, as one of my colleagues said, woke up and read in *The Guardian* that Labour Members would have to accept spending pledges that were not our own, we knew that there would be hard choices. We also knew that somebody would have to pay for those choices, perhaps in the form of cuts.

Many of my colleagues have introduced cuts at local government level—albeit with a heavy heart. People like me will pass through the Government Lobby tonight, because we believe that this is a short-term measure that will reap long-term gain by creating a modern economy and liberating from poverty all the children and single parents whom I represent. That outcome will be possible only when constituencies such as Rochdale achieve economic prosperity.

Although £5 on benefit will buy things for the family, in the long term it will not alleviate the poverty trap in which many of my constituents are caught. Two, three and sometimes four generations of single parents live on council estates in my constituency and they are looking for some bold action by the Government. They are waiting for the national child care strategy to kick in. They are looking for success from the new deal for lone parents and for a national minimum wage.

Some of the bravest people who represent the Labour party in local government are single parents. Rochdale has taken the bold step of appointing a poverty committee, which brings together a cross-section of local council representatives to address that problem. The committee is discussing the issue tonight. The committee chair, who is one of the bravest people I know, is a lone parent with eight children. Tonight, she will answer an allegedly awkward question from the Liberal Democrats—who do nothing but ask awkward questions and offer no solutions.

That councillor intends to back the Government because she is aware of the bigger picture and she knows that we must change the way things work. She worked for the Labour party during the general election campaign not because she thought it would be easy—she had her doubts about the spending pledges to which Labour was committed—but because she understood that a Labour Government would acknowledge her existence and her contribution to society. That is a positive, not a negative, point.

That Labour councillor is concentrating on the Government's positive measures, whether it is the family unit, the social exclusion unit or our work on poverty. She knows that those measures represent light at the end of the tunnel; it will not be all continuous grind and poverty. She trusts us to have her best interests, and those of the people whom she represents, at heart. She believes that the Government will change the economic destiny of the majority of people on the Newbold council estate whom she represents.

I shall pass through the Government Lobby tonight not because I do not recognise that there are problems with the revolving door of seasonal work or problems for

[Lorna Fitzsimons]

young families with children under five—I am not that naive. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), the chair of the parliamentary Labour party, I hope that the Government will continually review the measure when it is in place. I hope that they are serious about that pledge. I hope that the Government will do something if the penalties kick in for those in seasonal employment and if there are problems for families with children under five.

If the Government do not stand by their word, many people will find it harder to look to the long term when they are forced to address other difficult issues. It has been difficult to make this speech tonight as a new Member of Parliament when so many eminent colleagues have made wonderful contributions. I ask Ministers to bear it in mind that we are putting a lot of trust in the Government because we believe that they have the nation's long-term agenda at heart. We knew that there would be hard choices, but I hope that we shall learn some lessons from this exercise. We have fallen into this problem and the way in which we have dealt with it has done no one any favours. We must ensure that we are the Government whom my friend the councillor will defend tonight; her trust in us must be well placed. I hope also that the faith that new Members like me will place in the Government when we pass through the Lobby tonight is not misplaced.

7.45 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I put my name to new clause 1 and to amendment No. 1 because I believe that the proposals that they outline will help to protect the living standards of single-parent families.

The Government's proposals will undoubtedly cut the living standards of some of the most deprived and disadvantaged children in our country. There is abundant evidence of the incidence of poverty among single-parent families. The average income of a single-parent family is only 37 per cent. of that of a two-parent family. Some 53 per cent. of children in one-parent families lack three or more of the basic necessities of life compared with only 24 per cent. of children in two-parent families. Single parents face additional costs in bringing up their children because they have no partner with whom to share child care and no one else to contribute to the family income.

The Government propose to cut benefits for single-parent families by up to £11 per week. I find that incomprehensible and unjustifiable, especially when we are apparently heading for a budget surplus and the economy is reported to be in reasonably good shape. The Government are proposing a measure that the previous Tory Government tried to introduce. We opposed it then and, to be consistent, we should oppose it now. No doubt the Secretary of State will tell us later that we are now in a different situation because the Labour Government propose to improve job opportunities for single parents. I applaud her for that: I give her credit for ensuring that there will be investment in new job opportunities and in childcare facilities to help those single parents who want to work to do so.

The fact of the matter is that, in many areas, the jobs and the childcare facilities do not exist yet—if they do, they are not adequate to deal with demand from single parents. Some single parents may choose to look after their children themselves rather than put them in the care of another person. If that is their decision—particularly when their children are very young—they should not be penalised for it.

I urge my right hon. Friend to rethink the issue, and I urge as many as possible of my hon. Friends to vote for amendment No. 1, which has cross-party support. I honestly believe that it reflects the mood of the country. A poll that appeared in yesterday's edition of *The Guardian* revealed that the majority of people—a ratio of three to one—believe that the Government have got it wrong.

Today, all Scottish Members received a letter that criticised the Government proposals to cut benefit for single-parent families. The signatories of the letter include Rev. Alexander McDonald, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Cardinal Thomas Winning, Richard Holloway, the Scottish Episcopalian Bishop of Edinburgh, the Young Women's Christian Association Scottish National Council, Save the Children, the Transport and General Workers Union (Scotland) and other organisations that have campaigned consistently for children's rights and the rights of single-parent families in particular.

May I say this to my hon. Friends who have been critical? I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt) is here. I saw her on the television not all that long ago, saying that the opposition to the Government proposals was a conspiracy organised by the Socialist Campaign Group. I am sure that Bishop Holloway, Cardinal Winning and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland will be surprised to find out that they have been recruited into the Socialist Campaign Group—the Church militant perhaps, but not the Campaign Group.

The letter specifically refers to a statement by the Prime Minister, saying:

"if the Labour Government has not raised the living standards of the poorest by the end of its time in office it will have failed."

Therefore, when I go into the Lobby tonight to vote against the Government proposals, I shall be not rebelling against the Prime Minister, but urging him to stand by his commitment and to protect the living standards of some of the poorest and most vulnerable children in our country.

Mr. Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): As many hon. Members have said, this is not an easy issue. As a new Member, I am aware that this is the time for clear judgment and to be as honest and as truthful as we can be. I have noticed that truth and honesty seem to have disappeared in the media recently as they have dived down into their usual cynical attitudes.

Today, *The Guardian* insinuated that the benefits of every lone parent would be cut if the Government were successful in the Division Lobby tonight, as I am sure they will be. That was an absolute lie. It is an outrage to scare lone parents in that way because all lone parents who currently receive the benefit will be protected.

The truth is that I fought the election campaign on a manifesto and supported a programme that said that Labour would stay within its spending limits for the first two years of government. I defy the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) or any other hon. Member

to find any leaflet, magazine or newspaper article that suggests otherwise. That was the platform on which I stood as a candidate.

On the doorsteps, amid many positive messages that I received, some constituents regularly said, "You will not do it. You will spend your way out of it." Standing as a candidate on that platform, my response was, "No, we will not." After 18 years of Tory rule, our approach is to review and to reprioritise our budgets. I also made it clear that it was important that, in reprioritising those budgets, the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable people in our country should have the highest priority.

Mr. McDonnell: Can my hon. Friend produce any leaflet, any reference in the Labour manifesto or any leaflet in his constituency or elsewhere, in which we gave a pre-election commitment to cut lone-parent benefits? Can he produce any reference to that in the manifesto?

Mr. Goggins: Having studied these issues and followed them carefully over many years, but particularly in the run-up to the election, I was aware at that time that cuts were built into—

Mr. McDonnell: Can my hon. Friend produce a reference?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The House has been good natured up to now, so let us continue in that manner.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): It is a very good question.

Mr. Goggins: It may be a good question and I am attempting to answer it. I was aware that the proposal to cut benefit was built into Tory spending plans. Therefore, when I was campaigning, I knew that that cut was a possible consequence of the campaign. If I win an election on a platform that says that Labour will stay within spending limits, I have to face the question: if we restore this benefit cut what other benefits am I prepared to cut to make up the difference?

Mr. Frank Cook: Does my hon. Friend not realise that we are cutting the benefit? Those who protest against this are not asking for extra money. We seek simply to leave it as it is until the broad-ranging review is concluded. We are not asking for extra money, so we are staying within spending levels.

Mr. Goggins: I am sorry, but my hon. Friends cannot have it both ways. The simple fact is that there is a £400 million commitment here and, if that cut is restored, another cut elsewhere in the budget will have to be found. It is a painful fact for me and for many of my hon. Friends, but it is none the less a fact.

One of the things that has disturbed and sometimes appalled me is the way in which many people outside and in the House have sought to pitch the debate in a particular direction by saying, "You are either on the side of the poor or you are on the side of the Government." That is a false statement. Throughout the debate, we have heard of various initiatives, including the social exclusion unit and the new deal, which is aimed especially at lone parents, young unemployed people and unemployed people who are disabled, who also aspire to a place in the work force. We have heard about the cuts in value added tax on fuel, the additional payments to pensioners this winter and aspirations to raise educational standards in the poorest communities.

The Prime Minister has said that, if we have not delivered for the poorest, we will have failed. Hon. Members and the country will judge him on that pledge. It is important that we fulfil that pledge, but I am absolutely convinced that, to tackle poverty, we have to encourage employment opportunities, especially among those people who have been excluded over many years from the work force.

A third of all households in Britain that have no one in paid employment are single-parent households. It is not a question of compulsion. We know from research that the majority of lone parents want to work because they know that it will make their families better off, give them more independence and enable them to participate in society. The new deal will deliver on that aspiration.

The truth comes, of course, when hon. Members face their constituents. Many of us have met lone parents in recent weeks. One in particular taught me a great deal. She was very unhappy about the prospect of the cut, but two things emerged from the discussion, which hon. Members should realise. First, she thought that, as an existing claimant, her benefit was going to be cut. She was reassured when I told her that it was not going to be cut.

Secondly, that lone parent goes out to work for £110 a week. It is not a huge salary by any means. It is extremely modest, but she prefers to work rather than to be on benefit. Her problem is that, during school holidays, child care costs her £70 a week. That is her difficulty. We need to produce as soon as possible a child care programme to help her to keep her job, rather than an extra £5 or £6 a week in benefit after she has lost her job.

Many hon. Members have described this as a tough decision. It is the hardest decision that I have had to face in my time as an hon. Member, but it is certainly not the first time that Labour Ministers and a Labour Government have had to face a difficult decision. When lone-parent benefit was first introduced, the Labour Secretary of State for Social Services said:

> "As in many other areas of our social policy, we have got to face facts and achieve the maximum we can within the resources available."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1975; Vol. 898, c. 67.]

Those words were spoken by Barbara Castle and they are as true today as they were in 1975.

8 pm

Mr. Frank Cook: This is a difficult debate, with nightmarish aspects. I shall try to introduce a degree of reality based on my experience as a constituency Member.

In implementing a measure to end entitlement to lone-parent benefit for next year's new claimants, and the preceding abolition of the lone-parent premium on income support, the Government are staking their moral authority on a simple question: can we guarantee real opportunities to all single parents who will be adversely affected by the two cuts?

The number and range of such opportunities is to be extended by the new deal for lone parents. I support that programme, and I do not doubt the Government's

[Mr. Frank Cook]

sincerity in promoting it; but, given that the best available figures suggest that the combined losses in entitlement will affect half a million benefit claims in 1998–99 alone, is it cynical to see a triumph of hope over expectation in any contention that every one of those half million will, by way of compensation, be offered a work or child care package?

If it is cynical to suggest that the official unemployment figures exclude a significant number of people who are in reality actively seeking work—heaven knows, the Deputy Prime Minister has made that claim many times, and I am sure he is right—and thus adding to competition for available vacancies, not only was that cynicism shared by nearly all my right hon. Friends in opposition; it is, or should be, shared by them in government, however expedient it might be now to retain the same figures. They would probably agree with me—I hope they would—that the official figure for those unemployed in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees in October this year, 8.5 per cent., understates the size of the task of providing employment opportunity for all who lack it, as does the numerical total of 4,181 for the Stockton, North constituency.

In October, the figure for the Stockton borough as a whole was 7,187, and 1,124 jobcentre vacancies were unfilled. It does not take an Einstein to work out that 6.4 people were chasing each vacancy. In neighbouring Middlesbrough, the situation was even worse: 14.4 people were chasing each registered vacancy. Those are two towns in a grouping of five. Across the old Cleveland boundaries, the figure is 10: across five towns, 10 people are chasing each vacancy. The Bill will increase that figure, but how are we to increase the number of vacancies? The whole proposal is premature and unjustified. We are running away with ourselves. Too much sloppy logic is being applied in an attempt to justify measures that are unwarranted, and, indeed, were previously condemned by senior members of the parliamentary Labour party.

I would not care to gamble on the possibility that, in the four years that the current Parliament has to run from April 1998 onwards, no single parent will approach me and say, "I have lost £5 a week from an extremely tight family budget because of the withdrawal of the lone-parent premium"—or £6 a week because of the withdrawal of lone-parent benefit—and your Government cannot offer me a job that I can do so that I can compensate for that by my own efforts." As I have said, there are 10 people seeking every job.

One must assume from their actions that the Government are prepared to take that gamble—to gamble on the flawless implementation of their new deal programme in all areas, and to gamble on there being no downturn in economic growth. I endorse the programme, and applaud such initiatives as the funding of after-school club places and the introduction of enhanced child care disregards into the family credit regime. However—even leaving aside, for the purposes of my argument, lone parents who quite honourably choose to remain at home with their children; for heaven's sake, some mothers believe that the first five years of their children's growth require the personal attention of at least one parent, lone or otherwise—my support of those programmes cannot blind me to the possibility that the Government's reach will exceed their grasp, and that I can expect to see far more than one victim of that relative failure at my constituency advice bureaux over the next four years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt) said that potential claimants had come to her surgeries saying that they supported the broad thrust of the measure. I do not know where they get these surgeries from. I have been a Member of Parliament for nearly 15 years, and I can tell the House that it is no joke: my surgeries are bloody heartbreaking, and I do not want to add to that. My hon. Friend also claimed that we had inherited a shambles created by the Child Support Act 1991. Of course we did, but my hon. Friend failed to remind the House that the parliamentary Labour party trooped through the Lobby in order to enact it—and the person who led us through the Lobby was my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is now asking us to trust her on the basis of a review that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, has told us will be continuous.

If we are to have a review, why can we not depend on the review team headed by the Minister for Welfare Reform, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)? If we are to have a broad review, why can we not wait for the full package and see what we are going to buy? If we continue at this rate, we shall have to have a review of reviews, and probably another review after that.

What am I to say to the constituents who come to my surgeries? Am I to say that my faith in the Government's generally good intentions towards lone parents meant that I was prepared to support measures that resulted in their impoverishment? Can I justify such a stance? I am afraid that I cannot. I am a simple individual. That does not mean that I am stupid; it means that I am not convinced by some of the arguments that we have heard this evening.

Other right hon. and hon. Members will face the choice that I must face unless they can guarantee the universal success of the new deal for lone parents—and, in the real world, how can they? In that context, new Labour's rhetoric about hard choices is oddly reminiscent of the old left slogan, "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs." George Orwell had the best answer to that: he said, "So, show me the omelette." We should look at the omelette.

I do not want to delay the House, although I could continue for another 10 minutes. What we need to do can be summed up in two words—"precisely nothing", at least for the moment. I cannot vote for the new clause, because it suggests a change in the regulations, and I think that we must have time to take stock. We should pause, and take a breath. For that reason, I shall vote for amendment No. 1.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful for this opportunity to take part in the debate, which is one of the best that we have had for a long time. Perhaps that is not surprising because there is some cross-party agreement and such debates usually draw the best from hon. Members. Two arguments need some further review. My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) comprehensively demolished most of the Government's arguments. Since then the issue of the review, about which a couple of Labour Members spoke, has been introduced. Given the importance that

they attach to the review and that, as far as I am aware, no Opposition Member had heard a whisper of such a review until it was mentioned in the debate, I hope that in the new spirit of freedom of information the Government will be prepared to put the paper describing the review, which has apparently just been circulated to Labour Members, in the Library so that we may all see exactly what the Secretary of State proposes. If the document is such an important part of the argument, it should surely be available to all hon. Members.

The second main Government argument is that there is in some sense a choice between welfare to work and lone-parent benefit. I do not accept that, and I do not think that many Labour Members accept it. We have shown that there is money in the budget to reverse the benefit cuts. In addition, we have shown that while welfare to work is welcome—we have consistently welcomed it—even on the Government's figures no more than 50 per cent. of lone parents are expected to get back into long-term work as a result of the welfare-to-work programme. That means that at least 50 per cent. of lone parents will gain nothing from welfare to work but will have all the disadvantages of the lone-parent benefit cut. The two cannot be seen as the two sides of the argument. Lone parents who will gain nothing from welfare to work should be allowed to retain at least the benefits that they currently receive.

I shall not try to demolish the Government's arguments because they have already been comprehensively scattered to the winds. I shall give three positive reasons for Labour Members choosing to vote for amendment No. 1. They have rightly made great play of the importance of keeping their promises. I have already said that we are debating two promises. The first is the Government's promise to stick to the budget that they inherited. They will do that whatever the outcome of the vote. Thanks to the unexpectedly fast fall in unemployment and the measures in the Bill to block loopholes in national insurance, there is enough money in the social security budget to do more than cover the cost of reversing the benefit cut. The Government will keep that promise, so there is no point in using an argument about breaking it to persuade people to retain the cut.

Labour made another promise before the election. It is on record, perhaps not in its manifesto, but it was made by no less a person than the Secretary of State. That promise was to reverse the benefit cut. If the Government want to keep their promises, that is the one that they should consider and I urge them to do that. Hon. Members have spoken about disincentives to work. The Government rightly say that they want to remove such disincentives and give people every opportunity to find work. We support that, but it is quite clear that a benefit cut for new claimants must be a disincentive to work for those who are currently on the higher benefit level. If they get temporary jobs and are later thrown out of work, they will receive lower benefit, and that is clearly a disincentive to finding a job. That is a positive reason for Labour Members who wish to remove such disincentives to vote for amendment No. 1.

We support the Government's emphasis on dealing with social exclusion. They have set up a social exclusion unit. Good for them. They claim that they are trying to reduce the gap between the richest and the poorest which under the Tories grew so big. We support that, but how can they reduce that gap by making some of the very poorest even poorer? The Government cannot expect us to believe that they are intent on reducing social exclusion if they carry out their threat to make some of our poorest people even poorer.

8.15 pm

Labour Members who go through the Government Lobby will be voting with some of the most right-wing Tories in the House who for years have supported the policy of cutting lone-parent benefit. Do those Labour Members think that their friends and families and the people who worked for them before the May election, the members of their party and the constituency committees want them to vote with people such as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) to damage the interests of lone parents? Is that what people sent Labour Members here to do on 1 May? I challenge them to accept that almost all their constituency supporters support the amendment. They should accept that there are no arguments for voting against the amendment unless the sole intention is to enable the Secretary of State to save face.

Ms Harman: We have had a wide-ranging debate—

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your support and sustenance. As you know, many hon. Members wish to say why they intend to vote in favour of amendment No. 1 and against the legislation. If the Government move a motion that the Question be now put, I hope that you will take cognisance of the fact that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I hope that your arm will not be twisted by the Chief Whip or by any other Government Whip.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows me better than that.

Ms Harman: We have had a wide-ranging debate covering many issues relating to lone parents, and I will take this opportunity to set out the background to our policy and priorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), in his thoughtful and important speech, reminded the House that our task is to rebuild the welfare state and to do that around family and work patterns that have greatly changed since the welfare state was founded. Anyone starting to devise a system of support for lone parents and their children would start not just with benefits—if they were concerned about the living standards of lone parents, they would start by devising opportunities for work, for training for work and for child care to support work. They would also look at the responsibility of fathers to continue to pay for their children even if they do not live in the same household.

A modern system of support should start with the opportunities that have been denied to thousands of lone parents because of the previous Government's neglect. It would start with the opportunities that this Government have decided are their priority for lone parents. Our aim is to give lone parents the opportunities that previously they have not had. Anyone starting out to devise a system of support for lone parents would make it a priority to provide them with the support that they need to take advantage of those opportunities. There would be support for lone parents in taking the opportunity to work, such

[Ms Harman]

as help with job search, and with finding and paying for the right child care. There would be support with training. Anyone devising such a system would start with measures that the Government are already implementing.

The new deal for lone parents, a national child care strategy, extra help with the cost of child care, and a national minimum wage will help lone parents get into work, and will help make work pay. The Government are addressing all the issues raised by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who moved the amendment.

Mrs. Fyfe: I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend. Will she explain to me why it is her policy that a lone parent in work who loses her job should be treated as a new lone parent and should have a lesser benefit? What is the logic of that?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises the important issue of whether our proposals will be a disincentive to lone mothers to take work. I ask her to bear with me, because I shall answer that question. If I do not answer it satisfactorily, I will give way to her again.

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, because I know that she wants to make progress. She has talked about the support that she wants to give lone mothers, especially those who go back to work. All hon. Members welcome that support, but what support will she give lone mothers who have to stay at home either because they feel that their children are too young to leave in the care of others, or because they cannot find a job?

Ms Harman: I shall address that point. The clause deals with the benefits for lone parents who are in work, not the benefits for those not in work.

In my view, in the Government's view and in the view of those who elected us, the failure to invest in opportunity in the past 18 years means that providing opportunities must be our first priority. We are delivering those opportunities. We are offering lone parents a new deal and providing them with what they want, which is the opportunity to work instead of a life devoid of any choice except dependence on benefits.

Most lone parents want to work. They know that that is the only way to improve the living standards of their families and to be able to afford all the things to which my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) referred. Lone parents want those things for their children, and they know that they can get them by working. But work is about more than money.

Dr. Lynne Jones: My right hon. Friend talks about the desire of lone parents to work. Does she recall her own words in her book "The Century Gap", in which she wrote:

> "As the century gap narrows, it is to be hoped that taking time out of paid employment to care for small children will come to be considered as valuable an occupation as any other in society"?

Does she now reject that argument?

Ms Harman: The hon. Lady will know—

Mr. Burns: Hon. Friend.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend will know that in that book I also argued that it is important to extend choice so that lone mothers can have the financial independence that work affords. My hon. Friend will recognise that that theme runs strongly through my book.

Lone mothers say that work is about more than money, although that is important. Work for them means that they do not have to depend on benefits. They can show their children that income is about work rather than benefits. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) referred to the work ethic. He said that we should be concerned about estates where people are growing up, generation after generation, never experiencing the world of work. Lone parents in my constituency tell me that they are concerned about their children. They want to work so that they can set an example for their children, and can bring them up to understand that life is about work and not just about claiming benefits. They want the Government to deliver those opportunities, so that they can set that example to their children, and that is what we shall do.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): What would my right hon. Friend say to people in my constituency, where there are 1,500 lone parents and 200 jobs advertised at the jobcentre? Where are the jobs to come from?

Ms Harman: Even in areas where jobs are available and where there is a trend for married mothers to go into work, lone mothers get left behind and trapped on benefits. We are trying to ensure equality of opportunity for lone parents to be able to work. Our starting point and our priority for investment is to back them with opportunities to work, whether in part-time or full-time jobs.

Many hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), rightly reminded the House that lone parents are often poor. I have argued in the House for 15 years that lone parents are poor, but I have also argued that it is not lone parenthood of itself that makes them and their children poor: it is the absence of an opportunity to work. While married women have entered the labour market in ever greater numbers, lone mothers, who want to work and most need to work, have been left behind.

The Government are committed to tackling the causes of poverty, not just the symptoms. That means tackling the barriers that lone parents face when they want to get into work. That is what is done in other European countries, where lone mothers are twice as likely to be in work and only half as likely to be dependent on benefits as they are in this country. Lone mothers elsewhere in Europe are better off, because those countries tackle poverty among lone parents and their children by supporting them with opportunities to work and with child care, and that is what we should do, too.

Dr. Lynne Jones: What my right hon. Friend says about opportunities for lone parents in other European countries is undoubtedly true. Is it not also true that the benefits system and sex education in those countries are better? Should we not learn a lesson from that as well?

Ms Harman: I agree with my hon. Friend that sex education is important, but European countries which support lone parents with an impressive, high-quality

child care infrastructure, and with support to get them into work and help them stay in work, do not necessarily have better benefit systems for lone parents who do not work.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Work is exceedingly difficult to find in my constituency for people of all ages and of both sexes. If my right hon. Friend must make tough decisions, why does she not recommend the taxing of child benefit paid to those earning in excess of £40,000 per annum?

Ms Harman: I will deal with the issue of choices in spending later in my speech, but I should like now to deal with the specific measures that hon. Members will vote on today.

Clause 70 of the Bill provides power to equalise rates of child benefit for lone parents and couple families. The provision will therefore affect the income only of lone parents who are in work and will not affect the income of lone parents who are not in work. The House has already had opportunities to debate the benefits of lone mothers out of work, and those benefits have been introduced through separate regulations. The lone mothers who are the subject of today's vote are those who are in work or who are considering work.

8.30 pm

Two substantive questions have been asked in this debate, and I should like to answer them. The first is whether lone parents have extra costs in work beyond those faced by couple families. The second question—which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) asked—is whether the measure will discourage lone parents from taking work. Many hon. Members have asked those questions today.

The answer to the first question is yes, lone parents face extra costs in work beyond those faced by couple families. However, the Government are dealing with those extra costs, because they are child care costs. Access to high-quality affordable child care is crucial if lone parents are to have the same opportunities to work as other families. That is why the we said in our manifesto that we would develop a national child care strategy to help parents balance work and family life. We are making that a reality.

Our national child care strategy will have three parts: meeting parents' demands for accessible, high-quality and affordable child care.

First, on accessibility, the Government have made the biggest ever investment in child care. There will be £300 million from the national lottery and the Exchequer to extend out-of-school child care. The additional 30,000 out-of-school projects represent a 10-fold increase on current provision, and they mean that there will be places for almost a million children. Child care will therefore be available for those children before school if necessary, after school if necessary, and in the school holidays. Moreover, there will be help for the under-fives.

Every parent will have access in their community to out-of-school care for their child. I feel very proud of that achievement, which has come so early in the life of the Government. In 1983, I tabled my first parliamentary question, asking the then Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher, whether she would consider concerns about a complete lack of after-school clubs preventing parents from being able to balance work and home responsibilities. She wrote that off as rubbish, as did a subsequent Tory Prime Minister. This Labour Government, however, are now delivering on that commitment. We are delivering after-school care in addition to the other measures to which we are committed in helping to improve access to child care.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I do not think that there is a Labour Member in the Chamber who would not and does not welcome the national child care strategy, but will my right hon. Friend explain why we cannot deliver the national child care strategy before pulling away the safety net of benefit support? If we were to do that, our proposals would be coherent in a way in which they currently are not.

Ms Harman: As I shall explain in a moment, help with child care costs and extra child care provision will come on stream at the same time as the benefit changes for lone parents who are in work.

Our action on after-school clubs is in addition to our other measures to help improve access to child care. We will provide a nursery place for every four-year-old in Britain, and we will promote an integrated approach to education, child care and family services in our early excellence centres.

The second strand of the national child care strategy is quality. We have always said that child care should not be about numbers and that the quality of care is vital. We will therefore invest £100 million extra in training nursery and play staff.

The third element is affordability. Clause 70 is about the flat-rate additional allowance of about £6 a week in child benefit. A £6 flat rate does not make sufficient difference for many parents who have to pay the high costs of child care. We have therefore announced extra help with child care costs through the child care disregard for in-work benefits. The disregard will be introduced on the same day as the measure that we are now debating.

The extra help will mean that a lone parent with one or two children can receive up to £95.50 per week towards the cost of child care—almost £40 per week more than is currently available.

Audrey Wise: Does not the disregard mean that to qualify for a £100 disregard a parent must be able to spend £100 on child care? Is it not true that as most of those parents receive maximum family credit, the extra disregard will not make a ha'p'orth of a difference?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend has welcomed the extra help through the child care disregard, but says that it does not go far enough—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] She says that of itself the disregard—although it is an extra contribution to child care costs—is not enough. I agree with her. It is only the first step. The Chancellor has announced that there will be more help with child care costs through the working families tax credit.

The measures focus help where it is needed—on lone parents' child care costs. The measures mean that some lone parents will receive more benefit help in work than they currently receive, and that some lone parents who could never before have contemplated work will now be

[Ms Harman]

able to do so because they will be able to afford child care. Together, our measures amount to a major new child care programme, demonstrating that our priority is to invest in opportunity by giving lone parents the same opportunity to participate fully in society and to support their families through work. It is the best way forward.

Again, my answer to the question whether lone parents have extra costs in work beyond those experienced by couple families is yes, but they are child care costs and we are helping to meet them.

The second question that many hon. Members have raised is whether the measure will discourage lone parents from taking up work. My answer to that is no. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Hon. Members ask why, so I will explain. First, lone parents want to work because they are better off in work than they can be on benefit. Research suggests that the average additional income for lone parents already in work and on family credit is more than £50 a week above the estimate of their out-of-work income.

Dr. Marek: May I draw the Secretary of State's attention to a House of Commons Library research paper which disproves the argument that such people will be £50 a week better off? The paper says that they will be £10 better off when child care and travel costs are taken into account. A footnote to the paper says:

"Indeed, they would be better off if they stayed on income support and managed to earn £10-£15 per week from a part-time job which did not necessitate child care costs."

Will the right hon. Lady please not use the £50 figure? It is inaccurate and she must get her officials to look into the matter and find the right figures.

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hon. Friend."] My hon. Friend rightly reminds the House that the Policy Studies Institute research takes account of the income that lone mothers get in work without taking account of their child care costs. I have pointed out that that research also does not take account of the extra help with child care costs that the Government are giving and will continue to give.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Harman: I have given way about nine times. I am confident that I am about to answer the question that my hon. Friend has not asked.

Will the measure discourage lone parents from taking up work? The answer is no. First, lone parents want to work because they know that even if they have part-time work, with family credit they are better off than they can be on benefit. Secondly, lone parents will not be discouraged from taking up work because many lone parents want to work, not just for financial reasons, but because they do not want to be dependent on benefit. The lone mothers in my constituency say to me, "We want to work—we do not want to be dependent on benefit because we want to set an example to our children."

Mrs. Fyfe: Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Ms Abbott: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Harman: Lone parents want their children to know that work is better than benefit dependency. They want to provide a positive role so that their children can see that work brings independence and self-esteem. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), to whom I will give way, agrees that lone mothers are keen to work and to have opportunities.

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who has been extremely generous in giving way. She argues that the cuts in child benefit will not be a disincentive to lone mothers to work. I draw to her attention the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study, "Making Work Pay", which states:

"If lone mothers are pushed into hardship, for example through changes in benefit entitlements . . . their chances of getting into paid work may be drastically reduced."

Ms Harman: That study was researched before we introduced our proposals. We will implement them. That research does not take account of the extra help we shall give lone mothers with the extra costs of child care.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank my right hon. Friend for her generosity. I am sure that we all agree that most lone parents do want to work if the situation allows them to do so. My right hon. Friend's comments assume, however, that every employer is a nice, kind, generous one who will understand a mother's family problems and will not sack her unreasonably. For the first two years of any employment, people cannot take a case to an industrial tribunal. I know that some of my party colleagues are somewhat distanced from the trade unions these days, but they should realise that not all employers are good ones.

Ms Harman: Lone mothers are well aware, as is everyone else, that the first job one gets does not necessarily prove to be permanent or a job for life. I believe that lone mothers want to work because they are better off and because they want to set an example to their children. They have said clearly that many of them cannot work because they need help and support to find it. They need practical help with finding a job and with finding accessible, affordable child care. The Government will deliver that through the new deal for lone parents and the national child care strategy.

Ann Clwyd: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Harman: I will press on with my comments because this has been a long debate. I may give way later.

8.45 pm

In consultation with lone parent organisations, we have developed a radical new programme that offers lone parents throughout Britain the opportunity to find work. Lone parents welcome that programme and employers have been offering jobs to lone parents, some of whom have been on benefit for five, 10 or even 20 years. The new deal for lone parents is real welfare reform in action. It is a completely new service which extends opportunities where they never were before.

Ann Clwyd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Will she confirm that if a lone parent loses

their job or has to leave it because their child becomes ill, they will get a cut in benefit when they return to that benefit?

Ms Harman: If a lone parent loses her job and goes back to income support, she will get the same rate of benefit for her child as a married couple on the same income.

I have already announced that from next April all lone parents newly claiming income support will be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new deal. We are not excluding those with young children from those opportunities. As my hon. Friends have asked today, we shall keep all the issues under review. We are investing the best part of £1 million in evaluating the effectiveness of our new deal.

The Liberal Democrats have backed our welfare-to-work proposals, but they opposed the windfall levy which finances them and they oppose any cuts to pay for them. We do not have the luxury that they afford themselves. I remind the House that existing lone parents will continue to receive the higher rate of child benefit.

Mr. Livingstone: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have just had a message on my pager which says, "A vote is expected in the next few minutes." May we have an assurance that you will allow the debate to continue? A large number of hon. Members have sat here throughout the debate. I was lucky to be called, but there are many more who wish to speak. May we have an undertaking—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I do not possess a pager, so I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Ms Harman: I remind the House that existing lone parents will continue to receive the higher rate of child benefit. We have built in additional protection for lone parents currently on income support. They will continue to be entitled to claim the lone-parent rate of child benefit when they move into work.

Mr. Swinney *rose—*

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Ms Harman: I will not give way to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) because I am about to conclude my comments. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Lady is not giving way.

Mr. Corbyn: She has not seen me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have seen the hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Lady is not giving way.

Ms Harman: On the contrary, I certainly had seen my hon. Friend.

Lone parents have told us that they need help to find work and that they need help with child care in work. The Government are providing that. That is why the answer to the second question is that we do not believe that the benefit changes will deter lone parents from moving into work. Our programme will extend opportunities to lone mothers, who will be better off in work than they could ever have been on any rate of benefit.

Mrs. Mahon: The Secretary of State has been good enough to give way many times and she has answered a couple of questions, but she has not answered mine. If a lone parent chooses not to take part in the new deal because they feel that they need to stay at home with their family, will they be allowed that choice or will the new deal become compulsory?

Ms Harman: There is no intention that the new deal should drive lone mothers with young children out to work. We are doing what we said that we would do in our manifesto, which is to offer opportunities for lone mothers who previously did not have them.

Many Labour Members have raised the issue of what people voted the Government in to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) reminded the House in his thoughtful speech that when we asked people to vote for us earlier this year, we told them that we would tackle poverty and social exclusion. We told them how we would do so, which was by promoting opportunity. We told them also that we believed that work was the best form of welfare for people of working age. We said that we would invest in helping people to move from benefits to work. We said also that we would offer a hand-up, not merely a handout.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) urges us to abandon our manifesto. I say to him that we should not do so. The public clearly want an active approach to welfare so that everyone works for his or her living if that is possible, and that is what we have promised to do.

Under the previous Government there were no substantive measures to help lone parents into work. I criticised the previous Administration for merely proposing benefit cuts and providing no opportunities for lone parents to be better off in work. Without the recent general election and without a Labour Government in office, that would have been the end of the story, but it is not. Our approach is different from that of the previous Government.

Work and opportunity are at the heart of the Government's approach, and that extends to lone parents, who for many years have been invisible in the House except when it came to the opportunity for criticising them. Our manifesto promised to provide help for lone parents in moving into work, and that is what is expected of us. Indeed, that is what we are delivering.

I explained at the outset that the measure on which the House is to vote is about lone parents who are in work or who are considering work. It is not about benefit levels for lone mothers who are out of work. I have addressed the substantive issues and explained the Government's approach in the light of our manifesto promises. I ask the House to reject the amendment and the new clause.

Mr. Webb: After more than four hours of debate, I have no desire to detain the House from dividing. We have heard the Secretary of State's response and my colleagues and I feel that it did not take up the key

[Mr. Webb]

question: what is the point of clause 70? The money is not needed; the Government do not need the money, but lone parents do.

The Secretary of State mentioned her challenge to Baroness Thatcher—then Mrs. Thatcher—on first entering the House. It occurred to us on the Liberal Democrat Benches that if the then Mrs. Thatcher been here tonight, it is clear which Lobby she would have passed through.

We have laid before the House two ways of objecting to an objectionable part of the Bill. We have offered new clause 1, which is the positive approach that the Liberal Democrats would take. We have heard from Labour Members that although they disagree with the clause they would have difficulty in supporting new clause 1, and we respect that position.

We shall pursue new clause 1 to a Division, having had an assurance from the Chair that there will be a separate Division on amendment No. 1. That assurance came from the Chair earlier in the day, and we are grateful for it. I understand that a Division will take place on the new clause and that there will then be a discussion on backdating. That having taken place, I understand that there will be a debate on amendment No. 1, which will take place in the normal way. That is my understanding.

We have not heard a convincing response. It is time that we stood up for lone parents.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Nick Brown) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 62, Noes 458.

Division No. 112] **[8.55 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McGrady, Eddie
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swinney, John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alex Salmond and
Mr. Donald Gorrie.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burns, Simon
Butler, Mrs Christine
Butterfill, John
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Church, Ms Judith
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Drew, David
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel

Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Andrew
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLeish, Henry
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prior, David
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
St Aubyn, Nick
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael

Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr Rudi
Waller, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Wells, Bowen
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 2

BACKDATING OF BENEFIT

'.—(1) For subsection (2) of section 1 of the Administration Act (entitlement to benefit dependent on claim) there shall be substituted the following subsection—

"(2) Except as provided by section 3 below, where under subsection (1) above a person is required to make a claim, or to be treated as making a claim, for a benefit in order to be entitled to it, the person shall be entitled to it—

(a) from the date on which the claim is made; or

(b) in respect of the period from the date on which the conditions for entitlement to benefit would have been satisfied had a claim been made at that time, or 12 months prior to the claim, whichever is the later, provided that that claim was made without unreasonable delay and that benefit shall only be paid in respect of such periods during which the person would have been so entitled.".'.—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Webb: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New schedule 1—*'Exceptions to the backdating of benefits—*

All Benefits

1. The backdating of benefits for a period longer than one month may be allowed for—

(a) cases where entitlement to benefit is dependent on the claimant's, or another person's entitlement to another benefit; and

(b) Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance claims, where a previous claim to Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance has been refused because the claimant or partner is in remunerative work and the Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance Claim is made within 14 days of the determination on the Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance claim.

Income Related Benefits

2. The backdating of income related benefits for a period no longer than one month may be allowed for—

(a) claimants who have difficulty communicating because of learning, language or literacy difficulties;

(b) claimants who are deaf or blind for whom there is no one else to make their claim;

(c) claimants who are ill or disabled for whom there is no one else to make their claim, except in the case of a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance;

(d) claimants who were given misleading information by an officer of the Department of Social Security or of the Department for Education and Employment;

(e) claimants who were given misleading advice in writing by a solicitor or other professional adviser, or by a medical practitioner, a Local Authority or by a person working in a Citizens Advice Bureau or a similar advice agency;

(f) claimants who have been given misleading information in writing about their income or capital by their employer or former employer, or by a bank or building society;

(g) claimants who are required to deal with a domestic emergency affecting them, for whom there is no one else to make the claim; and

(h) claimants who are prevented from attending the appropriate office by adverse weather conditions.

Delayed Claims

3. The backdating of income related benefits for a period no longer than one month may be allowed in cases where claimants are forced to delay claiming because—

(a) the appropriate office, where the claimant would be expected to make a claim, was unable to provide a service and alternative arrangements were not available;

(b) the claimant was unable to attend the appropriate office due to difficulties with his normal mode of transport and there was no reasonable alternative available;

(c) there were adverse postal conditions;

(d) the claimant was previously in receipt of another benefit, and notification of expiry of entitlement to that benefit was not sent to the claimant before the date that his entitlement expired;

(e) for Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance the claimant had previously been entitled to Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance and the claim for Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance was made within one month of expiry of entitlement to the previous benefit;

(f) for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance the claimant had previously been entitled to Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance and the claim for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance was made within one month of expiry of entitlement to the previous benefit;

(g) the claimant recently separated from his partner; or

(h) a close relative of the claimant recently died.

Refugees

4. Refugees may be allowed, where the Secretary of State thinks it appropriate to claim backdated awards of Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to the date of the asylum application.

Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance

5. Claims for Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance may be allowed to be backdated if employers delay in notifying the claimants that they had no entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay or Statutory Maternity Pay.

Further Exceptions

6. Further exceptions may be allowed in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed.

Amendment No. 2, in clause 72, page 47, leave out lines 7 to 26.

Amendment No. 6, in clause 72, page 47, leave out lines 14 to 19 and insert—

'(a) in respect of contributory benefits, non-contributory benefits and pensions, grants and allowances paid under the Naval, Military and Airforce (for disablement and death) Service Pensions Order 1983–

(i) in respect of any period (or, in the case of a widow's payment, any death occurring) more than three months before the date on which the claim is made or treated to as made; or

(ii) in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed, in respect of any period before that date; and

(b) in respect of, income-related benefits, benefit for industrial injuries and child benefit–

(i) in respect of any period more than one month before the date on which the claim is made or treated as made; or

(ii) in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed, in respect of any period before that date.

( ) In this section "contributory benefits", "non-contributory benefits", "income related benefits", "benefit for industrial injuries", and "child benefit" shall have the same meaning as defined in Chapter 4 of the Contributions and Benefits Act 1992.'.

Amendment No. 32, in clause 72, page 47, line 18, leave out 'may be prescribed' and insert

'are prescribed in Schedule (*Exceptions to the backdating of benefits*)'.

Government amendment No. 18.

Mr. Webb: I am sure that the House will want to move promptly to the vote on amendment No. 1, so I shall be as brief as possible. New clause 2—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Webb: New clause 2 relates to the backdating of benefit claims where an individual does not make a claim on time. Until April 1997, it was possible to backdate a claim for up to 12 months if one had good cause for not making a claim on time. From April 1997, the Conservatives introduced a cut. They removed the idea of good cause and restricted backdating to a maximum of three months. That took £120 million from some of the poorest people in the country, including £50 million from pensioners and £50 from the sick and disabled.

Clause 72, which new clause 2 seeks to overturn—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is extremely unfair to the hon. Gentleman that the House is so noisy. Perhaps conversations could take place outside the Chamber.

Mr. Webb: Clause 72 further restricts people's rights when they claim their benefits late. It goes even further than the Conservatives were prepared to go. It takes an extra £60 million from the poorest households in the country, penalises them for ignorance of the system, takes £14 million off pensioners and takes £18 million from disabled people. The losers include 100,000 people on income support. This is not merely discretionary money that does not matter. Basic living standards will suffer.

The clause introduces restrictions on the backdating of housing benefit, reducing it for the first time from one year to one month. That means that people who build up rent arrears because they claim their benefit late will not be able to clear those arrears by means of a backdated payment, and may lose their house.

The St. Mungo's centre in London is worried about the implications of the backdating changes. It says:

"Backdating housing benefit can help them keep up to date with their rent, cope in their own homes and not end up back on the streets."

New clause 2 seeks to overturn clause 72 and introduce an alternative provision. Clause 72 could lead to greater homelessness and greater public expenditure.

The fundamental point is that on Second Reading the Secretary of State said:

"We want to ensure that the system is not run on the basis of getting things wrong and then backdating to sort them out."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 787.]

In other words, let us get things right first time and not backdate when they have gone wrong. We agree with that, but the paradox about the backdating proposals in the Bill is that if no one received his money late, backdating would not be necessary. If the system gets money to people on time, we do not need clause 72 or new clause 2, but the Government know, and we know, that people will continue to get their money late through no fault of their own, and clause 72 restricts their right to receive it.

New clause 2 simply says that people should have up to 12 months backdated benefit if, for a good reason, they delay a claim. What are the good reasons why people claim their benefits late? They can be ill health, infirmity, lack of understanding of the system—for goodness sake, it is complicated—or bereavement.

Representatives of elderly people's organisations say that it is unreasonable to expect that a bereaved person will always be able to find the way through the maze of benefits, such as income support, within a month of the death. The measure penalises bereaved people and those who do not understand the system.

New clause 2 simply says that if one has a good reason for claiming late, one should be able to claim up to a year's backdating. Without the new clause, the Bill will penalise people who, through no fault of their own, do not understand the system.

9.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I shall not support the amendments and shall support the Government, but I want to discuss issues relating to industrial injuries disablement benefit, because neither the amendments nor the new clause address that issue. As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said, the previous Government abolished the whole concept of a good-cause exception, and nothing in the amendments or the new clause addresses that fundamental problem.

We have to go far beyond the concept of backdating for one, two or three months or even a year; we need to look fundamentally at the way we address the issue, because industrial injuries disablement benefit raises special problems. Sometimes symptoms can develop late—long after illness has started and long after exposure to harmful substances such as asbestos has occurred. Asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma lead to an extremely unpleasant death, as I have seen in my previous life as a lawyer representing people with mesothelioma.

Mr. Godman: My hon. Friend obviously has legal experience, so can he correct an assumption of mine?

[Mr. Godman]

I was under the impression, following a famous case taken by a commissioner, that there was such a thing as justifiable ignorance; is that not still the case?

Mr. Dismore: It is my understanding that the previous Government abolished that, with effect from April 1997. That is the issue I am currently addressing and I hope to give some ideas to the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), who is to respond to the debate.

Mesothelioma is a prime example of the problems that can arise. It leads to an extremely unpleasant death, especially in the last three months of life. It is a fatal illness and those last three months are extremely traumatic for the family and extremely painful and distressing for the individual sufferer. Similar problems arise in respect of other industrial diseases and cancers.

Sometimes, there can be late diagnosis or even a diagnosis made only after the post mortem. Regrettably, that is an all too frequent occurrence in respect of lung diseases. In addition, diagnosis can take a long time to come through: for example, patch testing for dermatitis can take many weeks before a diagnosis can be made.

Problems can arise in making a causal connection between the illness and the hazard at work that caused it. An example I cited in Committee was that of a dental nurse whose claim I dealt with, who suffered from glutaraldehyde poisoning. Glutaraldehyde is a sterilising chemical used in dentistry; the nurse suffered quite severe nasal and respiratory trouble, but it was nearly a year before she realised that there was a causal connection between the chemicals with which she was working and her illness.

Repetitive strain injury is becoming an increasingly common and recognised problem, particularly for those who work on keyboards. Again, the causal connection can often be extremely difficult to establish, and a diagnosis may be long in the making. That problem was recognised by the Social Security Advisory Committee, which commented on the previous Government's proposals and said that one of the problems with delays in the payment of disability benefit was that

"the delay in establishing the correct diagnosis may take months or even years, given that General Practitioners will often need to refer cases to specialists. Moreover, the attribution of a commonly recurring condition to an occupational cause is often controversial, leading to a longer delay."

It was critical of the previous Government's proposals.

The answer is not to go back to the old ways of simply looking at the matter in terms of good cause. We need to develop new ideas to deal with such cases. The problem with good cause is that it relied on the discretion of an adjudication officer in the Department of Social Security. If one has to rely on someone's discretion, the decision can go either way.

I have some sympathy with the previous Government's response to the SSAC's comments on good cause. They said that the problem with the good-cause exception was that it ran

"counter to the objective of improving administrative efficiency by aligning the backdating rules as far as possible and removing the need for adjudication officers to consider good cause, which is a costly provision to operate."

I should like to devise a new way of looking at such cases which did not rely on a good-cause defence and gave people the right to have benefit from an early stage, perhaps from the date of diagnosis or perhaps some other possible date.

As part of our overall review of social security we must look at that problem and come up with an imaginative solution rather than opting for the old methods used pre-April 1997 or the old method of backdating payment for a month or two. Frankly, that does not address the evil that I have identified in some of the cases and illnesses I have described. To backdate a claim for two months, three months or perhaps a year is purely arbitrary. We must find a more imaginative way of proceeding.

Mr. Godman: I should like to cite an example where I believe that a claim of justifiable ignorance would be useful. Recently, two of my constituents who are crew members of a Caledonian MacBrayne ferry complained to me about their experience. They went into the crew's quarters and were told that it contained asbestos-contaminated material. I advised them to inform the Health and Safety Executive in Glasgow. Could that action be used as evidence if, God forbid, they had to make a claim in 10 years or 15 years because they were suffering from asbestosis?

Mr. Dismore: That could be evidence in a civil law claim, but that does not address the problem that faces us, which relates to the industrial injuries scheme. That evidence may prove good causal connection at a later date, but the difficulty with respiratory conditions in particular is that it is often many years before the illness starts to develop. It may be many years after that before the sufferer, thinking back 20 years, makes a causal connection and seeks a diagnosis from the GP. After that, it may be some time before the patient is referred to a consultant for an opinion. Some conditions are not even detected until a post mortem is conducted. Those problems with the old system are not addressed by the amendments. That is why we need to look for a more imaginative solution.

I do not want to run the risk of people making premature claims. I do not want people to make speculative claims because they think, "I may have a certain condition and I had better put a claim in quick just in case because I do not want to be caught up by some backdating rules." Such claims could clog up the system and defeat the prime objective of the Bill. It is about not just lone-parent benefit or backdating, but the fundamental need to modernise the social security claims system to make it work more efficiently. The problems associated with backdating could militate against that laudable goal.

We must think about imaginative solutions and I hope that the Minister will assure us that he will consider that as part of an overall review of DSS procedures and benefits. I hope that, at a later date, he will offer us some ideas to deal with a real problem.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): In support of my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), may I tell the Minister that in my inner-city constituency, hardly a week goes by without people coming to my surgery already at risk or having suffered loss of benefit because they have not been able

to claim on time, or have not been advised that they had a right to claim, or have been misled by others. They expected the Government to rescue them from the callousness of the previous Government, yet the Labour Government intend to target the people who are struggling most.

I hope that the Minister and his colleagues understand the practical implications for people who are desperately trying to make ends meet. When they fail, some of them are driven to illness, self-abuse, suicide attempts and so on, because they are not coping. It is a real, practical, weekly problem, and for those of us who try to look after them, the proposal is one of the most unhelpful steps that the Government could take.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Clause 72 is not only draconian in its effect, but is perhaps the only truly original part of the Bill. It was not proposed by the previous Government, but is entirely home grown. It might be for the convenience of the House to say that we intend to divide on new schedule 1.

In Committee, Conservative Members expressed the deep concerns of many organisations about the Government's proposals to restrict the backdating of benefit claims. The Bill allows enormous scope to the Government to legislate by regulations later. Indeed, that was a subplot throughout the Committee stage. More than once, the Minister promised to let the Committee see draft regulations to be passed under the Bill, and on a number of occasions we pressed him to redeem that promise. However, there has so far been a marked reluctance by Ministers to produce those draft regulations, and by and large the Committee stage came and went without any drafts.

Even on Second Reading, Ministers were clearly defensive on the subject of backdating. They said that hardship provisions would be considered in Committee. The Committee was indebted to the Minister for a stream of helpful letters and memorandums on various aspects of the Bill. The Minister was at pains to ensure that the Committee had the benefit of the Government's thinking on a number of issues, yet until we came to the debate on clause 72, the Committee had been kept in the dark on backdating. One might say that that was the dog that did not bark.

On 20 November, shortly after the debate had commenced, the Minister rose to announce a series of exemptions from the effects of clause 72. That was followed by the Minister's letter to the Committee dated 25 November, setting out in enormous detail the various exemptions. The fact that the Minister has been so detailed and frank about the Government's intentions is not, I believe, a result of the Government's professed commitment to open government—which, as we have seen on more than one occasion recently, is much in doubt. Rather, it is a tribute to the persistence of the Opposition on the Committee.

New schedule 1 and amendment No. 32 have the simple effect of listing the same exemptions that the Minister listed in his letter to the Committee of 25 November—no more, no less. The effect of the new schedule is to challenge the Government to put in the Bill what they claim that they intend to do by way of regulation. These are important issues affecting many vulnerable people, and they should appear in the Bill. If the Government were able to give in Committee such a precise list of exceptions to the harsh backdating provisions, surely they can commit themselves and accept our new schedule.

At the end of the proposed new schedule, we make it clear that further exceptions may be allowed. That merely echoes what the Minister stated in his letter to the Committee. In addition, amendment No. 6 seeks to take account of the Government's arguments for cost cutting, and to recognise that there are many groups, including the elderly, the recently widowed and the severely disabled, for whom one month will simply not be enough time. The amendment targets those groups and gives them an extra two months' leeway. Moreover, with respect to contributory benefits, backdating will give them money to which they are entitled and to which they have contributed through their national insurance contributions.

I also point out to the Minister that the distinction we seek to draw in the amendment between the various types of benefit is exactly the same as the distinction that he drew in his letter of 25 November—I see the Minister nodding. In that letter, he says that there will be automatic backdating for non-income-related benefits such as retirement pension, widows' benefit and child benefit. The principal, if not the only, difference between what we suggest and what the Minister proposes is that we advocate three months and he wants only one month. The amendment provides for three months' backdating for incapacity benefit, invalidity benefit, maternity allowances, benefits for widows and widowers, retirement pensions, war widows' pensions, attendance allowances, severe disablement allowances, invalidity care allowances and disability living allowances.

9.30 pm

The amendment is an attempt to persuade the Government to compromise and accept the adverse effects that clause 72 will have on many vulnerable people. I have already explained that the clause can claim no parentage from the previous Government. It is not open to the Minister to claim, as the Secretary of State claims, that in some bizarre way he is a prisoner of the Conservative Government's spending plans.

What is the Government's motive in bringing forward those tough provisions? Are they designed to correct some perceived unfairness or anomaly in the existing system? The answer is no: clause 72 is about saving money, and nothing else. In fairness, the Government have been very up front about that. The sole reason given for the clause was to meet the costs of the Government's decision to revoke the single room rent restriction on single housing benefit claimants aged under 25. By way of parenthesis, it is interesting to note that the Minister has had very little to say about the future of 25 to 59-year-olds—it seems that that is a matter for review.

It was also pointed out in Committee that research has shown that the Government's plans were based on there being 155,000 more rent allowance claimants than there actually are. A recent report by the National Federation of Landlords has estimated that housing benefit expenditure could be as much as £500 million less in a year than had been anticipated.

That brings me to the curious case of the constant £57 million. As the Minister readily conceded in his letter to the Committee of 25 November, when the Bill was first published on 9 July, the explanatory and financial memorandum stated that clause 72 was expected to generate net programme savings of £57 million in a full year. I have pointed out that, on Second Reading,

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

Ministers said that they were already thinking about possible exceptions. However, as the Minister said in his letter, they

"had not decided on the range and type of specific exceptions".

The Minister explained how the Government had been taking careful note of the representations from groups such as Age Concern and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. He said:

"it was only very recently that final decisions could be taken on the range of exceptions".

The use of the word "final" is curious because in his letter and in Committee the Minister said that the proposed regulations were certainly not set in stone, yet the line taken by the Minister both in correspondence and in Committee was that the figure of £57 million remained valid.

When pressed by me in Committee on how the original estimate would be affected by the exclusions he had just announced, the Minister maintained that the figure included those exceptions. It surely cannot be right that the original figure of £57 million remains accurate and takes full account of the long list of complex exclusions. Is it really the case that those exclusions will not make a difference of a penny more or less to the predicted figure?

In Committee, the Minister talked about a "broad brush", but the figure of £57 million is pretty precise in the broader context of the social security budget. Now that he has had more time for mature reflection, I ask the Minister to be a little more frank on that subject. It stands to reason that either the £57 million figure was right originally and is now wrong, having been overtaken by events—we could all understand that, and there would be no shame in admitting it—or, if the new figure is believed to be accurate and takes full account of the proposed exemptions, the original estimate must have been wrong. It would also be helpful if the Minister could explain precisely how he and his colleagues intend to spend that not insignificant saving. Will it be taken up elsewhere in their budget, or will it be snaffled by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for other purposes? Since the Committee stage, the Minister has had a fair time to reflect on the matter and I await his answers with interest. In passing, I note estimates that, in a single year, the Government's clause will affect 105,000 income support claimants, 50,000 housing benefit claimants and 115,000 council tax benefit claimants.

I have explained the circumstances in which the Minister's announcement came to be made in Committee. I make no personal criticism of the Minister, but it would be fair to say that the Committee was taken by surprise—it was "bounced". Without any notice or proper briefing on that long, complex list of exclusions, all that I and my hon. Friends could do was give the Minister's announcement a cautious welcome. I said that we would give it more detailed consideration, as would concerned organisations.

That has happened and, in many respects, the Minister's announcement has been seen through. For example, Age Concern says that, for means-tested benefits, the Minister's much-flaunted exceptions are very much in line with the current "special reasons" for backdating. In future, a maximum of one month will be permitted in replacement of the current three months for income support and 12 months for housing and council tax benefits. The one-month limit will apply even if the claim has not been pressed because of misleading information from benefit staff or other sources, or because someone had been seriously ill at the time.

Age Concern is also worried about the inflexible one-month limit for means-tested or non-means-tested benefits where there has been a bereavement. The Minister tried to deal with that in Committee by saying that nearly all widows' benefit claims are made within one month of the death of the spouse, but Age Concern, which should know after all, does not accept that that is necessarily true for means-tested benefits for which people will qualify only after the death of the spouse.

In Committee, we welcomed the Government's acknowledgment of the problems that can arise where a benefit claim depends on the claimant's entitlement, or another person's entitlement, to another benefit. However, I join Age Concern in seeking reassurance from the Minister that the backdating provisions will be applied flexibly, so that people do not have to make unnecessary claims for benefits to which they know they are not entitled.

I have no doubt that the Minister will repeat the argument that if people are better informed about the benefits to which they are entitled, that will reduce the need for backdating. That is a superficially attractive argument. Surely a better system can be devised, so that we do not depend on backdating to get things right. That is precisely why my amendment is in the form that it is. The majority of people, with the right information, will be able to claim their full entitlement in due time. However, it is still the vulnerable groups to which I have referred that will find it hardest to be informed fully and, due to many likely circumstances, will not be willing to start to sort out their affairs for a period that might exceed three months, let alone one.

Age Concern makes the same point. It rightly welcomes the announcement of research into why older people do not claim income support and of other pilot studies to try to improve take-up. Of course, that is absolutely right. Forty per cent. of my voters in Eastbourne are over retirement age. All too often in my advice surgeries, I come across elderly people who simply do not claim the benefits to which they are clearly entitled, but I agree with Age Concern that we should start to tinker with the backdating rules only if and when we have tackled the problem of low take-up.

After careful reflection following the Committee stage, Age Concern's conclusion is particularly damning. It says:

"the Minister's statements in Committee do little to reassure us. We remain extremely concerned that these measures will severely penalise many vulnerable older people who do not claim benefits as soon as they become entitled to them."

Help the Aged has also written to express its concerns. It says:

"The effect of clause 72 will undoubtedly cause additional hardship to many of the most vulnerable older people."

It also makes the valid point that many such claimants use the money from backdated claims to pay off debts such as rent arrears that have accrued in the meantime.

In some ways, the reaction of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux is even more disappointing for the Minister. It refers to the exemptions announced by the Minister in Committee, saying:

"these were interpreted by many as new concessions".

It points out, however, that the exemptions were merely a reiteration of the circumstances in which income-related benefits could be backdated, prescribed by the previous Government in April this year. The only significant difference—and it is a big difference—is that the Minister proposes to reduce the existing three-month period to one month.

The citizens advice bureaux are in no doubt about the Government's true motives. They say:

"the Government's reasons for imposing further limits on the back-dating of benefits have little to do with a rational appraisal of what is most fair and logical, and everything to do with making further benefit savings."

They point out that, in March this year, the Social Security Advisory Committee recommended that the then new limits on backdating should not be proceeded with.

The citizens advice bureaux also have sensible things to say about the balance to be struck between encouraging take-up and limiting backdating. Of course they support the Government's stated wish to improve the system so that people understand what they are entitled to—who would not?—but they conclude, and cite a number of cases in support of their view, that

"it is only too evident that back-dating provisions are an essential 'back-stop' to the present fragmented benefit structure."

I suspect that, deep down, the Minister agrees with that view. Indeed, he admitted as much in Committee, during a debate on a quite different clause, when he said:

"If any amendment imposed such a requirement on us now, the problems of administration—which is already complex, bureaucratic and inefficient—would be exacerbated, as our current systems cannot always work in the integrated fashion to which we aspire."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 28 October 1997; c. 48.]

That was a very clear statement by the Minister of the position as he saw it.

The citizens advice bureaux also cite a number of specific examples in regard to which they have sought clarification from the Department since the conclusion of the Committee stage—sadly, without success in a number of instances, particularly the exception in which one benefit is linked to others. I shall not weary the House with all the detail, but they mention attendance allowance and disability living allowance linked with a subsequent claim for income support, cases in which a carer's entitlement to invalid care allowance depends on a successful claim for attendance allowance or disability living allowance by the person being cared for, incapacity benefit and income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Our new scedule is an attempt to persuade the Government to compromise, and to accept the adverse effects that clause 72 would have on many vulnerable people. It is reasoned and reasonable. It makes provision for those people, and gives them at least two extra months. If the Government reject it, they will deal a direct blow to the elderly, widows and the severely disabled, putting small budget savings ahead of their needs. On any view, these are harsh measures, even when we weigh them against the exemptions announced in Committee. I believe that, if they accepted the new schedule, the Government would still keep a large part of the envisaged £57 million saving—and, at the same time, they would have the satisfaction of helping those who are most in need.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): At lunchtime today I spoke at the Sutton carers forum, which represents 20,000 carers in that London borough. Hon. Members will probably not be surprised to learn that carers are alarmed by the Government's proposals relating to invalid care allowance and its backdating by only one month.

I want to quote from a letter that was handed to me by a constituent at the meeting. He gave up a well-paid job to care for his wife. He wrote:

"The care of your loved one is more than enough to worry about without the added problem of dealing with bureaucracy. The change to a carer's financial position is one that only becomes apparent once life has settled down after the initial shock."

It was six months before that carer realised that the money had run out and that he needed benefit. By seeking to backdate invalid care allowance by just one month, the Government are hitting the poorest hardest. I am afraid that that seems to be a habit that the Government are acquiring. I hope that they will think again, because carers deserve much better than is currently on offer.

9.45 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I have written to the Minister about backdating being limited to a month, and I am grateful for his response. Perhaps in his winding-up speech he will address the issue of bereavement. After the death of a loved one, many widows are in shock, and sorting out their finances will not be their top priority in the month following the death. Many of them may not be capable of sorting out their finances in that time. For example, there may not be close family members to help them. Within the marriage they may not have been in charge of finances or, indeed, had anything to do with them. Perhaps the deceased had full control of the finances. Widows might not know that they are suddenly poor and eligible to apply for benefit.

When such conditions apply, I would favour some discretion by the authorities to allow them to pay benefit to such widows. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said that the Government had allowed extra time in some cases. I am not aware of that from the Minister's reply to me, and I seek some clarification about widows in the month following bereavement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): I shall deal first with amendment No. 2, new clause 2 and amendment No. 6. The amendments seek to provide longer general time limits for the backdating of late claims for benefit—12 months and three months respectively rather than the one month that we propose. Amendment No. 2 and new clause 2 would return us to the position prior to the changes that were introduced in April by the previous Administration. They would not only cause the savings resulting from our proposals to be lost but introduce further costs of about £135 million a year.

Part of the reason for the measure was to not extend the single room rent restrictions to 25 to 59-year-olds. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) incorrectly said that we were not extending the restrictions

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

to those who are under the age of 25. We are evaluating the previous Government's restrictions to the under-25s. That is being closely monitored, and we shall report on it early next year.

Good government means setting the right priorities within limited resources. Where savings are needed, our priority must be the payment of benefit to meet current entitlement. That is a prudent and reasonable approach. We have to make realistic choices, and we have chosen sensibly according to reasonable priorities. We have also taken care to ensure that special cases will be covered through a range of exceptions. They will ensure the necessary flexibility in a scheme which we want to be as straightforward and easily understood as possible by customers and staff.

In reply to the first question by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen), the exceptions will fall into three broad categories. Under the first category, backdating will be allowed beyond the general one-month time limit. It will apply to both non-income-related and income-related benefits. It will include cases in which entitlement to a benefit is dependent on the claimant's or another person's entitlement to another benefit. It is obviously unreasonable for administrative delays in awarding one benefit to deprive a person of entitlement to another.

The second group of exceptions will be on income-related benefits, for which the basic rule will be no backdating. Backdating up to the one-month time limit will be permitted if special reasons apply. That will include cases in which the customer has difficulty communicating because he has learning, language or literacy difficulties, or he is deaf or blind and there is no one else to make a claim on his behalf. It also includes customers who are caring for a person who is ill or disabled and there is no one else to make the claim.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I have noticed that, from time to time, all Governments in the past 20 years have, when they have found it necessary, spent considerable sums telling people that they should claim various benefits. Newspaper advertisements tell people how to claim. That gives the impression that the Government are saying, "We've got some money, and you ought to be getting hold of it," which runs counter to this restriction on backdating. The implication is that there are loads of people out there who are ignorant of the benefits that they can claim, but my hon. Friend is proposing to prevent the people whom we are anxious to ensure receive benefits from backdating their claims. One runs counter to the other. Will he explain how he has come to that conclusion?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I shall come to that specific point a little later in this reasonably brief summing up. I shall first complete the list of exceptions.

The third category will provide for up to one month's backdating of income-related benefits for customers who are forced to delay claiming for various reasons: the appropriate office was closed and alternative arrangements were not available; they were unable to attend the appropriate office because of difficulties with the normal mode of transport and there was no alternative; there were adverse postal conditions; they have recently separated from a partner; or a close relative of the customer has recently died. I shall elaborate on that in relation to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Our proposals also provide a basis, as part of our general review of social security, for our medium and long-term aim of streamlining existing arrangements for claiming benefits. In line with that aim, I have asked officials—I explained this in Committee, but unfortunately the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) did not refer to it—to examine whether the processes for claiming specific benefits can be significantly improved.

The Bill contains a provision on data sharing. When someone has made a claim for one benefit in one part of the organisation, that information is automatically made available to ensure that it triggers entitlement to other benefits. That practice will be extended across agencies, such as between the Benefits Agency and a local authority, to ensure that people do not have to search around to find out about their entitlement: it is automatically triggered.

I have also asked whether specific administrative arrangements can be established to ensure that when a baby is born, that information automatically triggers the receipt of child benefit. Whether the baby is born in hospital, at home, or under the domino arrangement, proper provisions will be in place to ensure that the claim is made. The same applies to widows' benefits. I am sensitive to the traumatic effect of a death, but whatever the circumstances, it has to be registered within five days. If that process is linked to the administration of benefits that flow from that death, backdating does not apply, because the widows' benefit will have been triggered.

We shall have a much more streamlined service. Officials are examining closely how we can put those arrangements into practice.

Mr. Godman: Will my hon. Friend assure me that the provisions will cover those with learning difficulties, particularly in cases in which someone with a learning disability, or perhaps with mental health problems, has lost what might be called a caring adult?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for enabling me to repeat the point that exceptions for learning difficulties are included in the list.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) made a very important point on industrial injuries benefit, specifically as it relates to diseases. In Committee and since then, he has repeatedly made representations to me on that point. I repeat what I said in Committee. I am sympathetic to the point, and I think that we shall have to consider imaginatively how we can deal with it, quite separately from the way in which the backdating proposals will operate. I have been in touch with officials to investigate how industrial diseases of the type that my hon. Friend mentioned can be dealt with more appropriately.

Administration of the system is important. It will be made easier when evidence supporting a claim is fresh and immediately relevant, as there will be less need for staff to make follow-up inquiries to check on the accuracy of details that are often several months old. In that

context, the approach that we advocate—a one-month backdating time limit, with a prescribed list of exceptions—will be easy to understand, underlines customers' responsibility for making a claim on time and is consistent with the general public's expectations.

Taking into account the principles underlying the proposal, and in view of the exceptions that we intend to adopt, I ask the hon. Member for Northavon to withdraw his new clause and not to press his amendment.

Amendment No. 32 and new schedule 1 propose to include in the Bill a list of exceptions that allow backdating of income-related claims for up to one month and, in certain circumstances, backdating of specific benefits beyond the one-month maximum. As I announced in Committee, we propose to provide for exceptions in regulations. Those exceptions include all the specific circumstances stated in the new schedule.

I am pleased that the Opposition support the exceptions that we propose. It would not be sensible, however, to add the new schedule to the Bill. Exceptions are necessarily stated precisely and in some detail. Although the proposed schedule would allow us to add further exceptions by making regulations, it would not allow any amendment of the details that are currently included without recourse to primary legislation.

The listed exceptions cover administration of a number of benefits. Should any small change be needed—perhaps for only a technical reason—we would have to come back and take up the House's valuable time, to obtain the necessary authority to change primary legislation.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for dealing with my point in such detail. Leaving aside small technical matters, does he now, as of today, envisage any significant additions to or subtractions from the list of exceptions, as shown in our new schedule and in his letter to the Committee?

Mr. Bradley: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, we are a listening Government. The proposals are still making their way through the House. They will have to go to the other place, and further representations will be made. Final regulations will eventually be laid before the House for further debate. Until then, there is always an opportunity to make changes. If we accept his new schedule today, however, and add it to the Bill, that opportunity will be lost. I assume from his intervention that he will not press his new schedule.

In Committee, I undertook to table amendment No. 18, which corrects an unintended effect resulting from the drafting of clause 72. It amends section 3 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, which provides for late claims to widows' benefit in rare cases such as those involving a missing person, when death is difficult to establish. The amendment will ensure that in such special circumstances, the current period of 12 months will continue to be allowed between the time when a body is discovered and identified, and the time when the widow is advised of this. I commend the amendment to the House and hope that the other amendments will be withdrawn or rejected.

Mr. Rendel: I am delighted to have the chance to wind up the debate. I do not intend to take much of the House's time over it.

To cut through some of the verbiage that has gone before, the heart of new clause 2 is that the Government are expecting to pay out less in benefits, by restricting the amount of backdating. If they pay out less in benefits by restricting backdating, that inevitably means that—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Social Security Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

Question agreed to.

As amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Rendel: With new clause 2, we are trying to overcome what will inevitably be a restriction in benefits to those who have the right to them, but who may not claim them in time. If anyone doubts that that will happen, he or she need only look at what the Government are saying about the drop in the amount that they are expecting to pay out in benefits as a result of clause 72.

I am especially worried about housing benefit. People have said to me that they are concerned about the difficulties of people who do not claim housing benefit on time. They get into arrears on their rent or their mortgage and as a result, they may later find themselves without a home. That should be of great concern to every hon. Member.

It is also true that many of the benefit forms that claimants face are off-putting. Some of them are long and complex. I was delighted to hear the Minister say in Committee and today that he is looking for imaginative solutions and for ways in which the claim forms can be made rather easier to understand. That will overcome some of the problems. I have no doubt, however, that there will still be a need for some complexity in the forms, and that some claimants will find them difficult to handle and will be put off making their claims in time for that reason alone.

We want those who are due benefits but who do not claim them on time, with good reason, to be given a chance to claim them more than one month late. I do not suggest that the Government should allow anybody to claim any time after the event. If people are dilatory and put off a claim for no good reason, there is some justification for saying that they should have pressure put on them to make their claim promptly, by the introduction of a restriction on the extent to which they can backdate the claim. If, however, people have a good reason for a late claim, it is only right and proper that the claim should be allowed from the time that the benefit was first due to them.

I am unhappy with the Minister's response, and we wish to press new clause 2 to a vote. Conservative Members may press new schedule 1 to a vote. We see some justification for having the special reasons put on the face of the Bill, and we shall support new schedule 1 if it is pressed to a vote.

[Mr. Rendel]

We do not believe that it is possible to predict everybody's reasons for being late with a claim. For that reason alone, it would be better for the House to agree to new clause 2 rather than to new schedule 1. We would, however, rather have new schedule 1 than nothing. We believe that only new clause 2 will properly allow the Government to pay all the benefits to people who need them and are due them.

Mr. Waterson: I do not want to weary the House by going over the arguments for new schedule 1 yet again, self-evident and excellent though they are. Suffice it to say that the Minister has not explained adequately why he is not prepared to accept it. I am genuinely surprised that he is not. If he can write a letter to the Committee setting out the exceptions in such exquisite detail, there is no reason why that should not be part of the Bill. I shall move new schedule 1 formally, and I ask my hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 57, Noes 345.

Division No. 113] **[10.4 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorrie, Donald
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swinney, John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Adrian Sanders and Mr. Paul Keetch.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*

Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs. Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

New schedule 1

'EXCEPTIONS TO THE BACKDATING OF BENEFITS

All Benefits

1. The backdating of benefits for a period longer than one month may be allowed for—

(a) cases where entitlement to benefit is dependent on the claimant's, or another person's entitlement to another benefit; and

(b) Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance claims, where a previous claim to Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance has been refused because the claimant or partner is in remunerative work and the Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance Claim is made within 14 days of the determination on the Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance claim.

Income Related Benefits

2. The backdating of income related benefits for a period no longer than one month may be allowed for—

(a) claimants who have difficulty communicating because of learning, language or literacy difficulties;

(b) claimants who are deaf or blind for whom there is no one else to make their claim;

(c) claimants who are ill or disabled for whom there is no one else to make their claim, except in the case of a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance;

(d) claimants who were given misleading information by an officer of the Department of Social Security or of the Department for Education and Employment;

(e) claimants who were given misleading advice in writing by a solicitor or other professional adviser, or by a medical practitioner, a Local Authority or by a person working in a Citizens Advice Bureau or a similar advice agency;

(f) claimants who have been given misleading information in writing about their income or capital by their employer or former employer, or by a bank or building society;

(g) claimants who are required to deal with a domestic emergency affecting them, for whom there is no one else to make the claim; and

(h) claimants who are prevented from attending the appropriate office by adverse weather conditions.

Delayed Claims

3. The backdating of income related benefits for a period no longer than one month may be allowed in cases where claimants are forced to delay claiming because—

(a) the appropriate office, where the claimant would be expected to make a claim, was unable to provide a service and alternative arrangements were not available;

(b) the claimant was unable to attend the appropriate office due to difficulties with his normal mode of transport and there was no reasonable alternative available;

(c) there were adverse postal conditions;

(d) the claimant was previously in receipt of another benefit, and notification of expiry of entitlement to that benefit was not sent to the claimant before the date that his entitlement expired;

(e) for Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance the claimant had previously been entitled to Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance and the claim for Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance was made within one month of expiry of entitlement to the previous benefit;

(f) for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance the claimant had previously been entitled to Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance and the claim for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance was made within one month of expiry of entitlement to the previous benefit;

(g) the claimant recently separated from his partner; or

(h) a close relative of the claimant recently died.

Refugees

4. Refugees may be allowed, where the Secretary of State thinks it appropriate to claim backdated awards of Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to the date of the asylum application.

Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance

5. Claims for Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance may be allowed to be backdated if employers delay in notifying the claimants that they had no entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay or Statutory Maternity Pay.

Further Exceptions

6. Further exceptions may be allowed in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed.—[*Mr. Waterson.*]

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the schedule be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 192, Noes 374.

Division No. 114] **[10.20 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David

Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Whittingdale and
Mr. James Cran.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra

Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 12

REGULATIONS WITH RESPECT TO DECISIONS

Amendment made: No. 12, in page 7, line 15, leave out 'then, unless regulations otherwise provide'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Clause 4

UNIFIED APPEAL TRIBUNALS

Amendments made: No. 10, in page 3, line 11, leave out 'and'.

No. 11, in page 3, line 13, at end insert

'and

(d) section 11 of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997,'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Schedule 1

APPEAL TRIBUNALS: SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 53, line 18, leave out 'allowances or gratuities' and insert 'or allowances'.

No. 22, in page 53, line 21, leave out 'allowances or gratuities' and insert 'or allowances'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 54, line 15, at end insert—

'Appeals in certain types of case

10.-(1) The President shall make arrangements for the identification of appeals made under section 13 of this Act which appear to him to raise questions of general importance relating to the interpretation or application of the law in respect of which the Secretary of State has decision making functions under section 1 or section 2 of this Act.

(2) The President shall, in making such arrangements as are referred to in sub-paragraph (1) above, delegate such of his powers in that regard as seem to him appropriate to any full-time chairmen of appeal tribunals who hold office for the time being.

(3) The President shall, when he identifies any cases as are mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above, make such further arrangements as are necessary to ensure that such appeals are determined as soon as reasonably practicable in priority to other pending appeals.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 4, in schedule 4, page 59, line 29, at end insert—*'Appeals in certain types of case—*

8. The Chief Social Security Commissioner shall be under the same duty as respects appeals pending under section 15 of this Act, as is the President under paragraphs 10(1) and (3) of Schedule 1 to this Act.'.

Mr. Kirkwood: I detect that the House wants to move on quickly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] However, if I am provoked, I might speak for a long time. I want to insinuate a thought into the Minister's mind. The amendments deal with some important procedural aspects of the Bill. Some of the clauses, especially clauses 26 and 27, contain some dramatic and far-reaching changes, about which I am concerned. Through amendments Nos. 3 and 4, I want to ask the Government to consider mitigating some of the consequences of clauses 26 and 27.

The House may not be fully aware of the powers with which clauses 26 and 27 deal, but they allow the Secretary of State to direct a social security tribunal or commissioner not to hear a case where another similar and test case is pending. That is an unprecedented power. It allows a member of the Executive to direct how members of the judiciary or quasi-judiciary shall deal with appeals that are before them in certain circumstances. That is a new power, and one that is unprecedented and the Government should be careful about the circumstances in which that sort of power is used.

The amendments would require that suitable arrangements are made for identification and hearing of test cases—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The conversation in the Chamber is growing louder. I know that hon. Members

are anxious that we should now proceed quickly, but the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) should be heard in silence.

Mr. Kirkwood: I want the Government to think about the possibility of looking at special provisions for identification and hearing of test cases as priority matters for social security appeal tribunals and commissioners. It can only help claimants and appellants in test cases to have their cases determined within a reasonable time against the background of the powers in clauses 26 and 27.

The amendments are perfectly self-explanatory. The Minister may say that the same results can be achieved via an administrative route or, indeed, he may even say that the Government already have the power, in the Bill, to do that. If so, I ask him to consider putting it on the face of the primary legislation. If he is unable to agree to that tonight, will he give careful consideration to making those changes so as to expedite the process? That would go with the grain of what the Government are trying to do in other parts of the Bill, while at the same time mitigating some of the new powers the Executive is taking to control appeal tribunals and commissioners. If he can give me an assurance that he will at least consider the matter between now and the Bill going to the other place, I should be happy not to press the amendments.

Mr. Keith Bradley: The amendments would impose additional duties on the president of the appeal tribunal and the chief social security commissioner. Each year, there are 300,000 appeals and such detailed examination of all of them would not be practical, given that fewer than one in 3,000 may eventually become a so-called test case. Examining each case would also create further unnecessary delays in the appeals process. The appropriate time to consider whether there is a general issue of importance is after a tribunal has decided an appeal and one of the parties has applied for leave to appeal on a point of law.

Commissioners already have complete discretion to expedite specific cases and we shall continue with that. It is our intention to speed up the process for all appeals. The amendment would create further delays, but I can assure the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) that I shall look carefully at what he has said and consider whether any further action is appropriate. With that assurance, I hope that he will withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Kirkwood: I give in—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 2

DECISIONS AGAINST WHICH NO APPEAL LIES

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 55, line 19, after 'section' insert '64(1), 71(6), 113(1) or'.

No. 24, in page 55, line 32, leave out

'in the circumstances referred to in section 160(2)'

and insert

'or income-based jobseeker's allowance in the circumstances referred to in section 160(2) or 160A(2)'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Clause 22

SUSPENSION IN PRESCRIBED CIRCUMSTANCES

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 14, line 30, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations made under subsection (1) above may also provide that, in prescribed cases or circumstances, entitlement to a relevant benefit shall cease from a date not earlier than the date on which payments were suspended.'—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Clause 56

COLLECTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 37, line 19, leave out

'provide for interest to be charged'

and insert

'subject to sub-paragraph (3A) below, provide for interest to be charged by the Secretary of State'.

No. 15, in page 37, line 48, at end insert—

'(3A) Regulations under sub-paragraph (2)(e) above may provide that, in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed, interest under those regulations may be charged by the Inland Revenue (instead of the Secretary of State) as if the regulations were made by virtue of paragraph 6 above.'

No. 16, in page 38, line 4, at beginning insert

'subject to sub-paragraph (4A) below,'.

No. 17, in page 38, line 17, at end insert—

'(4A) Regulations under sub-paragraph (2)(h)(ii) or (iii) above may provide that, in such cases or circumstances as may be prescribed, penalties under those regulations may be imposed by the Inland Revenue (instead of the Secretary of State) as if the return in question were a contributions return within the meaning of paragraph 7 above.'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Clause 70

POWER TO REDUCE CHILD BENEFIT FOR LONE PARENTS

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 46, line 35, leave out from beginning to end of line 1 on page 47.—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 457.

Division No. 115] **[10.38 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clwyd, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Etherington, Bill

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Norman A
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Swinney, John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Tyler and
Mr. Andrew Stunell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berrningham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burns, Simon
Butler, Mrs Christine
Butterfill, John
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Church, Ms Judith
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Drew, David
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*

Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Andrew
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLeish, Henry
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prior, David
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
St Aubyn, Nick
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Wells, Bowen
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 72

RESTRICTIONS ON BACKDATING OF BENEFIT

Amendment made: No. 18, in page 47, line 24, leave out 'and

(b) in subsections (2) and' and insert—

'(b) in subsection (2), for the words "12 months", in the second place where they occur, there shall be substituted the words "one month"; and

(c) in subsection'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Schedule 6

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 65, line 15, at end insert—

'. In subsection (2) of section 51 of that Act (supplementary powers to make regulations)—

(a) in paragraph (a), for sub-paragraph (iii) there shall be substituted the following sub-paragraph—

"(iii) the making of decisions under section 16 or 17;"; and

(b) paragraph (b) shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 35, in page 66, line 8, leave out

'In paragraph 2 of Schedule 4A to that Act'

and insert

'In paragraph 1 of Schedule 4A to that Act (interpretation), the definition of "review" shall cease to have effect.

( ) In paragraph 2 of that Schedule'.

No. 36, in page 66, line 9, after 'directions)', insert '(a)'.

No. 37, in page 66, line 10, at end insert

'and

(b) in sub–paragraph (c), for the words "a departure application and a review are to be dealt with" there shall be substituted the words "a decision on a departure application and a decision under section 16 or 17 are to be made".'.

No. 38, in page 75, leave out lines 8 to 10 and insert—

'84. In section 164 of that Act (destination of payments etc.), subsection (5)(a) shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 25, in page 77, leave out lines 38 and 39 and insert—

'(a) for sub–paragraph (a) there shall be substituted the following sub–paragraph—

"(a) Appeal tribunals'.

No. 26, in page 77, line 42, leave out 'paragraph' and insert 'sub–paragraph'.

No. 27, in page 77, leave out lines 45 and 46 and insert—

'(a) for sub–paragraph (a) there shall be substituted the following sub–paragraph—

"(a) Appeal tribunals constituted under'.

No. 28, in page 80, line 33, at end insert—

'.—(1) In subsection (3) of section 16 of that Act (severe hardship), for paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the following paragraph—

"(b) it appears to him that the person concerned has, without good cause—

(i) neglected to avail himself of a reasonable opportunity of a place on a training scheme; or

(ii) after a place on such a scheme has been notified to him by an employment officer as vacant or about to become vacant, refused or failed to apply for it or to accept it when offered to him; or".

(2) For subsection (4) of that section there shall be substituted the following subsection—

"(4) In this section—

'employment officer' means an officer of the Secretary of State or such other person as may be designated for the purposes of this section by an order made by the Secretary of State;

'period' includes—

(a) a period of a determinate length;

(b) a period defined by reference to the happening of a future event; and

(c) a period of a determinate length but subject to earlier determination upon the happening of a future event;

'training scheme' has such meaning as may be prescribed.".'

No. 29, in page 80, line 33, at end insert—

'.—(1) In subsection (2) of section 17 of that Act (reduced payments), for the word "either" there shall be substituted the word "any".

(2) In subsection (3) of that section, for paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the following paragraphs—

"(b) he has given up a place on a training scheme, or failed to attend such a scheme on which he has been given a place, and no certificate has been issued to him under subsection (4);

(c) he has lost his place on such a scheme through misconduct."

(3) For subsections (4) and (5) of that section there shall be substituted the following subsections—

"(4) Where a young person who has given up a place on a training scheme, or failed to attend such a scheme on which he has been given a place—

(a) claims that there was good cause for his doing so; and

(b) applies to the Secretary of State for a certificate under this subsection,

the Secretary of State shall, if he is satisfied that there was good cause, issue a certificate to that effect and give a copy of it to the young person.

(5) In this section—

"training scheme" has such meaning as may be prescribed;

"young person" means a person who has reached the age of 16 but not the age of 18.".'

No. 30, in page 80, line 38, at end insert—

'. In subsection (2)(b)(ii) of section 20 of that Act (exemptions from section 19), for the words "he has failed to complete a course of training" there shall be substituted the words "the condition mentioned in section 17(3)(b) or (c) is satisfied".'

No. 40, in page 80, line 46, at end insert—

'. In subsection (1) of section 36 of that Act (regulations and orders), for the words "9(13) or 19(10)(a)" there shall be substituted the words "9(13), 16(4) or 19(10)(a)".'.

No. 41, in page 81, leave out lines 24 to 28.— *[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Schedule 7

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 42, in page 83, line 15, column 3, after 'qualified', insert'adjudicating'.

No. 43, in page 84, line 51, column 3, at end insert 'Section 51(2)(b).'.

No. 44, in page 85, line 10, column 3, after 'Schedule 4A,', insert

'in paragraph 1 the definition of "review",'.

No. 45, in page 85, line 51, column 3, at end insert 'Section 164(5)(a).'.

No. 46, in page 87, line 10, leave out '23' and insert '23(1)'.

No. 47, in page 87, line 13, column 3, at end insert—

		'In Schedule 8, paragraphs 21(1) and 23.'.

No. 48, in page 87, line 39, at end insert—

'1996 c.23.	Arbitration Act 1996.	In Schedule 3, paragraph 54.'.

—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Clause 81

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 52, line 8, leave out 'sections 50,' and insert '(a) sections'.

No. 33, in page 52, line 8, leave out '77' and insert '79'.

No. 20, in page 52, line 8, after 'this section,' insert 'and

(b) section 50 so far as relating to a sum which is chargeable to tax by virtue of section 313 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988,'.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

10.58 pm

Ms Harman: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill is an important step towards our aim of building a modern, fair and efficient welfare service that commands the support of everyone in society. It lays the foundations for transforming the future delivery of welfare and for eradicating the failures of the past.

The Bill has received rigorous and constructive scrutiny, both in Committee and in today's debates. I am grateful to all the Committee members for their work and, in particular, to the Chairmen, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale). I also thank my ministerial team—the Under-Secretaries of State for Social Security, my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham)—for the tremendous amount of hard work that they have put into the Bill, taking it through the House thus far.

Today, we have had extensive and wide-ranging debates that have focused on just two clauses: on backdating and lone parents. Perhaps the House will allow me to mention briefly the other 79 clauses in the Bill. Those clauses pave the way for us to modernise the system that we inherited from the last Administration—a confusing system of incomprehensible rules, laborious form filling and complex processes that trap millions of people on benefit who want to work. That system is both unacceptable and unsustainable.

This Government believe that welfare should focus on investing in people's opportunities and success, which means providing an integrated service—a service that concentrates on meeting the needs of those whom it is intended to help, and is not constrained by artificial organisational boundaries. That is better government. It means recognising that individuals' lives do not easily fit into departmental boxes, and working throughout Government making use of new information technology to deliver a complete modern service to the citizen.

Service delivery is central to our approach to welfare reform. Our services must actively help people to move from welfare into work, where they can be much better off than they would ever be on benefits. Our services must be focused on what clients need; they must ensure that help goes to those who need it, not to the fraudsters who would rip off the system; they must be efficient, and offer the best possible deal to clients, taxpayers and our staff. That is what we mean by an active, modern service.

The Bill lays the foundations for the provision of such a service. It paves the way for a modern, integrated service, enabling people to give us information just once in a way that is convenient for them. We shall then be able to advise them how that affects all their dealings with the Department. The Bill will create a much simpler decision-making process, reducing the number of types of decision maker from six to one—who will act on my behalf—and enabling decisions to be presented quickly, correctly and in a way that is easy to understand. It will enable us to provide a streamlined, straightforward system for claimants to appeal against decisions to an independent tribunal, cutting out unnecessary duplications and frustrating delays.

Not only will my proposals streamline the current process; I will assume responsibility for the administration of the appeals system through a new Department of Social Security executive agency established for the purpose of improving the administration of appeals. The Bill will also reinforce people's responsibilities in relation to the welfare system by imposing tougher penalties on those who try to evade their responsibility to make national insurance contributions. It will close loopholes exploited by those who seek to save money by doing their employees out of the contributions that are essential to their future pension entitlements. It will also make it easier for employers to pay their fair share by aligning the ways in which certain benefits and expenses are dealt with in the tax and national insurance systems.

The Bill, introduced in our first three months of government, is an important step towards meeting the commitments that we made to the British people in our manifesto. They gave us a strong mandate to reform welfare—to tackle poverty and welfare dependency and to tackle them wisely, extending opportunities to all. We will transform welfare delivery into an active, modern service that meets people's needs and helps them to fulfil their aspirations. The Bill puts in place the building blocks to do just that, and I commend it to the House.

11.3 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): It has been a long evening, and I do not intend to detain the House for longer than necessary. Labour Members will be pleased about that. It has certainly been a long evening for the Secretary of State, but I am intrigued to see that not a single other member of the Cabinet is present to support her after what has clearly been a difficult time for her. When her right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke of tough decisions, I did not think that he meant this sort of decision.

On Second Reading, I dubbed the Bill the Peter Lilley memorial Bill. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) is sitting beside me to re-emphasise that. I am also glad to see that Labour Members are pleased that they are driving through a measure that they opposed throughout their time in opposition.

The Bill clearly reflects the last Government's desire to streamline the benefit system and make it more efficient. That is why, when we were in government, we launched the change programme. Despite that, the Opposition have never offered the Government unconditional support for the Bill. We said that it contained elements that we had not introduced when in government. I shall shortly mention some of those.

Clause 2 provides for some decisions to be made by computer. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) spoke about that. The Secretary of State and her team should think carefully about that issue and, as the Bill goes through the other place, they might consider how some of those decisions will be made. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said that clause 2, while apparently innocuous in

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

many ways, would begin to drive a wedge between the concepts of decision and responsibility. He said that while a computer could in an extended sense make a decision, it could not be held responsible in any ordinary or important philosophical or legal sense. The Law Society has also expressed concern. The clause has not been amended, but the Government should think carefully about the words of my hon. Friend and Labour Members should think about how some decisions will be made under the Bill.

Clause 1 proposes the abolition of the independent tribunal service which makes decisions, and we are concerned about that. However, two topics have detained hon. Members, and one of them is the backdating of new benefits, in relation to which we moved a new schedule. Labour Back Benchers did not seem to be especially concerned or pay much attention when we debated that. The Government have said that they are a caring Government, but this measure will adversely affect many vulnerable people. That is made obvious by such groups as Age Concern, the National Council for One Parent Families and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Before the election the Labour party said that it would make a difference and would form a caring Government, but that same Government have added the backdating measure to the Bill that we left behind. It is a mean addition that we did not think was necessary. Our amendment would have helped to change that, but the Government rejected it. Despite what the Secretary of State said about our new schedule and about the amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats, I urge her to think again. Before the general election, many Labour Members prided themselves on speaking up for widows and war widows. Many such people will be directly affected by the reduction to one month of the time for backdating claims. We should like to have an amendment to the Bill in another place to remove that provision.

The most controversial debate was on new clause 1 and amendment No.1, which sought to correct the breaking by the Secretary of State of every pledge during her time in opposition. When we were in government the Labour Opposition said that they did not believe in what we were doing, that they would not do it, and that it was a principle not worth having. Labour Members told pressure groups and single parents all over the country that they would champion their cause when in government. All that needed to be done was to get Labour into government and it would certainly not impose such legislation. Labour said that if such legislation were already imposed, it would strike it out.

Over the past six or seven months the Government have had many opportunities to stand by the Secretary of State's pre-election pledges, but they have not done so. Even now they do not offer the excuse of principle. They do not say that they believe in the legislation as a means of levelling married couples and lone parents. They say that somehow they were left with a budget problem, but we know that the Prime Minister made it clear just before the election that the existing budgets would have allowed them to drop the legislation and still survive the two-year constraint. They could still do that, but they have decided not to. The fiscal excuse is absolute nonsense, rubbish. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State goes on about it, but, on her principles, she had every reason to drop the proposals and chose not to do so. That is why she has had a Back-Bench rebellion that is sizeable enough to remind her of the pledges and commitments that she made before the election.

I do not want to dwell too much on family problems, but I suspect that tonight's rebellion is just the beginning. Questions will be asked about why a Government who came to power on a set of promises, turned round and broke every single one of them.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Dr. Kim Howells): Dream on.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is Labour Members who should dream on, for they will have many nightmares in the next few weeks and months. Even today's editorial in *The Times* said—*[Interruption.]* Isn't it wonderful? In opposition and government Labour courts Mr. Murdoch and his friends, but when it is accused of being inconsistent, it does not like it. *The Times* said:

"The trouble comes because Ms Harman's arguments are often either opaque or inconsistent. Unlike the Tories, she is reluctant to make the case that the benefit system should not be loaded in favour of single parenthood".

The Government promised great welfare reforms, but so far they have delivered absolutely nothing. The lauded Green Paper and the important welfare proposals have been non-existent. On Monday, we heard from the Treasury through a planted leak in *The Times* that it was to make a series of cuts. Treasury-driven cuts: that is the Government's big welfare reform. The Minister of State is completely ruled out and the Secretary of State does not even have any comment to make. No one from the Treasury or from the Cabinet is present tonight.

In conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray."] I know that pain hurts, so I shall not prolong it too long. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] I do not want to detain Labour Members for too long, because they are in serious pain, and it is better for them to receive medication quickly. The Government have reneged not just on this promise, but on a number of pledges that they made. What we have seen tonight is some of the Labour party waking up to the fact that whatever it promised, whatever it said and whatever it pretended en route to government, it has a bad habit of biting back when it gets into government. This is not a fit Government; it is not even fit to man the Treasury Bench, and I hope that very shortly the public will realise that.

11.11 pm

Mr. McNamara: I shall not speak for long, because I had a good opportunity to express my views earlier.

Some of my hon. Friends cheered when they heard the size of the vote for the amendment. I did not cheer, because it is sad that so many of my colleagues felt it necessary to vote against the Government. It is never a happy experience to vote against one's party, particularly when it is in government. I have done so in the past, but it is never an easy decision. We had put so much faith and hope in our Government, but, despite all the splendid measures that have been introduced, we felt let down on this issue. Contrary to all our traditions, we have hit the poorest of the poor. It was not a happy occasion.

Earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) tabled an early-day motion to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Abortion Act 1967. I tabled an amendment to it, which said that I expected Governments, of whatever party, to ensure that women who become pregnant do not feel that the only solution is to have an abortion. I believe that these cuts will put pressure on women, especially women who already have children, to have an abortion. I regret that, because it is appalling. I could have abstained, but I am glad that I voted against this proposal.

I had other reasons for voting against the cut. When I listened to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—she was then the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson—attacking the then Government on the issue, she convinced me of her case. During the general election campaign, I went round and told my constituents, "I am convinced that we will not implement such a cut, and, regardless of whether the Tories win, I will not vote for it. Whatever happens, I will not vote for it. I will vote against it." Today, I have kept my word to my constituents.

Labour Members have been told that we have an inheritance of cash limits from the Tory party. We did not discuss the limits but were told that we have inherited them. It was not an inheritance, though, because the body was not dead when we seized the limits and said that we would implement them. I believed then, as I believe now, that we would come to rue that decision. We are ruing it today. If ever there were a hostage to fortune, which has caused our problems in this debate, it was our decision that we could out-Tory the Tories.

The decision was not a matter of financial prudence. There is scope within the social fund, by making the necessary adjustments, to obtain the money. Further surplus money has been raised in taxation, because unemployment has been falling—but we could have found the money regardless.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: No. I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman because, unlike so many of my hon. Friends, he has not been in the Chamber since 3 pm today hoping to make his point.

We have made ourselves prisoners to undertakings that we will rue, as we have rued the strange decision on income tax. For the life of me, in the past week, I have not been able to believe not only the enormous, atrocious and obscene bonuses given in the City, and that we are not prepared to tax them, but that we are to cut benefits for single mothers. If they go to work, take advantage of all those wonderful schemes and lose their job, they will receive less benefit.

If my constituents come to me, I will tell them, "Weigh very carefully what is involved. I want you to go to work. I want you to be protected. I want you to be independent and to have your pride, but I want you to ensure that your children have food on the table and clothes on their backs."

Some people may say that £5 or £11 is not terribly important. I tell them to go round the charity shops, and to the supermarkets late at night, when bread is sold off cheap. Then they can ask whether that money is really important to single-parent families.

11.17 pm

Mr. Kirkwood: We have had a very interesting and dramatic debate, which is what the House is for. I should also like very squarely to tell the Government that if Labour Members have raised dissentient voices, they should be allowed to do so without any type of sanction. To do otherwise would be to deny freedom of speech in the House, to deny hon. Members the right to represent their constituents and to negate the process of parliamentary democracy. Any sanctions taken against any Labour Member in the coming hours or days would be a disgrace, and negate the whole ethos of the House.

The provisions in the latter half of the Bill deal with cuts in benefits and are extremely contentious. I want, however, to deal with the earlier provisions on the modernisation of social security procedures because they are also important and some of them may come back to haunt us.

It was, of course, right to modernise aspects of the system, but some of the new provisions are draconian. The Bill blurs the distinction between the initial decision-making procedure and appellate rights. It also reduces the independent element in the decision-making process. Reducing the powers of the independent appellate bodies is a serious mistake which we make at our peril. The changes may bring about some savings. I suspect, however, that they will be modest and will be achieved at the expense of the poorest in our society.

Why, for example, is it necessary to abolish the chief adjudication officer? The only explanation the Government have given is that he has no resources with which to ensure that his annual reports are enforced. We all know that his annual reports often highlight terrible anomalies in the law and that they can lead to improvements in the standard of decision making.

The Bill, fundamentally, passes all decision-making powers to the Secretary State. Why? The Secretary of State is a Member of the House of Commons. The Benefits Agency officials have taken independent appeal decisions in the past acting as civil servants in an independent system. In future, the Secretary of State will act in her own right. She will not be able to claim independence from the tribunal service. She will be directly held to account in the House of Commons for tribunal decisions taken in her name and we shall not be slow to take up the challenge. We have here a fundamental change to the way in which we do things at the level of appeal tribunals.

The attempts the Secretary of State is making to change the decision-making process will significantly reduce the accountability of independent tribunals and will send a negative message to the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society. There will be inadequate checks on initial decision making which will not be in the interests of those people who appeal. The point has already been made about decisions being made by computer. That is another serious change in social security procedures which I deeply suspect as well.

We are told that agency chief executives will in future have quality control systems in place. I shall believe that when I see it because I do not believe that there will be adequate resources to allow that to happen.

During the passage of the Bill, we have been made aware that the right to an oral appeal hearing has been gradually eroded. That may not be mentioned directly in

[Mr. Kirkwood]

the Bill, but under Tory regulations that have not yet been repudiated by the Government, claimants now have to opt for an oral hearing. We all know that many claimants do not turn up for their hearings; the reasons for that are varied and complex. I believe that social security law is so complicated that claimants often give up when they are faced by a mass of Department of Social Security papers. The Bill will mean that claimants will be forced to resort to judicial reviews to protect their own interests.

My final point—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] These may be technical but they are important points. The Bill will be likely to fall foul of European law and the European convention on human rights. It is only a matter of time before clauses 26 and 27 are found to be legally wanting. The system that we are establishing in the Bill is essentially flawed. I believe that we shall be forced to return to the provisions in due course in a way that may well further embarrass the Government. They may have to change many of the provisions all over again to get back to the independent system of adjudication appeal that we have enjoyed heretofore.

11.24 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I do not know whether there will be a vote on Third Reading, but if there is I shall vote against the Bill. I should like to tell the House why.

I was elected to the House and took my seat 47 years ago last week. I joined a Parliament that had taken over a Britain that was battered, bombed and bankrupt. That Parliament's first action was to treble the widow's pension from 10 shillings a week to 26 shillings a week. That bankrupt nation introduced a free health service, put me through college without any charge—I had been a wartime airman—and did not have much of a problem with the welfare bill when unemployment was so low because we were building houses and hospitals and recruiting teachers and nurses.

I was a Minister in subsequent Labour Governments that brought pensions into line with earnings. I am very proud of that. As Secretary of State for Energy, I also introduced a scheme to ensure that everyone on benefit had a 25 per cent. cut in their winter fuel bills, regardless of the temperature. All that is dismissed as old Labour, but I am very proud of it. The arguments for the Bill, which have been well rehearsed, run counter to the beliefs that I have and that the Labour party had—the beliefs that brought me into Parliament and led me to join the Labour party on my 17th birthday in 1942.

I must say, very respectfully, that the Government have not taken a hard decision; they have taken the easiest decision possible, hammering the poorest people who have no bargaining power. They have ring-fenced the richest people, promising them that there will be no increase in income tax. Anyone who has had experience of single parents—up to a couple of thousand have been to my surgeries over the years—knows that the children of split families are affected by their circumstances. They want their mother or father close to them when the other partner leaves. We are going back to the Victorian concept of the deserving poor, who want work, and the undeserving poor, who prefer to look after their children.

I am opposed to the philosophy of the Bill. Every argument that I have heard from the Front Bench has convinced me more and more that this is a bad measure.

I do not want to detain the House for too long. Another reason why I shall vote against the Bill on Third Reading if there is a Division is that I have also read about the next items on the agenda—tuition fees, the possibility that disability benefit may be targeted or that the pensioners' link with earnings may not be restored.

I have found today's debate fascinating, because politics has come back to the Chamber of the House of Commons. Some of us, including me—I make nothing of that—want hon. Members to say the same in opposition and in government. We want some attempt to be made to assess the rights and wrongs of matters, rather than decisions being taken on the basis of an economic analysis founded on some requirement to be competitive and productive. The cuts that the Cabinet made 21 years ago cost us the 1979 election. Denis Healey, who is an honest man, has admitted that those cuts were unnecessary.

I do not ask anyone else who has not had my experiences to follow me into the Lobby if there is a vote, but I shall vote against the Bill, because this is what Parliament is about. If we separate this place from the concerns outside, there will be a price not just for the party of which I am proud to be a member, but for the reputation of the parliamentary process, as people become more and more despairing because their concerns are not being listened to.

11.28 pm

Mr. Salmond: I had not intended to say anything on Third Reading—today's events speak for themselves—until the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said that he would have to advise a constituent carefully on whether to move into employment under the circumstances set out by the Government. I watched the Secretary of State for Social Security say, "Shame." If there is any shame in today's proceedings, it lies not on the Back Benches, but on the Front Benches.

The point is crystal clear. If someone loses a job or takes seasonal employment, he or she will return to benefit at a lower rate than that on which he or she started. How can any Member of this place, given the salaries that we earn, do other than advise a constituent in such circumstances to think extremely carefully about moving into employment? We would not be doing our duty if we did anything other than give such advice. If there is any shame in our proceedings this evening, it lies not with the hon. Member for Hull, North but with the Secretary of State.

As an observer of the Labour party's problems on this issue, I do not understand why the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—those who are pulling the strings—have made a stand. I am told that the stand has been taken so that the Government can appear macho to the City. Apparently it is important to show the fiscal rectitude of the new Labour Government. If it is important to show fiscal rectitude and strength, why not pick on someone who is strong rather than on someone who is weak? There is no strength to be demonstrated in picking on single parents, who are one of the poorest sections of the community. Perhaps the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer should remember the words of Zsa Zsa Gabor, who said, "Macho men ain't mucho." Those words apply to the Government's campaign against single parents.

In 1992 the Conservative party came to office with a considerable majority. Within a few months, however, it ran into a series of economic circumstances that were largely of its own making. The result was called black Wednesday, and that destroyed the economic credibility of the Conservative party, a blow from which it never recovered. I wonder, when we look back on today's proceedings, whether they might not be seen as new Labour's black Wednesday, which destroyed the social credibility of the new Labour Government. When all is said and done, it will be a pyrrhic victory for the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

11.31 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson: The Bill, which continues to include cuts in lone parent benefit entitlement, is shabby, vindictive, unprincipled and unsupportable. I know that that is right because those are the words that we used when the issue was first raised by the motley crew of the Conservative Government when they mooted the cuts in lone parent benefit entitlement.

If the House has any doubts about that, it had a timely reminder from the Opposition Front Bench spokesman when he repeated the taunts that we heard in Committee. For the Conservatives, this is the Peter Lilley Memorial Bill. The Government should have taken heed of the final warning when the Tories joined Labour in the Lobby in support of a Tory-designed measure designed only to make the poor poorer.

I will take up the four shabby myths that we on the Labour Benches tried to persuade ourselves represented the pretext on which the Bill should be supported. It was argued that somehow we had a mandate or an obligation to make the cuts. It was said that we had to make hard choices, including the cuts. It was said also that lone parents would not be affected by the cuts and, indeed, that they would be better off as a result of the introduction of welfare to work.

Labour has never had a mandate to make the poor poorer. It has never had a mandate to make the poorest of the poor, children in lone-parent households, poorer still. Labour fought the last election by attacking the Tory record, which was that one in three children lived in a poverty-stricken household. We knew that that was the legacy that we would inherit. We also knew that we did not have a mandate to perpetuate it. We certainly never had a mandate to make it worse.

That is not a hard choice. It is not a hard choice to pick on the weakest in the playground and kick buckets out of them. It is not a hard choice to pick on the most vulnerable and insecure. Hard choices are made when we are prepared to take on people bigger and tougher than we are who are doing despicable things. Those are the hard choices that people have to make in Parliament.

I want to put the whole thing into context. We are told that the saving is a £60 million necessity, perhaps rising to £400 million over four years. But in the week leading up to the debate we have made other choices, too—presumably still within the spending limits that we inherited.

We made a choice to sign a cheque for £1 billion to bail out those lone mothers the Korean bankers and speculators who were playing fast and loose on the streets of the casino economies in south-east Asia.

We have also given a substantial handout to another group of welfare dependants. I am grateful to the Paymaster General for spelling that out in the *Financial Times* on Saturday, when he wrote:

"the corporation tax changes from 1999 that Gordon Brown, the chancellor, announced in his pre-Budget report have a net present value to companies which totals more than £9 billion".

Those, too, are welfare matters. They are part of another dependency culture, and we should question whether we have an obligation to foster, nurture and support that culture. It is highly questionable whether it is the role of a Labour Government to encourage that sort of welfare dependency.

Furthermore, we are putting through the £60 million of "necessary cuts" at a time when huge unexpected receipts are flowing into the Treasury. No sense of economic compulsion drives us to make this decision.

The key point in this debate was made in an intervention when my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt) asked my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) why, if he felt so strongly about the cut, he had not voted against it on 22 July. I caution other hon. Members tonight: when subsequent cuts are suggested, whether in housing benefit, disability benefits, the taxing of child benefit or industrial injury benefits, and they choose to say, "There is a principle that I want to make a stand on," the same question will be asked of them. Members will be asked, "How did you vote on 10 December? What point of principle have you discovered now that you could not find then?"

The reason why it has become so important for the Government to make a stand on a trivial amount of money is to break the spirit of principled opposition to the idea of Labour Members hitting the poor. Members on our side of the House will have to reflect carefully on that thought for a long time to come.

It is untrue to say that lone parents will not be affected by this cut. We have been trying to run with contradictory arguments. We say that welfare to work will be their salvation and encourage them to find work. Yet, as many hon. Members have pointed out, those who go through the new deal programme to find work will discover that there are more people chasing jobs than there are jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) asked a telling question earlier: what will happen to women who believe us and go through the new deal programme only to find when they come out at the end that the "new deal" is no deal and there are no jobs for them? Will they go back to the same benefit level as they had before? The answer is no.

Even if people find jobs, what will happen when they are ill? When someone goes back, what will happen to the mortgage interest protection that she had before? It disappears. Who will then explain the repossessions that will follow when people have to go back onto benefits worse off than they were when they started?

Welfare to work will work only if we can deliver permanent, secure, well paid jobs. The question that we are refusing to answer, but which almost all our constituents are asking, is this: if this is to be a real opportunity to change people's lives and to make the difference between a cruel Tory Government and a Labour Government who will help people out of poverty,

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

where is the work? Employment Service agencies will talk a lot about employability but not a lot about employment. Yet that is how we shall be judged.

The figure of lone parents being £50 a week better off in work which was produced by the Secretary of State was Arthur Daley off-the-back-of-a-lorry statistics. Many Members have already gone into detail on this, but in any statistical appraisal one cannot include all women to define an average. The example that I would offer is Nicola Horlick. If she happened to be between her million-pound-a-year jobs, saw the new deal as a great opportunity and wanted to be at the front of the queue for six months of canal dredging to improve her employability, I suspect that at the end of it she would not be looking for outwork or piecework at 10p or 20p an hour of the kind that women in our communities still face. To include the economically powerful in an average is dishonest to the economically powerless, yet these are the vast majority of the women whom we shall be seeking to draw into the new deal proposals.

We also cannot assume that there are minimal child care costs, or ignore the loss of passported benefits. We cannot bank on pay levels that are non-existent for most of the women who will be affected by this measure. I was grateful to receive a copy of a letter from the managing director of a firm in Nottingham to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. The director wanted to re-employ a woman who had worked for him some years before. He said:

"I am keen to re-employ a former employee . . . Her child has just started school and she has approached me to offer employment of 20 hours per week . . . This I am happy to do at £4.32 per hour."

He then went on to work through the financial consequences of employing her, and said that what horrified him was that she would be worse off by £17.57 and

"what is most alarming to me, potentially even more worse off if she was off work to look after her child".

This is someone who wants to take a lone parent back into work but in doing so could only make her poorer.

I did some work with a group called Home-start which works with and supports lone-parent families in Nottingham. It calculated the break-even point for women moving from benefits to work. The figures in terms of replacement costs ranged from an average of £114 a week for a woman on benefits to a need to earn £239.50 when they are not. That was to break even—£6 an hour after tax. I would dearly love to see the offers of jobs that they might receive. When I asked the women what prospects they thought they had of receiving that amount, they laughed—they thought it was like Alice in Wonderland.

One woman said to me that if anyone there said they were receiving that money, they would know what work they were doing and what the game was—they would be on the game. The reality is that, for many women, a job providing a wage on which they could survive is not one that they could do legitimately. *[Interruption.]* Those who say that that is despicable should look at the path to "Wisconsin welfare" and ask how easy it has been for Wisconsin to drive women off the benefits system, where they could draw benefits after 12 weeks.

The one statistic that people involved in Wisconsin do not want to acknowledge is the 20 per cent. increase in arrests on charges of prostitution. The House may not like it, but there are people on both sides of the Chamber who, if that happened here, would be screaming blue murder about the quality of parenting.

This is the issue which has fallen off the agenda in this debate. Where does parenting fit in? Where do the rights of children fit into the sense of a civilised society, in which child welfare is part of the process of nurturing and valuing the generations yet to follow us into adulthood?

I am told that we live in an age in which politics is also the personal, and I want to make a personal statement. I am the eldest of seven children. I felt privileged in my childhood, because although we did not have much money we had a lot of love and support from a large extended family. At different times of our lives, however four of the seven children have been lone parents, whether as a result of death, divorce or the breakdown of a relationship. In each of those circumstances, the most important consideration was this—how do you minimise the damage to the children. That was all that mattered. All the rallying round was to try to put the children first.

Now we are faced with a set of proposals which suggest that the only way to confer dignity on parents is to send the lone parent out to work, forgetting the trauma and disorientation and everything else that their children have to work through. The House is saying that this will be the parents' salvation, but in years to come children will not thank us for this measure—they will brutally condemn us for the cynicism and cowardice that underpins it.

During the last week the press have been going around asking what the numbers will be. They saw a rebellion in the offing and a conspiracy in progress. Members have not been able to answer, because it has not unfolded in that way: people have been driven not by conspiracy but by conscience.

We are told that this is a great time for naming and shaming. Those of us who have voted against the cut in lone-parent benefits will have our names recorded in *Hansard*, but the reasons behind this will not be registered. For the record, I was driven to vote against the cuts because I am ashamed that a Labour Government should invite us to go down a path that was always cruel, mean-minded, vindictive and utterly unnecessary.

This Bill, the Peter Lilley Memorial Bill, should have been put in the dustbin when it was first mooted by the Tories. It should have been consigned to the dustbin of history tonight when the Tories trailed their poisoned prejudices into the Lobby to support the Government. That, more than anything else, should have told us that we were wrong. Even at that stage we should have had the courage not to betray our children and our consciences but to get out of the Lobby that the Tories had gone into.

11.47 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: I do not want to let tonight go by without congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise). She spoke for real Labour, and party members and supporters throughout the country will be grateful for that and derive hope from it.

Scottish Members who were here before the general election may recall, as I do, a time when the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), came to Scotland to address a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee on benefits and he was roasted; he was white and shaking after the ferocity of the attack on him by nationalist, Liberal Democrat and Labour Members, who all got stuck in.

Well pardon me, but I assumed that that was a guarantee that we would not continue with the same policy and implement these cuts. Some hon. Members have said that none of this was in the manifesto. I remember that the manifesto said that we would cut the benefits bill, but I assumed that that meant that the bill would reduce as we got people back into work. I never thought for one moment that it meant that we would cut the bill by reducing the payments to lone parents. I am opposing the measure in the Lobby tonight because, in my innocence, I relayed my assumptions to my constituents and urged them to vote accordingly.

I would also complain that, while we are expected to have expertise in literary analysis to divine the innermost meanings of any words in the statements, there is a lack of numeracy in all this. The Government say that people will be £50 better off on average. That obviously means—this has not yet been pointed out in the debate so far—that some people will be far less than £50 better off if £50 is the average.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), I am sad that it has come to a vote against my own party tonight. I am proud of a great deal that the Government have done since the general election. I am glad to be a member of the Labour party, but I cheered tonight because I was glad that many Labour Members had refused to be won over by simple promises of a review. Ever since July, when we were first alerted to the issue, there have been opportunities to have a proper look at it, but they were not taken. The party conference wanted to discuss the issue and was not allowed to do so.

So I end simply with this appeal. The Bill has gone through tonight and the cut will be made, but at least the Government claim that they will review it. I hope that it will be an honest and thoroughgoing effort and not just warm words that mean nothing. I am sure that there are plenty of us here who will ensure that the review means something. We will not allow ourselves to be put off. The party agreed in October to have a new system of making decisions. So far, that has not come into effect—but tonight a lot of us have become determined that it will.

11.51 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I know that many colleagues want to go home, so I shall be brief, but I want to say something about my position. As a result of the debate, I have taken decisions which will result in my losing my job as a parliamentary private secretary. I want to make it clear why I have done that. It is something that I very much regret having to do. I cannot in all conscience support one of the clauses of the Bill—the clause that cuts single-parent benefits, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said had been the main issue of debate today. I hope that the Government will look at what happened and how this problem arose.

The problem did not arise tonight. Much of the debate tonight has focused on some cuts that are not in the Bill. It has focused on cuts in income support and housing benefit which were contained in regulations that were never debated on the Floor of the House. I remind the House that the regulations were laid before the House on 30 July—the day before the summer recess. It was the last day on which there was any real business in the House. That is an old trick which we saw from the Tory Government many times in the past few years. They often laid regulations on the last day of business. The result is that consultation and discussion within the parliamentary Labour party never took place in a genuine way on the regulations or the Bill. That is one of the reasons why anger has built up towards tonight. I hope that the Government will remember and learn from that when they seek to make changes in the future.

The defenders of the main changes in the Bill, and the one change that has been the great focus, have talked about work. The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), who led for the Opposition on Third Reading, talked about that. I will accept no lectures from him or any other Conservative Member about Governments sticking to their promises. We have seen enough broken promises in the past 18 years to last us a lifetime. When Labour made promises and we all went out for the election on 1 May and talked about welfare to work, getting people back into work and the need to deliver child care, we meant what we said—every one of us meant it. Those are promises that we need to keep and I believe that we will keep them. The difficulty is that those are promises to put in place things that are not currently in place and will not be in place in April or June next year when the benefit reforms take effect.

I accept the need for reforms of the benefits system—we all know about the poverty trap—but we do not need this reform. What is going to happen to those who are trying to get work? We all want people to get work, but no one could believe that every lone parent who wants to get work, either now or on 1 April or 1 June next year, will be able to do that. It is simply inconceivable that the jobs will be there at the time, so what will happen to the people who do not manage to get work?

We have been told that only new claimants will be affected, although some people's status will change and they will become new claimants. I have one simple question and I cannot understand why I have not yet heard an answer to it: what will be so different about someone who is a new claimant on 5 April, compared with someone who is a new claimant on 6 April next year, when the income support regulations change? What will be the difference between a new claimant the day before the Bill comes into force and one the day after? Apparently, the answer is that one of those two people claiming on consecutive days will have to live on a few pounds less than the other. That is what Ministers are saying in making these changes.

Admittedly, in the beginning, new claimants will have a slight advantage in terms of the new deal and welfare to work, but by October next year every lone parent—including current claimants—will be in the same position. Are we saying that current claimants get too much? If not, how can we possibly say that a new claimant in exactly the same position next year will be able to manage on less? I have heard no explanation of that whatsoever, because no one could possibly pretend that there will not be new claimants next year who will be affected by the provisions in the Bill and by the new regulations made earlier this year. There are bound to be. I do not have a problem with welfare to work in terms of its aims, but I do have a problem in terms of the timing. Although I believe that we can achieve the child care, training and jobs that we want to be in place, that will not happen overnight and they will not be in place by the time the changes take effect.

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

We have been presented with a false choice in the debate; that choice states that people can have either welfare to work or benefits—that is all that is available. Earlier today, at Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister talked about the changes that we have already made to Tory priorities. We are not bound and we never have been bound by Tory priorities—we did not inherit anything that is binding. I hope that in a few months' time the Secretary of State will not be having to explain to people who have reluctantly supported her today that there was money in the system, but that that money was not spent.

I perfectly understand that hard decisions have to be made by Governments and I accept that some of those decisions might result in some people being hurt and losing financially. That is the nature of hard decisions, but I cannot accept that the casualties of those decisions—even if they turn out to be few in number, as some believe—will be some of the poorest people in society. People outside will not understand that. Earlier this evening, hon. Members said that we should remember the big picture, but I am afraid that decisions such as the one before us tonight will start to cause cracks in that picture. Once that happens, if we are not careful, the big picture could fall apart.

I greatly regret the position in which I and many of my colleagues in the parliamentary Labour party find ourselves tonight.

11.58 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I will detain the House for two minutes.

First, I pay tribute to the former Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Chisholm), to the parliamentary private secretaries, and to those Labour Members who have been willing to vote according to their consciences and their beliefs. *[Interruption.]* Secondly, I represent the same borough as the Secretary of State for Social Security; my constituency is adjacent to hers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The House must come to order. There are far too many private conversations going on in the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr. Hughes: As I said, I represent the same borough as the right hon. Lady. It is one of the two local authorities in England with the highest number of lone-parent families—four out of 10 families in our borough are single-parent families. I just do not believe, and nor will they, that in a borough which is also among the 20 boroughs with the highest unemployment rates in Britain, those parents will have a chance to go back to work in the future. To take from them what they have, against the promise of something that they may never have, is not a fair deal for them.

Thirdly, it would have been far more honourable had the Government been honest and, rather than claiming that what they said before the election and what they are saying now is the same, had admitted that they had changed their plans. People just do not accept that the words of opposition are consistent with the words of government. That undermines government and undermines this place.

When it comes to the big choices in politics, we must choose whether to defend middle England, middle Wales, middle Scotland, or middle Northern Ireland, the advantaged or the disadvantaged. The hard choice in politics is always to defend the disadvantaged and to fight for them, thereby risking the wrath of the advantaged when they sometimes have to pay the price for that decision.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not a long-standing parliamentary convention that when a Minister is defending a particularly unpopular Government policy and is embattled on a major matter, the Prime Minister—and, if there are financial aspects, the Chancellor of the Exchequer—come to support that Minister on the Front Bench? Is it not a sad departure from that convention that the Secretary of State for Social Security has been left so friendless on the Front Bench tonight?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for the Chair.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 58.

Division No. 116] **[12.1 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline

Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swinney, John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Paul Tyler and
Mr. Adrian Sanders.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With the permission of the House, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should be grateful if you took the motions separately.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall take them separately.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

BROADCASTING

That the draft Channel 4 (Application of Excess Revenues) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) (National Health Service Trusts) Order 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 2763), dated 20th November 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

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That the draft Copyright and Rights in Databases Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 6th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

EMPLOYMENT LAW

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10230/97, on a proposal for a directive on part-time work, and European Community Document No. 10975/97, Parts A and B, on proposals for directives extending the European Works Councils Directive and the Parental Leave Directive to the United Kingdom; and supports the Government's view that these proposals will contribute to a flexible labour market based on partnership between employers and employees and decent minimum standards at work.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 18.

Division No. 117] **[12.20 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*

Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui (Redditch)
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George (NW Norfolk)
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Browning, Mrs Angela
Chope, Christopher
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan Smith, Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fraser, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Letwin, Oliver
Paterson, Owen
St Aubyn, Nick
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Walter, Robert

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Maclean and
Mr. Peter Luff.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

AGENDA 2000: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION FUNDS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9984/97, Agenda 2000, as it relates to structural and cohesion policy; and supports the Government's aim that the reformed Funds should take account of the United Kingdom's regional interests and be fair to the United Kingdom in relation to other Member States, and that the reforms should make the Funds simpler, more efficient, affordable and durable.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the advice and view of the Speaker of the House of Commons that, when a Division is called, Tellers should be provided? On numerous occasions, has not Madam Speaker frowned on the type of practice that we have seen in the past half hour?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I can say only that the Chair has observed the rules of the House. I will leave it at that.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that I have witnessed a serious infringement of hon. Members' rights to bring their constituents' concerns to the attention of the senior member of the Government. Earlier this evening, in the Lobby, my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) tried to approach the Prime Minister and was physically restrained by Labour Members. He was trying to perform his duty as a Member of Parliament. Will you please bring the matter to the attention of Madam Speaker?

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Please be seated, as I have not yet dealt with the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn)—which was not a matter for the Chair. I am also quite sure that the

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) is capable of raising issues affecting his constituents in other ways.

Mr. Hogg: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said, "Further to that point of order," but it was not a point of order. I therefore hope that he will not continue.

Mr. Hogg: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a further point of order. If what my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) said is correct, there has been an assault by Labour Members on another hon. Member. That is a matter not only for Madam Speaker but for the Serjeant at Arms, because a criminal offence has been committed in the House. I therefore ask you urgently to refer the matter to the Serjeant at Arms.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was not a point of order.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was in the Lobby with my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), and I ask you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I will take no further points of order on that matter. I control what happens in the Chamber. I call the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) to present his petition.

Mr. Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is not a repeat of what we have already had.

Mr. Howarth: Madam Speaker is always telling hon. Members that she believes that her duty, first and foremost, is to protect the rights of hon. Members, and especially the rights of Back Benchers. I urge you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am in control of the situation in the Chamber. I have given a ruling on the matter that was raised, and it was a good ruling.

PETITIONS

Mr. George Atkinson

12.37 am

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I seek leave to present a petition from Mrs. Hélène Atkinson, whose husband, Mr. George Atkinson, has been imprisoned without charge in Dubai for nine months. The 2,909 petitioners are not satisfied that enough is being done to secure Mr. Atkinson's release. Wherefore, the petitioners pray that this honourable House urges the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to work for the release of Mr. George Atkinson.

To lie upon the Table.

University College (Cornwall)

12.38 am

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): I wish to present a petition from the people of Cornwall—in response to an overwhelming demand, on both academic and economic grounds—for a university college in Cornwall. Cornwall once had its own university college, and it now demands that that need be met, not through distance learning but through a properly resourced university campus.

The petition states:

The petition of the people of Cornwall declares that a new University College is needed for Cornwall. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to address the need for a University College based in Cornwall.

In the past few weeks, the petition has been signed by 3,158 people in west Cornwall.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government Finance (Dorset)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

12.39 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of the local government grant settlement as it affects Dorset and, in particular, council tax payers living in the borough of Christchurch and the East Dorset district in my constituency. I am delighted that my hon. Friends the Members for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) are here to support me because these issues affect their constituents as well as mine.

I shall go into the detailed figures later. The headline figures mean that unless a miracle happens and the Government alter their provisional grant announcement, a band D council tax payer in Christchurch will pay £100.25 more council tax next year—an increase of more than 15 per cent. A council tax payer in East Dorset will pay £98.72 more—an increase of 14.5 per cent. Those are truly staggering increases and they will require householders to make deep cuts in their other expenditure. Increases at five times the rate of inflation are totally unacceptable. This is obviously the real face of new Labour. The extra burdens are coupled with what we now know to be the highest mortgage interest rates for five years.

If the increases in council tax were intended to pay for a locally determined commensurate increase in services, they might be defended by those who support local accountability, but the increases result from a 1.5 per cent. increase in the budgets of East Dorset district and Christchurch borough, a 3.5 per cent. increase in county council expenditure and a 4.2 per cent. increase in police expenditure. It is no wonder that the Government are convicted on the charge of forcing council tax payers to pay more for less.

It is impossible in a short Adjournment debate to go into all the detail that councillors and others would wish. In recognition of that, I am grateful that the Minister has agreed that he will meet a deputation of my constituents in East Dorset and Christchurch and representatives from Dorset county council to go into more detail on the issues I am raising. In recognition of his courtesy, I shall try to ensure that all the groups come to see him at the same time.

In seeking to understand this year's local government grant settlement, the expression "pork barrel" comes very much to mind. "Pork barrel" is an American term applied to legislators who give to their political friends and take away from their political enemies to maintain popularity with their own party. What other explanation can there be for the fact that East Dorset district council suffers the largest percentage reduction in grant of any district council as a result of changes in the formula for allocation, otherwise known as the methodology, while the Prime Minister's district council of Sedgefield gains 14.6 per cent., the second highest gain in the country?

I could not agree—my constituents could not agree either—with the Deputy Prime Minister when he said that the

"new measures of neediness . . . are a clear improvement".—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 160.]

They are not a clear improvement. From talking to the Minister earlier, I am not sure that they are even clear.

I hope that the Minister will explain the Government's decision to allocate East Dorset only £68.25 per head grant next year, which is the fourth lowest grant per head of resident population in the country. The year after, the situation will be even worse as the full impact of the change in methodology bites, forcing the council tax up a further 10 per cent. for only 1.5 per cent. in increased expenditure.

If the Minister visited Dorset and drove from Verwood in my constituency to Blandford Forum in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset, I would defy him to justify how it could be fair that a resident in Blandford Forum received 26 per cent. more grant per head than a resident in Verwood. If, instead of travelling to North Dorset, the Minister travelled to Christchurch, he would find that the Standard spending assessment per head was 28 per cent. higher than in East Dorset.

There is something peculiar about that. I hope that the Minister will concede that, on any objective basis, the differences are anomalous and indefensible. Councils comprising urban fringes with large rural hinterlands seem to be losing out particularly under the methodology. The consequence is that if East Dorset increases its budget by 1.5 per cent., its council tax will go up by 13.76 per cent.

My constituents in Christchurch have also been dealt a cruel blow. Christchurch's SSA per head is going down by 2.8 per cent., from £90 to £88, as a result of changes to the methodology. The consequences of that are dire. The council has already implemented £100,000 of savings for this year and approved £257,000 of savings for next year. It will have to make £130,000 of additional savings to keep within its cap, which permits an increase of only 1.5 per cent. in budgeted expenditure—just £57,000. The Government's settlement will result in band D council tax in Christchurch going up by 17.37 per cent. next year, from £71.67 to £84.12, for a 1.5 per cent. budget increase.

In comparison with East Dorset and Christchurch, Dorset county council has done well. Its adjusted SSA has gone up by 3 per cent.—£6.167 million—to £224.031 million. As the population has also increased by 0.8 per cent., the SSA per head has gone up by only 2.2 per cent. and is still £40 per head lower than the average for English counties.

Dorset county council has also suffered a 50 per cent. greater blow than the shire county average, losing 1.3 per cent. of its SSA because of methodology changes. Dorset is most unfairly hit by the Government's fiddle to the SSA for capital financing. If, as spendthrift, debt-ridden Labour councils have long hoped, the Government are intent on bailing them out of the consequences of their profligacy by giving them extra grant towards the cost of those debts, that should not be at the expense of prudent authorities. However, that is what is happening. The reduction in the control total and the scaling factor from 85 to 78 per cent. will result in Dorset county council losing £855,000—£5.70 per band D council tax payer.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

The consequence of the settlement for Dorset county council is that increasing its budget by 3.6 per cent. to the capping limit will necessitate a band D council tax increase of about 10 per cent., from £556 to £610. However, that is not the end of the story. This year, all Dorset council tax payers benefit from a special reorganisation grant worth £26 at band D. The additional costs for Dorset resulting from Bournemouth and Poole becoming unitary are £78 per head at band D. That burden has not disappeared. It should have been reduced by the county council, but it is still significant.

The Government could give immediate and direct help to Dorset council tax payers by paying the transitional grant for a second year, as all the group leaders and my hon. Friends have argued in letters to the Secretary of State. The Minister shakes his head, but we have taken encouragement from the Deputy Prime Minister's statement that £130 million will be allocated for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation. On the basis of the present plans, he thinks it possible that less provision will be needed for that purpose. The Deputy Prime Minister said that any surplus would be added to the total of revenue support grant. I submit that it would be fairer to give £4 million of that to Dorset.

That brings me to the area cost adjustment. During the latter days of the general election campaign in April, the current Prime Minister—then the Leader of the Opposition—was asked whether he would reform the area cost adjustment. He told the *Cambridge Evening News*:

"We will review the Area Cost Adjustment in time for the next financial year."

The right hon. Gentleman added that, in relation to Cambridgeshire,

"changes in line with the recent Elliot review would bring the county an extra £10 million."

The right hon. Gentleman, by those words, raised expectations and led people to believe in Cambridge and elsewhere that were a Labour Government to be elected, the Elliot review of the area cost adjustment would be implemented this year. If the Elliot review recommendations had been implemented this year, Dorset would have benefited by about £4 million, about £25 per charge payer. It will not have escaped the notice of the House that that is a similar sum to the transitional reduction grant that the Government are proposing to withdraw from Dorset this year. That grant was given by the Conservative Government in response to representations that were made in Dorset.

Honour could be satisfied by keeping the grant for one more year in the expectation that the Government would then honour their pre-election pledge to implement the results of the Elliot review.

The final element in the council tax bill for my constituents is the precept from the Dorset police. The maximum spending power permitted by the Government for next year is £73.720 million, increased from an equivalent figure of £70.771 million for the current year. The police think that even expenditure at that cap will not be enough, so there is a fear that the precept will be raised from £63.59 to £71.37, an increase of more than 12 per cent., with only a 4.17 per cent. increase in expenditure.

The Government's confidence trick of forcing up council tax is clear from the figures for the Dorset police authority. Raising the expenditure to the cap would cost £2.949 million, and only 27 per cent. of that would be funded by the national exchequer, the other 73 per cent. coming from local taxpayers. That is why, for a modest increase in contribution from the Government, local taxpayers are being expected to pay £3 for every £1 that the Government pay.

The Deputy Prime Minister said when introducing the grant settlement for next year that when Labour was elected on 1 May it was declared that it was time to bury the hatchet. The right hon. Gentleman did not say where he was going to bury it. I hope that tonight the Minister will allay the fears of Dorset people that the Deputy Prime Minister's hatchet is targeted at Dorset in a vindictive vendetta against Dorset people who did not vote Labour in the general election.

I am conscious that in my constituency there was the second lowest Labour vote in the country. It was less than 7 per cent., and significantly less than in 1992. If we have a Government who are handing out money to their friends and withdrawing it from their enemies, we have exposed an example tonight. I hope that the Minister will be able to allay our concerns. From the examples that I have given, it is clear that charge payers in my constituency are being condemned to pay 15 per cent. more council tax next year for worse services.

Earlier this month, the Minister for Local Government and Housing told Radio Kent that if council tax increases by more than 7 per cent., the council concerned will be failing in its duty. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister whether he is prepared to make the same statement in respect of Dorset. If the council tax increases in Dorset by more than 7 per cent., will the hon. Gentleman consider that the county council and the district councils have failed in their duty? I hope that he will answer that question.

In announcing this year's settlement, the Government were guilty of a cruel confidence trick on my constituents. The Deputy Prime Minister promised that standard spending assessments would be fairer, and that spending could increase by 3.5 per cent., leading to a council tax increase of only 7 per cent. Yet SSA per head in East Dorset has fallen by 6.7 per cent. and in Christchurch by 2.8 per cent., and even for the county council it has increased by only 2.2 per cent.

We are getting mixed messages from the Government. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has told me in a letter that I should demand that Dorset county council pass on its full SSA increase to schools, despite the fact that it is already spending 6 per cent. above its SSA. The Deputy Prime Minister, however, says that the changes in the SSAs will have a large impact on council tax levels in some authorities if they do not adjust their spending accordingly.

In other words, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is saying that the SSAs must go towards additional spending by the council, whereas the Deputy Prime Minister is saying that because grant has been taken away from Dorset, the council's expenditure should be reduced accordingly. Those two messages are incompatible.

It seems that the Government recognise that local authorities need to spend more money, but they do not have the courage to provide the money themselves.

Instead they are transferring the burden to council tax payers. This is a massive council tax increase—a tax increase by another name—and my constituents feel that they are being unfairly punished. I hope that the consultation is a real one, and that when it is over we shall find that there is more grant for Dorset than it is to receive under the present proposals.

12.56 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) has secured a useful opportunity to discuss our proposals for the financing of local authorities' revenue expenditure in the coming financial year. He has rightly focused on matters of concern to his area of Dorset, which is the subject of the debate. He ranged rather widely, and we got as far as Cambridge; none the less, I shall focus specifically on the Dorset area.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman at the outset that his allegations of a vendetta against any particular area are totally unfounded. Charges of pork barrel politics come ill from a party that was renowned for rigging the standard spending assessment arrangements to ensure such curious results as the fact that leafy Kingston upon Thames was deemed as deprived as Barnsley. That was the previous Government's record, and it is not surprising that it provoked considerable criticism.

We have committed ourselves to a fair distribution of Government grant to local authorities, and the provisional settlement announced last week is a start in achieving that goal. It is better, in cash terms, than many authorities must have expected on the basis of last year's plans. It is also fairer in its distribution, and reinforces local accountability by giving local authorities more discretion over local spending decisions.

There will, of course, be some authorities that are disappointed with the measures we have taken to ensure a fairer distribution of grant, and I can understand the concerns of the authorities mentioned by the hon. Gentleman that have had a reduction in their standard spending assessments. As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, the authorities in the Dorset area around his constituency have been adversely affected by the changes. I do not seek to hide from that fact in any way, and I shall return to some of the reasons for it in a moment. We inherited tight spending plans, which meant that we had to make tough decisions if we intended to ensure a fairer settlement.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, education is the top priority for the Government and for the nation. That is where we have concentrated the new money for local authorities. Schools faced real problems after years of cuts and retrenchment, and we therefore made available an extra £835 million for revenue expenditure in English schools in 1998–99. There will also be £662 million of provision for local authorities for the education of children under five years old, following the abolition of the nursery vouchers scheme.

Adjusted for changes in funding mechanisms and in local government functions, that means an increase over 1997–98 in total standard spending of £1.78 billion, or 3.8 per cent. That is expected to be 1 per cent. above inflation, thereby allowing an increase in real terms to reflect our key policy priorities. It also allows £1.06 billion, or 5.7 per cent., more to go into English schools in 1998–99. That enables a start to be made on raising educational standards, which we are determined to see. It also allows £350 million for community care and £70 million more for children's social services, as well as a 4.8 per cent. increase in provision for fire services and other, smaller increases for the remaining services.

We have inherited extremely tight spending plans, and we are committed to living within those plans. I acknowledge that we have not been able, within those constraints, to meet all the pressures that local government has identified. However, I am sure that councils will wish to review critically all the tasks that they undertake and to continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness wherever possible.

There has already been a good deal of comment on how the increase is to be funded. The settlement led immediately to suggestions in the local press in Dorset that average band D council tax levels will rise by more than £90 for the coming financial year. The Government are fully funding, with extra grant, the £835 million of new provision for schools. We are also providing a new special grant to cover the revenue costs of local authority private finance initiative projects. Including these, aggregate external finance will be £37.51 billion, an increase of 2.7 per cent. compared with 1997-98.

That is not as big an increase as that for total standard spending. Although we have backed our new spending provision with grant, there was a gap in grant funding built into the spending plans that we inherited from the previous Government. That explains the difference between the total of aggregate external finance and the total standard spending.

The gap in grant funding implies a pressure on council taxes equivalent to a 7 per cent. increase. We have sought to release pressures that might otherwise have led to further tax increases, by a number of means, especially by fully funding the extra provision for education. That extra funding for education is worth £50 a year to the typical taxpayer. However, I will not be drawn into predicting actual tax levels. On that note, I must say that the unfounded and speculative claims that have been made about the effect of the settlement on council taxes are generally unhelpful and worrying to many local taxpayers.

The Government do not have targets for council taxes in 1998-99. The actual council tax in individual authorities is properly a matter for local discretion and local decisions on spending and financing. Tax rates will be affected by a range of factors, such as collection performance and collection fund surplus or deficit. I will say, however, that we expect local authorities to give proper consideration to the burden on their taxpayers when they come to set their budgets.

I will briefly discuss capping. Hon. Members will know that we remain committed to the ending of crude and universal capping. To achieve that, we announced in July a review of local government finance which will look at the matter, as well as a range of other issues. A sequence of consultation papers will be published over the next few months, with the intention of publishing a White Paper in the spring. The Local Government Association has been fully involved in these discussions.

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

In the meantime—and in the light of our public expenditure plans—capping will remain in place for 1998-99. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced provisional capping principles for 1998-99 to the House on 2 December. Those are subject to a number of changes this year. They will give local authorities more room to exercise local discretion and will help them to direct the additional provision for education to the schools, for which it is intended.

We recognise that there is the potential for increases in council taxes as a result of those changes in the capping principles. However, we expect local authorities to look carefully at their permitted increases, including passporting, and to make a careful judgment about whether they need to make those increases in budget and whether their council tax payers can afford them. Many authorities have budgeted below their capping limit in the past. We have given local authorities extra room within which to exercise their discretion and we expect them to use this greater flexibility responsibly.

Those principles are necessarily provisional. Firm decisions on capping cannot be made until authorities have set their budgets for 1998-99. When those decisions are made, the Government will of course take into account all relevant considerations.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I regret that I cannot, because I have been left very little time to reply, and the hon. Gentleman did not ask in advance for permission to intervene in the debate.

The hon. Member for Christchurch has raised several issues relating to the way in which standard spending assessments apply in Dorset. SSAs play an important part in the overall financial system for local authorities. The Deputy Prime Minister's statement outlined our proposals for local government finance for the coming year. I should like to remind hon. Members of what we are seeking to achieve and of some of the main changes for SSAs, since they put in context those affecting Dorset.

Our election pledge to tackle the issue of fairness remains a priority and the provisional settlement announcement has begun to overcome the injustices of the system. We are prepared to do whatever is necessary to reach that situation. As a result, the way in which SSAs are determined and how they might be improved is an important part of our review of local government finance. We are also ready to consider new evidence for changes in SSAs to bring about improvements.

The changes that we propose, like many of our other priorities, begin with education. The education formula assessing the spending needs for under-fives will be changed to reflect the abolition of the nursery vouchers scheme. The formula will be based on the number of pupils for whom local authorities provide nursery education, rather than on the total population of four-year-old children, regardless of whether they receive pre-school education. Where local authorities have increased provision beyond the level in spring 1997, they will be able to apply to the Department for Education and Employment for transitional specific grant.

Mr. Chope: I raised some specific, narrow issues relating to my constituents and some particular matters concerning the settlement in Dorset. The Minister is responding with banalities and generalities. Will he confine his remarks in the remaining time to the specific issues affecting Dorset? If council tax goes up by more than 7 per cent. in Dorset, will it be the councils in Dorset that are failing in their duty, or will it be the Government's responsibility?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman took rather more than the customary time, leaving me less time than is the normal courtesy to reply to his questions. I was giving him a detailed response on the issues that he raised, including the rationale for changes in the SSA methodology. I intended to come to his other specific points, but if I do not manage to do so, because time runs out, that will be his fault, not mine.

The principles that we adopted for changes in the SSA methodology were all agreed with the Local Government Association. The principles now make it more explicit how measures of need are evaluated. That represents an improvement on the previous formula, whereby some affluent areas were ranked higher in terms of deprivation than other parts of the country with more obvious economic and social problems. Indicators such as morbidity rates and the proportion of residents on income support have been—in my view, rightly—added to the indices.

We have confronted the inequity in the present system whereby visitors and commuters were attributed the same economic and social characteristics as residents. Previously, sparsity, density and measures of neediness applied to all those categories. That was clearly a gross anomaly and now they will apply only to those living in such areas. There was clearly something wrong with a system that prescribed that all visitors and commuters to an area were as deprived as the average resident. We shall continue to take account of the extra costs of visitors and commuters, but only the fair costs.

We have proposed in the settlement to change the way in which we deal with the costs of borrowing. During the 1980s, local authorities had several choices about how to use capital receipts. They could spend them on new investments or they could use them to repay debt. At present, the capital finance system works to the advantage of those who repaid debt. We propose to change it so that where an authority would do better from having its capital financing SSA worked out using its actual level of debt in 1990, rather than the notional level previously used, that measure will be adopted.

One significant part of the calculation of SSAs in which we have decided not to implement any change at present concerns the area cost adjustment, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The Prime Minister said that we would review that, and we have done so. We have received considerable representations from people in

local government who were unhappy about the Elliot proposals and supported a specific cost approach. We therefore specifically commissioned further work to examine the merits of such an approach.

Dorset county council fares well from the proposed SSAs. Its—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at nine minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 December 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Young People

1. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** If all young people will have a choice of all options in the new deal programme; what entitlement there is for progress from one option to another; and what is the maximum period that the unemployed will be able to be part of the programme. [18746]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights (Mr. Andrew Smith): All young people will have a choice of options in the new deal, although there will not in every case be a choice of every option. For example, those who are already well qualified may not be eligible for the full-time education and training option. Most participants will stay on one option, but where it clearly meets a young person's needs, people will be able to move to a second option. Although most people are likely to spend less than a year in the programme, the maximum period will be 16 months, and longer if we take account of the follow-through support for those who need it at the end of the option.

Mr. Simpson: I am grateful for the Minister's answer. Is he aware that one in four young unemployed people in the east midlands are in Nottingham? Many of them have been around the magic roundabout of short-term fraudulent schemes that the previous Government offered them and are deeply cynical about the concept of training. Does he accept that, for some, securing a regular attendance record over six months would be a major achievement; that we ought to be considering repairing the damage done to those whose cynicism about previous employment initiatives may have been well placed; and that we should allow longer-term continuity to bring them sensibly, and with skills, back into an employable work force?

Mr. Smith: Yes; the new deal will bring new hope and opportunity to my hon. Friend's constituents, as it will to others. The crucial importance of the gateway in the new deal programme is that it provides for young people a period of counselling, advice, assessment and the chance to try out subsequent options before choosing what they will go on to do. They will have a personal adviser who will help them not simply during the gateway period but while they are undertaking work under the option and subsequently when they so need it. Such continuity, the richness of provision and the quality that is available under the new deal will set it clearly apart from schemes that went before, which, as my hon. Friend rightly said, damaged so many young people.

Mr. Keetch: The Liberal Democrats welcome the new deal, although, as the Government know, we would fund it differently. What will the Minister say to people who will not qualify for the new deal because they take national insurance credits instead of, for example, jobseeker's allowance, or are on invalidity benefit? Is it not true that, for such young people, the new deal is no deal? What will the Government do about them?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. We have new deal programmes not only for those in receipt of jobseeker's allowance but for people who are disabled or have suffered long-term sickness—all from the extra £195 million, which the Chancellor made available from the windfall levy in the Budget.

Our approach to welfare to work offers opportunities not simply to the young unemployed, but to the long-term unemployed, the sick and disabled and lone parents. It is a world of opportunity better than anything that was on offer under the previous Government, and anything from the hon. Gentleman's party.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: Bearing in mind the high unemployment in rural areas and the lack of public transport in many such areas, what special arrangements will the Minister put in place to enable the scheme to work in rural areas?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the particular needs of rural areas. Those are being addressed by partnerships in each area, which match opportunities that will be made available locally to the needs of local participants, in conjunction with local business. We have negotiated at a national level substantial discounts through transport operators such as National Express and Stagecoach. The Rural Development Commission is working with local authorities to see how the new deal can extend transport availability in rural areas.

Mr. Beggs: We welcome the new deal and the new opportunities that will be afforded to those young people who have hitherto been unemployed. What emphasis will be put on ensuring that young people gain qualifications through the new deal?

Mr. Smith: That is another aspect which sets the new deal apart from schemes that went before. Quality training is a part of every option of the new deal because it is essential, not merely to rebuild the motivation and self-esteem of so many of the young unemployed, but to provide the means to help them get jobs and stay in jobs. I wish to place on record our thanks for the work of the Northern Ireland task force in developing the new deal there.

School Standards

2. **Mr. Coaker:** What plans he has to assist schools in areas of deprivation and disadvantage to raise standards. [18747]

11. **Ms Dari Taylor:** What plans he has to raise standards in schools in areas of disadvantage. [18757]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): In our White Paper, we spelled out a series of measures that would raise standards and achieve our literacy and numeracy targets, including the development of the standards fund, which we have now published, and the 200 literacy co-ordinators across the country. Last week, we published the School Standards and Framework Bill, which laid out our plans for education action zones, through which we can target additional help, pilot best practice and draw together the whole community to ensure that every child in every school gets a decent education, wherever they live.

Mr. Coaker: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that one of the crucial concerns for the education action zones to address will be the fact that schools serving exactly the same sorts of areas of social deprivation—whether urban or rural—achieve vastly differing results, in examinations, truancy and exclusion levels and many other indicators? We need to ensure that all schools in those areas achieve their very best if the comprehensive ideal is to give all our children the start in life that they deserve.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely. We have a bigger gap between success and failure than any other country in the developed world. Spreading best practice, developing quality leadership and headship in schools and ensuring that teachers have the professional development and in-service training necessary to do their jobs are all part of the agenda for transforming education in this country.

Ms Taylor: I am pleased to welcome the education action zones. We should appreciate knowing when the criteria for the education action zones will be published and what they will be.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall, within a matter of weeks, publish the detailed criteria for local communities, schools and education authorities to respond positively and in an innovatory fashion to the request to them to consider how they can use the zones to improve education in urban and rural areas. We shall of course spell out the detailed terms of reference. I hope that people will think imaginatively about how to tackle the long-standing under-achievement that has regrettably blighted the lives of some children in some parts of our country.

Mr. Viggers: Is the Secretary of State aware that this morning I read the brochure "Investing in Young People: A Strategy for the Education and Training of 16 to 18 year-olds" which he sent me? Are not the Government rich in promises but poor in performance? The funding of sixth-form colleges will fall in real terms in each of the next three years because of the productivity and efficiency improvements expected of them.

Mr. Blunkett: We are reducing by a third the productivity improvements—or cuts, as they were previously known—demanded of the colleges by the budgets set by the previous Government. The £83 million of additional resources, not including the new deal provision, will go a long way to ensure that colleges can develop their potential. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman received, and has read, "Investing in Young People", because it contains an opportunity, in its 10-point plan, to set aside the neglect of 16 and 17-year-olds and to put in the resources and support necessary, including an additional £10 million to expand the modern apprenticeship scheme next year.

Mrs. Lait: Is the Secretary of State aware that, because of the excellence of the education provided by Bromley council, many parents from surrounding Labour-run boroughs send their children to schools in Bromley? Would he care to give us a time scale suggesting how soon he expects the improvements that he promises in education to take place in the surrounding Labour boroughs, so that the parents of children in Bromley can choose the school that they wish their children to attend?

Mr. Blunkett: In the spirit of Christmas magnanimity, I congratulate the hon. Lady on her return to the House. I am delighted that she has raised that question, because it offers us support in sorting out the mess that results when children are excluded from their local schools because of the selective process implemented in Bromley, with school knocking out school. Getting admissions policy right, together with lifting standards in all schools for all children, will be a key part in the process of making sense of the nonsense that we inherited.

After-school Child Care

3. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** If he will list the number of after-school child care places to be provided in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* each of the English regions. [18748]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Alan Howarth): The precise breakdown of places will depend on the volume and quality of bids received by the new opportunities fund.

Mr. Morgan: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is not the affordability of good quality child care essential to the success of any welfare-to-work programme? Will he confirm that research by the equal opportunities organisation in Wales, Chwarae Teg, shows that so far child care has reached only the children of parents with professional qualifications? So far—if I may refer briefly to last night's events—it has not yet reached the classic low-paid lone parent.

Mr. Howarth: The research that my hon. Friend mentions is indeed significant, and demonstrates that this country has lagged seriously behind in the provision of child care. The previous Administration did not think that they had a responsibility to develop a national child care strategy. We shall do so.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made an additional £300 million available over five years. That will ensure that there is out-of-school child care provision; there are also other child care projects available in every

community. We approach that important responsibility with the utmost seriousness. It is a means of ensuring that those who are deprived, in poverty and on the margins of our society have the opportunities that the Government want them to have.

Special Needs

4. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** What steps he is taking to improve provision for pupils with special needs. [18749]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): On 22 October, we published a Green Paper, "Excellence for all children", setting out our proposals for raising the achievement of children with special educational needs. We are beginning to receive responses to the consultation from a wide range of interests.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I welcome the initiatives set out in the Green Paper, and other steps that the Government have taken, but may I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the specific difficulties facing children in care who attend mainstream education but also have special educational needs, and whose attendance record is often poor?

My hon. Friend may be aware that the Health Select Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the circumstances of looked-after children, and one of the issues that have come over to us loud and clear involves the tensions arising for those children as a result of the emphasis on league tables and school performance. Only this week, a child in a midlands city told us that the school that she attended simply did not like children in care. Will the Minister look into the issue as a matter of urgency, and attempt to achieve some balance between school attendance and the needs of children in those circumstances?

Ms Morris: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the under-performance of children in care. Statutorily, the state is their parent, and they have been badly let down. We want to address that issue through our responsibility not only for those with special educational needs but for looked-after children in general. We need far greater co-ordination between health authorities, social services and the education service, which have a joint collective responsibility to ensure that those children are cared for and receive a good standard of education. At the moment, many of them are being too badly let down.

I welcome the joint inquiry by the Select Committees on Health and on Education and Employment. As for my hon. Friend's comments on performance tables, it is crucial that information be made available, both for parents and so that schools can improve standards. I take seriously the idea that we should recognise progress and achievement wherever it happens. That is why, next year, we shall pilot value-added performance tables, so that the achievement of every child can be duly recognised.

Mr. Hawkins: When the Minister is looking at the different problems, will she recognise that a lot of head teachers—some of whom I was talking to recently—who have a proud record of helping special needs and statemented children are concerned about the policy that the Government are encouraging of inclusion in every single school? I was at one school last week where 40 per cent. of the entire roll are special needs or statemented. The head teacher feels that unless primary schools such as hers get extra resources, they will not be able to carry through the policy objectives that they wish to encourage. Will she look at the financial consequences of her policy on inclusion?

Ms Morris: Indeed. That is why, I was delighted to announce last Friday, *Official Report*, column 583, that the Government had made £11 million available next year for the access initiative. That amount compares with the £4 million made available by the previous Government last year, and is the highest amount in any single year.

I welcome the progress that some head teachers have made towards inclusion, and we want to encourage more of it. We believe that more children could be educated in mainstream schools. Many parents do not have the choice, as there is not a mainstream school near them that can accept their child. I accept that we must move with care towards inclusion, and we must make sure that schools have the proper support and that teachers have proper training. We do not want inclusion in name only; we want inclusion where children are working and being educated with their peers, and where they are taking a full and active part in school life. That can happen because, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is happening in many schools already.

National Year of Reading

5. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** If he will make a statement on his plans to support the National Year of Reading. [18750]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): The aim of the National Year of Reading is to demonstrate to children the excitement, pleasure and enjoyment of reading. In addition, it will encourage adults to learn to read. The Government, along with the private sector, will be supporting those objectives in a variety of ways.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply, and I warmly welcome the National Year of Reading; not least because it will provide an additional impetus for the Government's crusade to raise standards of literacy. As well as encouraging children who can read to develop their skills further, should we not focus attention on those who cannot yet read at all? What plans are there to focus on that specific group as part of the National Year of Reading?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some 8 million adults are unable to read and write properly, and the National Year of Reading must treat them as a priority. We shall need to find new ways of engaging and motivating those adults. We are particularly pleased that popular television programmes such as "EastEnders" and "Brookside" have agreed to promote the National Year of Reading within their scripts. That is a positive way of engaging adults who otherwise would not be part of the National Year of Reading.

Mr. Don Foster: I welcome the Minister's response and the emphasis that he rightly places on raising literacy standards across the board. Therefore, is it not frankly

ludicrous that we are spending three times as much on testing the literacy and numeracy skills of seven-year-olds as we are on books for those seven-year-olds? Is he aware that, even with the additional money that the Government have provided, we shall still be spending twice as much on testing as on books?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for an announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in a few days, which will reveal clearly the priorities of the Government. We believe that testing at seven is appropriate, as it is important to judge relative progress and to make sure that individual children can move on and develop their reading, and their literacy skills in general. On the wider issue of priorities, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased when he hears my right hon. Friend's announcement within 10 days.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: I welcome the Minister's statement on the National Year of Reading, and I urge him to give particular attention to co-ordinating adult literacy responses with those of children. That is particularly important in areas such as mine where not only the children but the parents in council estates need to be brought up to literacy standards. When we had a consultation exercise on the White Paper recently, that was one of the strongest points that came across. Will he take that into account?

Mr. Byers: Yes, the Government want a community approach to reading. The previous Government established four family literacy schemes—just four. We shall expand that programme and have nearly 500 family literacy schemes, as we recognise that that is a positive way to involve parents in developing their children's reading skills. It is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to getting the basics right and getting parents working with their children to ensure that they have the best possible start to their school life.

Student Loans

6. **Mr. Allan:** If students whose maintenance grants are to be phased out in 1998–99 will be eligible for the increased student loans that students in 1999 and 2000 are eligible to receive. [18751]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Dr. Kim Howells): New students entering higher education in the 1998–99 academic year will be eligible for increased loans in that year to offset the reduction in the level of maintenance grants. In 1999–2000, we propose to abolish maintenance grants. Those students will be eligible for an income-related loan for their maintenance on the same basis as 1999–2000 entrants.

Mr. Allan: Does the Minister share my fear that those people who are thinking of doing three or four-year undergraduate teacher training courses will be deterred by his proposals for student finance, as they know that the salaries that they will later earn as primary school teachers will be high enough for them to pay back the loan, but do not command the sort of graduate premiums that he uses to justify his proposals?

Dr. Howells: No, I do not agree. The reforms that we are putting in place see primary school teachers as an essential part of our community. They will be rewarded as such. The reward that they will receive will be to see the education system transformed and, as a result, a higher education system that will be transformed as well.

Ms Hodge: I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister has had a chance to look at the Select Committee on Education and Employment report that was published yesterday on the funding issues arising out of the Dearing report and the Government's proposals. If he has, does he agree with the Committee's findings that, while we generally accept the thrust of Government policy, there will be a funding gap in the year 1999–2000, before the money starts to flow in? Does he further agree that that gap should not be met by declining standards in higher education, greater student poverty or continuing the cap on student numbers in higher education? Therefore, will he give the House some idea of whether he is considering other measures, such as those suggested in the Select Committee report, as a means of meeting that funding gap?

Dr. Howells: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the Committee, as part of their comprehensive spending review, the Government will study that gap closely. They believe that the radical measures taken to secure sufficient funding and ensure a good and healthy future for higher education will also enable us to lift the cap on the number of students in higher education and will be sufficient to meet the long-term needs of that sector.

Mr. Boswell: Does the Minister agree that, contrary to the advice of the Dearing committee, the total abolition of maintenance grants is likely to lead to a real reduction in the numbers offering themselves for higher education. Do not the likely admission figures for next year already show that to be the case?

Dr. Howells: No, they do not. The figures are slightly down on this time last year—

Mr. Boswell: Really?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman can sneer, but it is true. What is more, there is evidence that 6 per cent. more students entered this year than the year before, because of the changes that are taking place in education. We think that the take-up by students this year accounts for that small drop in intake.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the decision to end the means-testing of grants for disabled students in full-time education has been widely welcomed?

Dr. Howells: It has been widely welcomed, and it shows that the Government, unlike the previous Government, recognise the huge potential among disabled people who have felt that they could not go into higher education because of the means test. That has properly been welcomed throughout the country, and will continue to be so.

Mr. Dorrell: Ministers are fond of asserting that it is the Government's policy to continue the expansion of higher education that has occurred over the past 18 years.

If that is indeed their policy, how can it be reconciled with the repeated reports from universities throughout the country of substantial reductions in applications for courses starting next autumn, compared with the equivalent figures for this time last year? Does the Minister agree that, when the figures from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service are published next week, we shall be able to compare the Government's warm words with hard reality? Does he accept that those figures are the litmus test of whether the Government are converting aspiration into reality?

Dr. Howells: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that those figures are extremely volatile at the best of times and that, after Monday, more than 25 per cent. of applications will not yet have been received, so the figures will account for only 75 per cent. They will show important trends, but I put it to him that if there is a downward turn, it will be very temporary, because people understand, as the Government do, that getting a degree is the best advantage that people can get if they want a good job. We shall ensure that they get that degree.

Peer Education Schemes

7. **Mr. Rowe:** What plans he has to develop peer education schemes in schools. [18752]

Ms Estelle Morris: We set out in "Excellence in schools" our strategy for raising standards in all schools. That includes imaginative approaches, one of which is certainly peer tutoring. It is already the practice in significant numbers of schools, and available research evidence suggests that it is effective.

Mr. Rowe: Does the Minister recognise that there is considerable excitement about the introduction of the millennium volunteers scheme? Many of us who have been campaigning for such a scheme for many years are anxious that it should not be frittered away or lose its potential. Does she agree that, within the possibilities open to millennium volunteers, the expansion of peer education would be an extremely fruitful course?

Ms Morris: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's contribution in this sector over many years and welcome his comments. Many young people have a valuable contribution to make in supporting the learning of younger people. I shall certainly take on board his suggestions.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Should not many local education authorities be congratulated on their work in developing mentoring schemes among students in schools, because of the pressures that many children face? Are not they best placed to demonstrate best practice?

Ms Morris: Yes, and I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend's local authority in Bradford on its work, as well as the authorities in Winchester, Kirklees and Birmingham. There has been much innovation which, as the evidence shows, has raised standards. The key point is that not only the students who are tutored raise their standards: those who do the tutoring benefit as well. Peer tutoring means winning all round.

Tuition Fees

8. **Mr. Burnett:** How the collection of tuition fees is to be managed and by whom; and what estimate he has made of the cost. [18753]

Dr. Howells: Under our new funding arrangements, universities and colleges will collect private contributions to tuition fees from full-time undergraduate students, building on the arrangements that they already have in place for collecting fees from part-time, postgraduate and overseas students. The higher education funding plans for 1998–99 assumed that institutions in England would collect £130 million from private contributions to fees. That figure allowed for costs of about 5 per cent. for collection, and for any default.

Mr. Burnett: Sir Ron Dearing's recommendation that students should contribute towards their tuition fees has one important caveat: that the cash raised should be hypothecated to the higher education budget. Does the Minister agree?

Dr. Howells: We have already informed universities that the money that they collect will be used in universities to drive up standards, to help with the running of universities. We hope that that will continue. We are interested in lifelong learning. We want universities to be part of a seamless education structure that will allow people to enter university from many directions different from those from which they now enter. That is an important component of all our new schemes.

Mr. Steinberg: My hon. Friend probably knows that I oppose the introduction of tuition fees. I am wise enough to know that my opposition alone will not stop them coming in, but can he give a guarantee that if they are to be levied they will go solely to higher and further education? If they go into the Exchequer generally, they will be no more than a tax on education.

Dr. Howells: I can give my hon. Friend that guarantee. He opposes tuition fees, but presumably he does not support the present arrangement, or the ones that led to it, whereby a young person from a family in one of the two lowest socio-economic groups has a two in 10 chance of a university education while someone from a professional or managerial family has a seven or eight in 10 chance. That cannot be right, and that is why we are making the changes.

Mr. Willetts: The Minister has just made it clear that tuition fees are a tax on higher education to pay for further education, as people had feared. How does he expect to run reliable means tests on students who come from outside Britain, and how much it will cost to do so?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman is known as "two brains", so he will understand that we are members of the European Union and that, as such, we have to abide by European Union law and that that task already has to be carried out. It will be carried out by an agency equipped to do the job. I do not know what mystery there is about that. We will certainly be able do it. The Government will presumably abide by it because it is the letter of the law.

School Budgets (Extra Money)

9. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** What steps he is taking to ensure that the extra money allocated by the Government to local authorities is actually allocated to schools' budgets. [18754]

Mr. Blunkett: I have written to the leaders of all local authorities with responsibility for education to emphasise that the £1,017 million additional funding for next year should be applied directly for the benefit of children in our schools so that the average 5.7 per cent. increase can be applied directly to raising standards.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply. I remind him that there is a difference between schools and education. As he has written to all local authorities, why did the Labour group on Gloucestershire county council vote just two weeks ago not to pass all the money on to schools? It was only because of the Conservative group that the motion to do so was carried.

Mr. Blunkett: I am always in favour of Conservative authorities following Government policy, and passing on the 5.9 per cent. increase in standard spending assessment allocated to Gloucestershire. I hope that Gloucestershire county council, with the support of all three main political parties, will apply itself to the provision of nursery education, which it has neglected over the years.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: There is no doubt that Labour local education authorities will see that the money goes to education. There are still several large metropolitan authorities where there is a discrepancy in the amount allocated per student for education, particularly in the SIGOMA group—the Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities. Will my right hon. Friend quickly examine that situation with a view to levelling up the imbalance that exists because of the way the formula applies to some education authorities?

Mr. Blunkett: I and my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions accept that further work is required on ensuring that resources reach those parts of the country and those authorities that are in greatest need. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister announced changes a couple of weeks ago that will start the process of achieving greater equity and fairness across the country, including provision for nursery children on the basis of those funded rather than on the notional numbers in the authority—and, of course, on the actual rather than the notional capital debt that had accrued before 1990. There is still room for improvement, but we are taking those essential steps to ensure that authorities can apply fairly the resources made available to ensure that we have equal standards across Britain.

Mr. Dorrell: Is it not already clear that there is a yawning chasm between the Secretary of State's rhetoric about a 5.7 per cent. increase in the average standard spending assessment across the country and likely experience of head teachers in terms of the increase in their schools' budgets that they will receive when the councils set their budgets early next year? Is it not the case that the Secretary of State simply cannot deliver on the commitments that he is giving, and that his letter makes that clear?

Is it not also true that such increase as will be available next year to schools will be paid for by swingeing increases in council tax? Today's edition of the *Evening Standard* reports that in London the council tax will increase by 11 per cent. on average, and that in Brent and Tower Hamlets it is set to increase by between 16 and 20 per cent. Are Ministers ready for yet another revolt from the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)?

Mr. Blunkett: I was not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman was in favour or against those councils raising the money to protect education and essential services. They will certainly make a choice at local level to apply resources to the Government's and the people's priority, which is to ensure that resources are given to schools to support their aim to raise standards. That is our policy.

We have made it clear that we shall monitor what local authorities do with that money. For the first time since capping was introduced, we have applied the actual revenue pound for pound to match the SSA provided at local level. That is in complete contrast with what the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends did in the years when they were in government.

Dr. George Turner: Does my right hon. Friend recognise, however, that Labour councillors face the difficult task—particularly given the changes in SSA and to social services—of having to make cuts in the provision of social services to people in order to deliver improvements in education? As a former education chairman of Norfolk county council, I know that such improvements are important and necessary. Those councillors will need to have a sympathetic hearing from Ministers during the consultation exercise on what in some cases will be dramatic changes in budgeting as a result of changes in the formula. Will my right hon. Friend use his good offices to ensure that representations from those who face such a difficult task are sympathetically heard?

Mr. Blunkett: My letter to the leaders of councils said that after 18 years of Conservative Government there would be difficulties in matching all the priorities and demands at local level. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing, who is present in the Chamber, is not only sympathetic but has managed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—whose cold I appear to have caught—to gain the provision of ring-fenced community care funding for the coming year, for an extra 12 months. That will help greatly to deal with the problem, which I accept exists, of matching demand and ensuring that we protect social services and the most vulnerable while at the same time matching the top priority of investing in standards in education.

Higher Education (Cornwall)

10. **Mr. Andrew George:** What recent representations he has received on the provision of higher education facilities in Cornwall. [18756]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations in recent months either supporting or opposing the university of Exeter's plans to establish a campus in Cornwall.

Mr. George: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he recognise that there is popular demand for a

university campus college in Cornwall, as demonstrated last night by the presentation of a popular petition to the House? The need to provide proper investment in higher education in Cornwall is also demonstrated by the fact that, pro rata, it has the longest waiting list in the country for Open university courses. There are also other reasons to support the request.

Does the Minister accept that it is no longer acceptable simply to ignore the strategic need to provide proper higher education resources in Cornwall and places like it by simply saying that it is a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England? He should also bear in mind the fact that the Secretary of State expressed strong support for the university of Exeter initiative prior to the election.

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend certainly gave that support. I can recall going a year ago to what one might call inland Cornwall and being shocked by the deprivation that I saw down there: it is one of the poorest parts of these islands. We recognise that higher education and its expansion, and further education and its expansion, can have a dynamic effect on economies in that state. We should like to see every effort made to try to raise those funds; we are barred by statute from telling any institution what it can or cannot do with its funding. We have certainly made inquiries of the Higher Education Funding Council to find out how it regards the project. We wish success to every attempt that is made to raise the sort of money required to expand higher education in Cornwall.

Mrs. Browning: While I welcome what the Minister has said about greater provision for higher education in Cornwall, which will be welcome throughout the west country, does he not realise that it his Government's policy that will penalise areas, particularly Cornwall? He will know, I hope, that average wages in Cornwall are 77.7 per cent. of the average in Great Britain. It is young people from families on lower incomes who will have the greatest difficulty now that the Government have rejected the Dearing recommendations and are about to force those young people, not only to pay tuition fees that will be repaid on a loan, but to pay 100 per cent. of their maintenance grant. It is precisely areas such as Cornwall which will notice first that fewer of their younger people are entering higher education.

Dr. Howells: It is a pleasure to answer the hon. Lady, and I will tell her why. Labour Members have known for years that people have been working on rice money, starvation money, which is why we are introducing the national minimum wage. It is why we shall ensure that young people in Cornwall will benefit from the new deal and from training; the new deal will be a tremendous investment. We believe that our proposals for the funding of higher education will increase the pitiably low percentage of young people from lower income families who currently enter higher education.

Young Unemployed

12. **Mr. Colman:** What steps he is taking to involve small and medium enterprises in the new deal for the young unemployed. [18758]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The involvement of small businesses is critical to the success of the new deal. We are winning their involvement through direct contact at local level, through organisations representing SMEs such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the Forum of Private Business and chambers of commerce, and through sectoral organisations and trade associations, for example in construction and tourism. There will be advertising and an intensified local marketing effort in the new year, but already 9,000 employers have told us that they are committed to the new deal; my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) will be pleased to know that 70 of them are in Putney.

Mr. Colman: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. An article in yesterday's *Financial Times* said that companies are flocking to sign up to the welfare-to-work scheme. More than 50 of the largest companies in the United Kingdom were mentioned in the article. As the Federation of Small Businesses, which has 100,000 members, supports the welfare-to-work proposals, as my right hon. Friend said, and as most new jobs will be coming through SMEs in the future, will my right hon. Friend ask local employment services and local government offices to give publicity—in the same way as was done in the *Financial Times* yesterday—through local newspapers and the local media to examples of companies flocking to sign up in our constituencies?

Mr. Smith: That is a good idea and it is precisely that sort of local marketing—to which I referred—that will be taking place in the new year. We are seeing a growing recognition that the division and corrosion of our communities that are caused by youth unemployment will be solved only through partnership efforts that bring everyone together—local communities, local authorities and local businesses. The level of commitment that we are now seeing shows that they recognise the benefits to business both of getting young people in touch with the world of work and of their being able to enjoy its opportunities and face the responsibilities that go with it. The new deal is good news for businesses as it helps their recruitment effort at a time of growing skill shortages by equipping people and training them to get a job and stay in it.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that the Minister is well aware that many of the schemes that have been tried in the past, both here and overseas, have had the problem of substitution—where employers who were going to take someone on anyway take on someone on a subsidy. As it is to be a six-month scheme starting in April, will the Minister take care to ensure that the tourism industry does not simply decide to use the Government's money—the Treasury's money, the people's money—to subsidise people who would normally be taken on for a six-month period, giving them little in the way of training and thus doing away with all the jobs that would normally be taken by students who try to work during the summer so as to be able to afford to go to university?

Mr. Smith: The truth of the matter is that now is exactly the right time to introduce a programme such as the new deal, because of the level of unfilled vacancies across the country—320,000 at the last count. That is whole point of the new deal: it can equip young people

who would otherwise not have the opportunity to apply for and fill those jobs to do so. It is therefore good for the economy as well as for those young people's future.

Mr. Derek Foster: My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the extent to which the big global players have signed up to support the new deal, but he will be aware that in most of our constituencies—certainly in some rural areas or in inner-city areas—it will be crucial to get large numbers of small and medium-sized enterprises. The Minister has given us some good news today, but my impression is that a great deal of work still needs to be done before we can be confident that sufficient numbers will be achieved. Will he ensure that the quality of training in that option is as high as it must be to deliver what young people need and deserve?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. My right hon. Friend is entirely right. I met the head of the Basic Skills Agency this morning precisely to ensure that the monitoring and quality assurance of training under all the new deal options ensures that the training given is of the highest standard. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the work that he, too, is doing to encourage small firms to sign up to the new deal and recruit the young unemployed; indeed, such work is an important opportunity and the responsibility of all right hon. and hon. Members. I referred earlier to the importance of partnership in getting the young unemployed back to work; we all have a task to perform in our own communities to help to get businesses on board and open up the opportunities that the young unemployed need.

Literacy Strategy

13. **Mrs. Brinton:** If he will make a statement on the literacy strategy. [18759]

Mr. Byers: The national literacy strategy is an ambitious programme for achieving our target of 80 per cent. of 11-year-olds reaching the expected standard for their age in English by 2002.

Next year, we shall invest £50 million in training for teachers and in providing new books for schools. All local education authority applications for funding have now been received and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing individual allocations before Christmas.

Mrs. Brinton: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. I speak as a former English teacher. Does my hon. Friend agree that summer literacy schools are one of the most effective ways of bringing literacy—reading and writing—to young people, especially those in disadvantaged communities? Is he prepared to comment on the recent evaluation of pilot projects that were held this summer? Is he aware that in my constituency of Peterborough we held two very successful projects at Bretton Woods community school and John Mansfield school? Those projects will be run again in 1998; will my hon. Friend visit them next summer, meet some of the young people and share with them in their achievement?

Mr. Byers: Thanks to the east coast main line, during one of my return visits to my constituency on Tyneside next summer I might stop off at Peterborough to visit either of those schools—I know that they did good work this summer. Because of the success of the 50 summer literacy schemes held this year, we are pleased that there will be a tenfold expansion to 500 summer schools to take place next year. That is a positive way of providing new opportunities for young people and ensuring that when they enter secondary education they have the basic skills that they need in being able to read and write effectively.

Mr. Bercow: Does the Minister agree that in formulating a literacy strategy an emphasis on traditional methods is important and welcome, and that there should therefore be no role whatever for the three left-wing academics who observe in a pamphlet that

"within the psycho-semiotic framework, the shared reading lesson is viewed as an ideological construct where events are played out"

and that

"Children must learn to position themselves in three interlocking contexts"?

Mr. Byers: Clearly there is a role for summer literacy schools for the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). Many of us on the Labour Benches who entered the House in 1992—I accept that he did not—find it very difficult to take lessons from the Conservatives on reading in our schools when the one programme that they ran to support reading in schools, the reading recovery programme, was scrapped by the previous Government in 1995.

Young Unemployed

14. **Mr. Tony D. Wright:** What representations he has received from employers in the *(a)* tourism, *(b)* leisure and *(c)* hospitality industries in respect of the new deal for young unemployed people. [18760]

Mr. Alan Howarth: On 24 November, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights took part in a major conference for the tourism and leisure industry on the new deal, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. He tells me that he was delighted by the range of support and the enthusiasm for the new deal among employers in these important sectors. The Employment Service will now talk to 40 leading companies which participated in this event to discuss their involvement in more detail.

Mr. Wright: I thank the Minister for his response, but does he agree that, in a constituency such as mine—Great Yarmouth—where work in the tourism industry is seasonal and poorly paid, employers taking part in the new deal must recognise that the most important part of the new deal is the training element for young unemployed people in the constituency and throughout the country?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is right to be worried about the interests of his constituents who may be taking part in the new deal, but I believe that the opportunities that can be provided in the tourism sector will be very important and valuable; it is one of the leading growth sectors in employment.

The safeguards for young people participating in the new deal are the formal agreements to be struck between the Employment Service and the employer, the guarantee of training, properly funded, setting the young person on the path to qualification, the continuing monitoring by personal advisers and, in the event that something goes really wrong, the new deal hotline, which will enable participants in the new deal to raise questions about whether they are receiving a proper deal, as I believe that they will.

Voluntary-aided and Denominational Schools

15. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** If he will make a statement on the Government's policy on voluntary-aided and denominational schools. [18761]

Mr. Byers: The Government welcome the part that voluntary schools, including voluntary-aided and denominational schools, play in the education service. Our new school framework will safeguard their ethos and will enable them, and all other schools, to raise standards and improve the quality of the education that they offer.

Mr. Winterton: Does the Minister accept that voluntary schools and denominational schools have for many decades served as the leaven in the dough to raise educational standards and the standards of pastoral care provided by our education service, and that the resources provided by the Churches in this country to supplement the public purse have been beneficial to every child in every school in the country? Will he assure me that denominational schools are safe in the Labour Government's hands?

Mr. Byers: I endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments about the valuable role that Church schools play. In the consultation exercise following the publication of the White Paper, "Excellence in schools", we were able to reflect on proposals made by the Church education authorities. As a result of their representations, we now have before the House a Bill which has their support. We believe that, as a result of the amendments that we made in the light of their representations, we now have a far better Bill.

Mr. Jim Marshall: How many Muslim schools have indicated a desire to enter the voluntary-aided sector? What criteria would they have to meet before such admission?

Mr. Byers: A number of applications are before Ministers at the moment, including some from promoters from the Muslim sector. As I am the Minister who has to consider those applications, it would be wrong for me to make a statement this afternoon. I can say, however, that they will be judged on the criteria that we apply to all other applications.

Mr. Dafis: May I press the Minister a little further? As Church of England and Roman Catholic schools are integrated in the public sector, should not similar provision be made for Muslim schools and for other schools with alternative curricula, such as the Rudolf Steiner schools? Would the Minister be willing to meet representatives of the Third Sector Schools Alliance to explore this possibility, and to explain what the obstacles to their entry to the public sector are? Is it not wrong that schools should be obliged to stay in the private or voluntary sector when they would like to be integrated with the public sector?

Mr. Byers: I understand the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman. There is no dogmatic opposition to schools entering the maintained sector; all schools will be subject to the same criteria. In particular, they will have to meet the demands and requirements of the national curriculum. One of the difficulties experienced by the types of school mentioned by the hon. Gentleman has been their failure to meet the terms and requirements of the national curriculum.

Freedom of Information

3.30 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): I am today publishing a White Paper on freedom of information. Its full title is "Your Right to Know—the Government's proposals for a Freedom of Information Act".

I am delighted to be able to make this important announcement to the House today. "Your Right to Know" is the latest example of how the Government are delivering the radical agenda for constitutional change set out in our manifesto.

For our agenda to be effective in modernising Britain, it is essential to identify the linkages between each of the Government's reforms. That has been assured by the role of my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, who chairs the Cabinet Committee on freedom of information. Under his chairmanship, we have also published the White Papers on devolution for Scotland and Wales, and the "Rights Brought Home" White Paper on the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into UK law.

Now this White Paper provides a further essential element in our constitutional agenda. "Your Right to Know" sets out clear and detailed proposals for legislation, which would give every individual a statutory right to know about the information and records that the Government hold. That is a right which will transform the culture of government and make it more open and accountable. It is a huge step towards rebuilding trust between the Government and the people.

These proposals for legislation realise a commitment set out in Her Majesty's Gracious Speech last May. Our White Paper is the outcome of a root-and-branch examination of this complex and difficult policy area. Within seven months, the Government have addressed the sensitive issues involved and arrived at the firm proposals described in the White Paper. On that basis, I believe that few can question our commitment to fundamental constitutional reform.

Our proposals start from the premise that open government is good government. They are accordingly radical, and with your permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to draw the House's attention to the key features of our FOI regime.

The first such feature would be wide coverage. We propose that an FOI Act should apply right across the public sector, covering Government Departments and agencies; local councils; quangos; nationalised industries; the national health service; schools and colleges; courts and tribunals; police authorities; the armed forces; and public service broadcasters. It should also include the privatised utilities and some private sector organisations carrying out duties on behalf of the Government. Instead of the few hundred public bodies subject to the code of practice on access to Government information, tens of thousands of bodies will be covered by the Act.

Secondly, there would be access to documents, not just to information. The right of access would be broadly based, and would apply to official records and information held by the bodies covered by the Act. That goes far beyond the code, which provides a non-statutory entitlement to information, but not to records or documents.

Thirdly, fewer exemptions would be allowed. The system for protecting information would be based on seven specific interests, instead of the 15 exemptions in the code of practice. Significantly, in most cases, information could be withheld only if its disclosure would cause substantial—I repeat substantial—harm. That is a further important advance on the code, which laid down a simple harm test.

Fourthly, a duty to publish would be introduced. I want the legislation to encourage public authorities to take a positive approach to openness, by requiring them to publish information as a matter of course, whether it has been requested or not. My Department will be developing an action programme to support the move from a culture of secrecy to one of openness.

Fifthly, there would be strong enforcement. An independent information commissioner should oversee the implementation of the legislation. To do that effectively, the Government have agreed to give the commissioner wide-ranging powers, including the power to order disclosure. At present, the parliamentary ombudsman, who supervises the code of practice, can only recommend disclosure.

Finally, we need an integrated system. Access rights to current and historic information would be brought together through the integration of the relevant sections of the Public Records Acts into the freedom of information Act. That would ensure a single legislative approach to the release of both past and present records.

Those points broadly summarise the Government's proposals for a freedom of information Act. It is fitting that this White Paper marks the start of an extensive and open consultation process, which will continue through much of the next year. First, there will be a period of consultation on the White Paper itself. That will give Parliament and the people a clear idea of the freedom of information Bill, which we intend to introduce as soon as a suitable opportunity occurs.

Before I conclude, let me mention two further initiatives connected with "Your Right to Know", the results of which will inform the consultative process even before the draft Bill. Indeed, I expect to publish both of them shortly after the Christmas recess.

The first is a separate consultation exercise on the management of Crown copyright. This is the system which protects the status and the integrity of official Government information. It also underpins the charging regime that exists for certain tradeable information-based services. Crown copyright is clearly relevant to our White Paper proposals, and we have almost completed an examination of its operation. I hope to publish the results of that in a Green Paper very shortly.

The second initiative will be a published paper setting out factual and background material relevant to the production of this White Paper. That fulfils the commitment that I made while the White Paper was being prepared, and is in line with the good practice set out in the White Paper itself, which commits Government to the maximum possible disclosure of factual and background information behind policy decisions.

Openness is fundamental to the political health of a modern state. This White Paper marks a watershed in the relationship between the Government and people of the United Kingdom. At last there is a Government ready to trust the people with a legal right to information.

There are matters, such as national security or personal privacy, where information must be protected. The Government need some protection for their internal

deliberations. I believe that our proposals strike the proper balance between extending people's access to official information and preserving confidentiality where disclosure would be against the public interest. It is a new balance, with the scales now weighted decisively in favour of openness. I believe strongly in these proposals, and I am delighted to commend them to the House now as a basis for public debate in the coming weeks and months.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in supplying me with a copy of the statement earlier today. I also endorse your remarks on Tuesday, Madam Speaker, in thanking the right hon. Gentleman for his full apology for the most unfortunate and deeply deplored leak that occurred on that day. When he responds to my questions, will the Minister inform the House how far his inquiries have progressed?

I have several general and some specific questions for the Minister. Does he agree that, if ever there were a subject where consensus was desirable, this is it? Will he institute talks with representatives of all parties during the lengthy consultative process? He will know that the Conservatives do not share his zeal for constitutional reform. However, we shall be more than willing to participate in a constructive spirit, because we are proud of our achievements in opening up government in a real and tangible way. I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman—for whom I have a high personal regard—did not see fit to pay tribute to the Conservative Government's work in instituting the citizens charter, producing league tables in health and education, and making many other important advances in open government.

Does the Minister agree that any freedom of information legislation should be submitted to a Special Standing Committee, so that it can be scrutinised most carefully? Does he accept that government, the parliamentary process and the integrity and impartiality of the civil service are undermined by leaks? Will he ensure that any Bill includes penalties for breaches of confidence and that any such provisions cover special advisers?

Does the Minister further agree that it is important that any Act should be a bulwark against the intrusive state, and that often people are best served by being given information and being allowed to decide for themselves? Will the Minister ensure that any provisions in the Bill apply in equal measure to the proposed regional development agencies, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly? Will he comment about that matter?

The Minister referred to seven specified interests. Will they cover the sensitive issues of foreign trade and commercial confidentiality? Will they cover the work of the Northern Ireland Office? Will the right hon. Gentleman spell out a little more clearly what he means by the word "substantial"? Finally, will he say a little more about the rather nebulous role of the commissioner and how his work will relate to that of the Parliamentary Commissioner?

Dr. Clark: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to the White Paper. We appreciate his sentiments. I listened to his offer of consultation, and I agree that we would welcome consensus on the issue. There will obviously be many opportunities for the widest consultation regarding both the White Paper and the draft Bill. I shall certainly consider ways in which we may take forward discussions in that respect.

As to the inquiry that I promised to establish in an attempt to discover who was behind the leak, my investigations are progressing. I shall obviously try to find out who was responsible.

The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about the regional development agencies. Freedom of information would apply to them. The White Paper also refers to the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. It makes it clear that while the Scottish Parliament will be responsible for taking decisions on matters pertaining to it, it is intended that it should have a freedom of information regime.

The substantial harm test is a key part of our policy. It is a liberal approach. I do not think that any freedom of information Act in the world includes substantial harm. It makes it harder to withhold information from the general public: unlike the code, which uses a simple harm test.

As I was drafting the White Paper, at the forefront of my mind was the ordinary citizen: not big business and not even the press, but the individual citizen. I am conscious of the fact that the legislation must be simple and straightforward. I was disappointed in the American system, which allows no appeal other than to the courts. I felt that it was sensible to avoid litigation, and to avoid going to the courts, so I advocated the creation of an independent information commissioner. The main purpose of the Act is more open government, and an information commissioner would be able to check the papers held by public bodies, and would rule on appeals by individuals who have had their applications rejected. He or she would have the mandatory authority to order the disclosure or withholding of information.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Being prepared to make uncomfortable facts known to the general public is a sign of a self-confident Government. Is he aware that the previous Government, at the end of their tenure, had a deliberate policy of concealment of information? They established various subsidiary agencies, which constantly bleated and used commercial reasons to justify hiding facts that should have been in the public domain. Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that his Bill will be framed in such a way as to enable Parliament to know not only what is good and comfortable, but what is uncomfortable and awkward? That is the sign of a mature and sensible Parliament.

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for her welcome for the statement. I share her view that openness is good government. On occasion, one must face up to unpalatable facts. The Government have a good record on the disclosure of information, such as the recommendations of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on BSE. We have been prepared to discuss with the British people the recommendations of our scientific advisers, and we have followed their advice.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster aware that my right hon. and hon. Friends broadly welcome this fulfilment of a commitment made in agreement with my party prior to the election, to introduce a comprehensive, wide-ranging and enforceable freedom

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

of information Bill? I welcome his openness to suggestions for amending and improving the legislation during the various deliberative stages to come.

I shall make a couple of points that do not, in any way, fundamentally attack the Government's approach. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is some risk that prior agreement between the receiving body and the giving body to treat matters in confidence could lead to an unacceptable exclusion of information? Does he further agree that the harm test for policy advice to Ministers and to the Government, which he describes in the White Paper, is too low and could limit public participation in the discussion of practicable options? Does he accept that there will be some disappointment that the 30-year rule is being retained, although modified, and that that may unnecessarily limit historical research?

Dr. Clark: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words, and I appreciate his general welcome of the White Paper. I shall try to conduct the consultations in an open way, as he wants.

The question of information given to the Government in confidence is a real difficulty; it is impossible to run away from such issues. I hope that we shall raise it, and that it will be raised with us, during the consultation period. As for the harm test and policy advice, I do not apologise for saying that the Government need space to conduct their deliberations, especially in a modern society. Having said that, however, I must add that the Government are very conscious that there is still unnecessary secrecy, even in information coming to Ministers. We have tried to differentiate between specific policy advice given to Ministers—and conveyed between Ministers—and simple factual and background papers given to Ministers. We hope and intend that the background and factual papers will be available, and will not be subject to the exemption.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the 30-year rule. We must bear it in mind that, while after 30 years documents are passed to the Public Record Office, under the new regime the Departments will disclose much more information during those 30 years. For that reason, shortening the period was not such a priority as it had been.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite all the criticism that he has received over the past few months about delay, many Labour Members now realise that his statement has been worth waiting for? The headline should be "Labour recaptures the high ground".

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when he talks of getting a consensus with that lot over there—the Tories—he should be careful? They will procrastinate for as long as possible. They will talk the hind leg off a donkey in the hope that they can delay the legislation for year after year. At the end of the day, the Labour Government must legislate—so do not hang about with that lot, because they will be frightened to death of having to reveal where they have got their money from under freedom of information legislation. When we get that information, we shall find that some of the money came from heroin dealers in Hong Kong.

Dr. Clark: I take it as a high accolade to receive compliments from my hon. Friend.

It is clear that we need to get the legislation right, and we intend to get it right, because we shall probably have only one opportunity to do so. I hope that my statement underlines the Government's commitment to push through—after as much consultation as possible—wide-ranging and radical freedom of information legislation that will change our whole political culture. I hope that we can move from our obsession with secrecy to a modern society based on openness.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Like others, I welcome the statement. If legislation follows, with the breadth and scope that the right hon. Gentleman described, it will emancipate many individuals, as well as the press itself and Her Majesty's loyal Opposition.

May I ask what will happen when an issue falls within, say, the scope of the Official Secrets Act, and could fall within the scope of a damage test? I have in mind, for instance, information given in confidence by a foreign Government. More specifically, what will happen in the Council of Ministers, which is one of the legislative bodies for this country?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman has a long and worthy history of trying to bring about freedom of information legislation. I pay tribute to the work that he has done over the years.

There must clearly be an interface between the Official Secrets Act and the freedom of information legislation. We must examine very closely the levels of harm and damage in both, to ensure that they are compatible with each other. On the hon. Gentleman's specific point about the Council of Ministers, the test is one of simple harm under the Official Secrets Act. However, such issues need to be explored. When I say that we need consultation because we have to get the legislation right, I refer to such matters of detail, which we intend to pursue over the next few months.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on—on any test—a remarkable and historic statement. We promised a freedom of information Act in five manifestos, we tried through private Members' routes to enact one, and, despite the report of Sir Richard Scott and a Select Committee report in which a Conservative majority recommended action, the previous Government failed to do anything.

Will all the exempt areas be subject to a test of substantial harm? At the moment, we have the curious convention that new Governments have no access to policy advice—albeit of a background nature—that was available to the previous Administration. That is conspicuous in the case of BSE. Will my right hon. Friend's proposals change that, so that we may see some of the evidence on the policy disasters of the recent past?

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. He has taken a particular interest in this area since he has been in Parliament. For all exempted areas, with the exception of policy advice to Ministers, the substantial harm test will be the required test. For policy advice to Ministers, the test will be one of simple harm. My hon. Friend referred to the convention that papers are not made

available to succeeding Governments. Clearly, all such issues will be raised during consultation, and we shall have to wrestle with them.

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): While I fully endorse the benefits of open decisions that have been openly arrived at, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in any organisation, there is always a need for some degree of confidentiality if it is to function effectively—whether it is a family, a parochial church council, a company or the Government? Does he further agree that those who write thunderous editorials about the need for ever more open government are themselves most jealous in keeping their own secrets? Does he agree that his high-minded attachment to the benefits of open government, which I fully accept as sincere, sits somewhat oddly with the record of how we had to drag out of the Government their dealings in the formula one affair?

Dr. Clark: We take on board the point that Governments need space in which to conduct their deliberations and come to their decisions. In deciding on and framing the White Paper, we specifically make the point that it is important to maintain the collective responsibility of government; that it is vital that we retain the political impartiality of public servants; and that we appreciate the importance of free and frank internal discussions in coming to conclusions as a Government. It is because of that that we have a slightly different exemption on policy advice.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): My right hon. Friend has made a bold statement, which I am sure the people of the nation will warmly welcome. There is nothing worse than fighting bureaucracies. However, will he ensure that people who are seeking legitimate information will not be harassed in any way by, for example, being asked awkward questions about why they want the information, and that they will get information without prejudice?

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for the question. Clearly, it is not the business of Government to determine why an individual citizen wants a piece of information that is held by the Government. There is no bar, no proposed requirement, no stipulated reason why a person should need the information. It is purely a case of an application, per se.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the right to know extend to the real Government of Britain—the Commission of the European Union—as it is the master now and the Labour Government are the puppets?

Dr. Clark: I am afraid that I do not have responsibility for the European Commission.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that this historic statement will be as welcome outside the House as it is to Labour Members, although judging by the grinning and grumbling of the Opposition, it is clear that they have problems with accountable and open government and public service? On the question of expedition, will my right hon. Friend set time limits within which organisations must respond to requests for information? Will he also illustrate, for the benefit of the House, the sins, blunders, omissions and conspiracies of the previous Government, which would not have been visited on the people of this country had freedom of information legislation been in place?

Dr. Clark: In the annexe to the White Paper, we set out the times in which departments in various countries have to respond to queries. The period is usually between 20 and 30 days, and we have specifically included that subject in the consultation. My hon. Friend tempts me when he asks me to talk about the sins of the previous Government. For my sins, I was a Front-Bench spokesman for 10 years, on agriculture and on defence. I certainly believe that, if we had had the sort of legislation that we propose, we would have been able to discover much information about BSE, which might have saved a lot of money. We might also have saved much hurt and harm after Chernobyl, which was the subject of a considerable cover-up. In latter years, as defence spokesman, I tried to explore what was behind Gulf war syndrome and, if I could have had access to the information that I would have been able to get under our legislation, much harm and hurt could have been saved and we might have got to the truth more quickly.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): What is all this going to cost and who is going to pay?

Dr. Clark: It is impossible to ascertain the precise cost, for the simple reason that we do not know what the demand will be. However, based on the code, it is clear that the cost will not be prohibitive. It is a cost well worth paying to open up government and sweep away the secrecy.

Ms Tess Kingham (Gloucester): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the fact that it extends to police authorities. I have been frustrated since being elected that I have not been allowed access to Police Complaints Authority reports, and I know that my predecessor was also frustrated by that. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether PCA reports, especially about investigations of deaths in custody, will be covered by the legislation?

Dr. Clark: The administration of the police is covered in the White Paper. For reasons that we all understand, we distinguish between the operational arm of the police and the administrative arm, but the latter should be covered by the legislation. It is my impression that the information that my hon. Friend requests will be covered, but I shall look into it and write to her.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Does the Minister believe that the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), had something to do with the disgraceful leak of the contents of the White Paper earlier this week to the BBC? Will he confirm that those conducting the leak inquiry will seek personal interviews with the Minister without Portfolio?

Dr. Clark: I came to the House the day before yesterday and apologised for that leak. I repeat that I knew nothing about it and no one was more annoyed about it than I was. We have set in train measures to look into the leak, and we shall have to await the outcome.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the narrow issue of the misleading of Parliament, and after spending 11 days in

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

the Old Bailey during the trial of Clive Ponting, may I ask whether the issue of the protection of deep throat information, for want of a better phrase, will be addressed?

In particular, will civil servants who know that the House of Commons is being treated by Ministers using an economy with the truth have somebody to go to, rather than being told that they must report it to the Sir Robert Armstrong of the day? It is unreal to expect civil servants to go to their permanent secretary or the Cabinet Secretary and say, "Please, sir, a Minister is lying." Is that problem addressed?

Dr. Clark: As I understand it, a private Member's Bill that deals with certain aspects is shortly to come before the House.

Mr. Dalyell: Does it have Government support?

Dr. Clark: I shall certainly have discussions with the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), to find out whether those points can be covered.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Had the policy just announced been in force in October, would the minutes of the meeting held by the Prime Minister with representatives of formula one at No. 10 Downing street—on 18 October, I believe—have been disclosed as a matter of course?

Dr. Clark: If that involved advice to Ministers, clearly it would be protected from the legislation.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my right hon. Friend share my view that this is the most important piece of unfinished business since the disgraceful way in which the Conservative party dealt with the Scott report? I congratulate him on the scythe that he has taken to the deep undergrowth of the culture of secrecy in government. He is today lighting a fire that will ultimately cleanse the democratic process and begin to restore the trust between Government and people.

Dr. Clark: I might just disagree with my right hon. Friend, in that the business is not exactly unfinished; until today, it was unstarted business. We have made a start today, and we intend to push it through. We shall push away the cobwebs of secrecy, and have a modern democratic society where the people of Britain will know the secrets that their Governments hold.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): We in the House all know that we are entitled to ask questions, and that the questions must have answers. However, it is the quality of the answers that we are worried about. We were all sympathetic to the right hon. Gentleman until he answered my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) and clearly did not intend to reveal the information that he said was available.

The Government can set their own policy without an Act, so will the right hon. Gentleman now tell the House that they will act as if the Act were already in place, rather than waiting years for it to be passed? For instance, I recently gave a list to the Prime Minister's office in a parliamentary question asking him to say whom he had met—people from among his blind trust contributors—and I got an answer which, although honest, told me absolutely nothing. Would that be covered?

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that the electricity companies were extending coal contracts for six months, yet this morning the electricity companies did not know that they were doing that. Would we be able to find out where that information came from?

Dr. Clark: It is a bit rich for Conservative Members to talk about waiting for years for information. While we are waiting for the legislation to be introduced, we are operating under the code of practice introduced by the previous Government.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): I can tell my right hon. Friend that when I used to ask the same sort of question of Tory Ministers, all my answers were always blocked. It is clear that the regime will change, and this is a triumph of common sense over the secret state, which has been a burden on the British people for far too long. It will transform the relationship between the individual and the state.

May I ask my right hon. Friend a specific question? He used the word "substantial" to qualify the word "harm". Can we have an absolute assurance that the word "substantial" will find its way into the final legislation, because that word will ensure that no attempt is made to block the provision of information to the wider public?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the word "substantial". I believe that its use is unique in freedom of information legislation. It means that it will be more difficult to withhold information. The Government have made it quite clear that that is the key component of the White Paper.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): We on the Ulster Unionist party Bench give a warm welcome to the Minister's announcement today, and I think that all hon. Members representing Northern Ireland will do the same. We have particularly suffered from quangos, and we look forward to being able to ask questions about those bodies. Will the Anglo-Irish Secretariat be included in the bodies about which we can ask questions?

Dr. Clark: I thank the hon. Gentleman. We have published a consultation paper on quangos, and he and I have had an exchange on the subject. On his specific question, I suspect that the body to which he referred would not be covered by the freedom of information legislation, but I shall try to ascertain the precise position.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I, too, would like to congratulate my right hon. Friend, who has fought a long, hard and personal battle to produce the White Paper. It is good to have it today. Will the intelligence and security services be covered by the White Paper, particularly as MI5 is increasingly carrying out investigations into matters that cannot be described as national security, such as fraud and computer fraud in Whitehall? Will he assure us that those matters will be covered by the legislation?

Dr. Clark: I am afraid that I have to disappoint my hon. Friend. We have made it clear that we believe that

the intelligence services are vital to the security of our nation. However, we have shown that although we are prepared to release information about the intelligence services, we hope that the new culture of openness and a new interaction between the House and the intelligence services can be built on, to create more openness in ways other than through the White Paper and legislation.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) got a response to his question, so I will give it another go. Can the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster state whether the Minister without Portfolio will be questioned about any involvement that he may have had with the leak? When will he be questioned? If the right hon. Gentleman will not answer those questions, this debate will be about not our right to know, but our right not to know.

Madam Speaker: Order. I really do feel that that question does not concern the White Paper. The Minister has gone as far as he can, and came to the House a few days ago very genuinely to tell us what had happened. With great respect to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), his question has nothing to do with the White Paper that the Minister is presenting today.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend on his groundbreaking statement. I have a specific question about public money going to private individuals for some alleged public benefit. Will individuals who receive public money to allow access to land under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food agricultural schemes for environmentally sensitive areas, and landowners who receive conditional exemption from inheritance tax for allowing people on to land, but are not required to publicise that access, be covered by the White Paper?

Dr. Clark: As a former president of the northern Ramblers Association, I have a certain sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. Clearly, information held by Government Departments relating to matters such as access to land and moneys being paid by MAFF should be available under the legislation.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In keeping with the principles of the White Paper and the importance of the proper release of Government information, will the Minister now tell us whether, in future leak inquiries, Ministers as appropriate will be interviewed—yes or no?

Dr. Clark: Leak inquiries are nothing to do with the White Paper. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Let me just—*[Interruption.]* I can only state the facts, I am afraid. The White Paper concerns the release of information. We all understand that there are set procedures for a leak inquiry. I have set in train measures to look into those reports, and the permanent secretary is conducting those measures.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I congratulate the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on the publication of this strong White Paper—the product, perhaps, of a successful marriage of Clark's shoes and Cardinal Wolsey's socks. The new commissioner's power of enforcement is unprecedented in the way in which we have conducted our business in this country. Therefore, the key is the appointment of what one might call a person with the right, challenging mindset. Will my right hon. Friend tell us how such a commissioner is to be appointed, and can we be sure that we shall not finish up with a cosy establishment figure?

Dr. Clark: In view of the key role that the information commissioner will hold, it is important that we get the right man or woman. The commissioner will be the principal officer, acting under the principal purpose of the Act, which will be to encourage more open and accountable government. It will be his or her job not only to adjudicate on whether information should be disclosed or withheld after an appeal, but to act as a facilitator, to find out whether there are ways in which citizens can find the information if they lose their appeal. Therefore, it is a key role. It is vital to understand that we have gone a long way in this process by insisting, in groundbreaking terms, that the commissioner will have mandatory powers to order withdrawal or disclosure of information.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the statement. Is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster aware that many people, both inside and outside the House, have waited years for such a proposal? Is not it a breath of fresh air, compared with the suffocating secrecy under the previous Government?

To follow on from the point made by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), why are the security services exempt from this proposal? Bearing in mind the fact that the legislation dealing with those services is tightly drawn, would not it be possible for the substantial harm test to be applied to them as well? Inevitably, that would prevent any leakage of materials that were damaging to national security, and I accept that a higher percentage of documents would be held, but it would allow some release of material. Can the Minister comment on the access to information in regard to European Union documents held by the Government in this country, as there is a problem with freedom of information in Europe as well?

Dr. Clark: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, that is a dilemma, but I think that every country excludes—the word is not exempt; it is exclude—the security services from freedom of information legislation. That might not be entirely true, but certainly most countries do. We took the view that if there was only an exemption, it could be challenged. We felt that the security of our nation took precedence in this respect. The House has an Intelligence and Security Committee. There are moves to try to open up the intelligence services, and we shall try to continue with that process.

On the latter point about European legislation, we started to explore that, but we have been wrestling with so many complex issues in the past seven months that we have left it for consideration in the consultative period. We shall have some time between now and producing the draft Bill to sort out many of the matters of detail.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Minister stated that our right to know would extend to public bodies and companies. Will he confirm that British Nuclear Fuels plc is one of the public bodies that will be covered by the

[Mr. Llew Smith]

Act? Will he also confirm that the operations of that company have been clouded in secrecy for far too long? It has been hiding behind excuses of commercial confidentiality and national security, to prevent the public from knowing what is happening within it.

Dr. Clark: We have made it clear that we shall include private sector industries that operate on a statutory basis, as well as the privatised utilities and the nationalised industries.

The security exemption will apply to British Nuclear Fuels, as to other organisations, but we are getting much more openness from British Nuclear Fuels these days, and I hope that that will continue. I mentioned Chernobyl earlier; we have moved a long way in the 10 years since that happened, and we now get much more help from British Nuclear Fuels.

Dr. Lynda Clark (Edinburgh, Pentlands): I congratulate the Minister on the White Paper and I look forward to the open consultation process, which I hope will form a model for other legislation. I am concerned that information will become of no use to people if they do not receive it quickly. Will there be mandatory time limits in the Bill? Will there be any role for Members of Parliament? Is it intended that constituents should come to us before going to the commissioner?

Dr. Clark: There will be a period within which we would expect Government or other bodies to reply to an application. We have suggested times applied in other countries in the annexe to the White Paper, but that is open to consultation. On the latter point, we considered whether we should follow the ombudsman route and direct inquiries through Members of Parliament, but we felt that that was unnecessary and that it was right and proper that the individual should be able to apply for the information on his or her own behalf, directly to the Department and then directly to the commissioner.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I add my congratulations to the Minister on his statement, which struck a blow for all who believe in transparent government. What consultations does he intend to hold with local government, to ensure that the present machinery under the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 is transferred smoothly into the provisions of whatever Bill is passed?

Dr. Clark: I have already had meetings with local government leaders, and I have been most encouraged by their enthusiasm to be brought within the legislation. They rather enjoyed being able to say that they were more open than us in any case. That is very positive. I have also had discussions with national health service representatives, and they, too, have been very positive. We shall continue the discussions, because it is very important that all those public services should be able to work together and to interrelate.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): As a former publisher and director of William Heinemann, which published "Spycatcher", it is music to my ears to hear the legislation outlined today. I have a practical question: given that the Minister's Department has one webcaster, but that there are no others in the civil service, how are we to get information from the civil service? What plans are there to train people and improve internet access, which is a matter of concern at the moment?

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words, and I can reassure him. I hope that the White Paper is being put on the internet at this very moment. That has certainly been my approach, and we may well consider how to put the consultation papers on the internet. I believe that the information technology at our disposal will allow us to put many more Government papers on the internet, and to do it extremely quickly.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, following an incident in my constituency in which a lorry carrying munitions caught fire, the previous Government refused to answer questions, on the ground of confidentiality, but that when the identical questions were tabled in the Congress of the United States, the information was given that the lorry was carrying cluster bombs and projectile missiles and was a considerable risk to my constituents?

Does my right hon. Friend further recall that the information from an inquest held in my constituency on a boy who was killed by mustard gas was kept secret in this country, but revealed by the United States navy? Will information about this country that is freely available in other countries be made available here when the legislation is passed?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, which I came across in dealing with the aftermath of Chernobyl. One had to go to the United States and Sweden to get the information that appertained to our country. We have made it clear that the Army will be covered in its routine activities by the Act, although obviously operations are a different matter. The case to which my hon. Friend referred should be covered by the legislation that we propose.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We now move on to the business statement.

Business of the House

4.24 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the business for next week.

MONDAY 15 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill.

TUESDAY 16 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the National Minimum Wage Bill.

WEDNESDAY 17 DECEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House, which will include the usual three-hour pre-recess debate.

Until about 8 pm, there will be a debate on the common fisheries policy on a Government motion. That will be followed by consideration of an allocation of time motion relating to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

THURSDAY 18 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 19 DECEMBER—Debate on welfare to work on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 22 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the School Standards and Framework Bill.

The provisional business for the first week back after the Christmas recess is as follows.

MONDAY 12 JANUARY AND TUESDAY 13 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Scotland Bill.

WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Regional Development Agencies Bill.

THURSDAY 15 JANUARY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

FRIDAY 16 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 14 January there will be a debate on cocoa and chocolate in European Standing Committee A.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Wednesday 14 January 1998:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 8164/96, Cocoa and Chocolate. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-ix (1997–98).]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I thank the right hon. Lady for her statement and for giving the House the business for the first week after the recess. She is an enthusiastic and skilful Chairman of the Modernisation Committee, and I hope that she will explain to the House why, in practice, she is not only not modernising the sitting hours of the House but has chosen to ignore the Jopling rules by arranging controversial and potentially lengthy business on three successive Thursdays. It is true that the Government have somewhat incompetently overloaded their legislative programme—hence the need for yet another guillotine motion next week—but there is no reason why they should ride roughshod over the rules that they came into office vowing to improve. Like me, she has heard the strictures of her Front Benchers on those matters. The House will be interested in her reply.

We were glad that the Government supported our social security policies against the rebellion of many of their Back Benchers last night. We were assured by the Secretary of State for Social Security that the Government will not be deflected from their intention further to reform benefits. Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate so that the Secretary of State for Social Security can explain those plans to her Back Benchers? In particular, can the Leader of the House say whether those plans include the taxation of benefits, especially for disabled people?

The Leader of the House heard the reaction of my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) to the Government's White Paper on open government, in which there were some things to welcome. Lofty intention is one thing, practice another, as we shall see. It was a pity that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was not quite generous-spirited enough to make it clear that his proposals built on many of the policies that we established. In the light of his remarks on open government, and of those of many of his colleagues, including the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), and the evident enthusiasm that has been expressed by hon. Members of all parties, will the Leader of the House comment on the fact that the Table Office has been instructed by the Government that it must not accept any question about the impact on employment of, or the level of, the national minimum wage?

Will the right hon. Lady explain how that extraordinary denial of information to Members sits alongside the Government's just expressed, but clearly imperfect, commitment to openness? Perhaps she would like to define what her Government mean by openness and to which areas of policy the principle of openness may be applied. Which are the no-go areas? Clearly the national minimum wage is one. Is not the Government's instruction to the Table Office a denial of every principle enunciated by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster just 30 minutes ago? In the interests of open government, I think we should be told. Whatever the right hon. Lady's reply, it is obvious that "Your Right to Know" does not apply to Members in respect of the national minimum wage.

Can the right hon. Lady clarify for the benefit of the House which Department has responsibility for the current crisis in the coal industry? We had thought that it was a matter for the President of the Board of Trade, but we read on page 22 of today's edition of the *Financial Times* that responsibility now rests with the Paymaster General. If departmental responsibility is to be shifted around in this way should not the principles of open government dictate that the House should be told? Is it a slap in the face for an inactive Department of Trade and Industry, as the *Financial Times* seems to have been briefed to say? Or is it some form of occupational therapy for the Paymaster General, who has clearly disqualified himself from talking about other people's savings?

When may we have a statement in the House from the right hon. Gentleman, rather than statements through lawyers at friendly press conferences, because we should all like to hear his clarification of the potential conflict between the Government's intention to close tax

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

loopholes and his own use of them. I am sure that, in the interests of open government, the right hon. Lady will wish to arrange for such a statement without delay.

Mrs. Taylor: I regret very much the attitude taken by the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) in her response, particularly as she has repeated allegations about the Paymaster General which are unworthy of the House and have been thoroughly refuted elsewhere.

Among the right hon. Lady's specific questions about the business for next week, she asked me about the Jopling proposals and the fact that there is serious business set down for some Thursdays this month and that serious business will be taken on some Thursdays in January.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Good.

Mrs. Taylor: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

The right hon. Lady seems to be unaware of the exact details of the Jopling agreement. It said that the House will try to rise early and take non-controversial business on the second half of Thursdays that are followed by a non-sitting Friday. None of the business that I have announced to be taken on Thursdays, which she regards as significant or controversial, will be followed by a non-sitting Friday.

In response to the right hon. Lady's comments about benefits reform and the need for a further debate, I do not believe that there is such a need, not least because the debate that Conservative Members chose to have on that matter on the most recent Opposition day fell somewhat flat because they had so little to say on the subject.

As for the coal industry, the DTI remains the lead Department. Of course, other Ministers in other Departments get involved in such issues and, given the right hon. Lady's experience in government, which is not that long ago, I should have thought that she could remember Cabinet Committees and the fact that Ministers assist each other when certain problems arise.

On freedom of information, the right hon. Lady was somewhat more dismissive than her colleague on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who was far more generous in his welcome of the White Paper. She claims that her party started this process, but, if it did so, it did not get very far and stalled on every relevant occasion. The statement that has been given to the House today was a significant breakthrough and was long overdue.

The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk asked about the right to know and claimed that the Table Office was being instructed by the Government on what questions it should be accepting. She should have known the answer to that, not least from her experience in government. The Government cannot give instructions to the Table Office; nor would the Government try to do so.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will there be a statement next week on the outcome of the Kyoto summit on world climate change? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for there to be a full debate early in the new year, in Government time, on the issue of climate change and the world's environment? Each time there is such a major conference, the House should be able to make a serious assessment of its impact and give some indication of how it wants the Government to behave at the next conference, whenever that may be.

Mrs. Taylor: The agreement reached at Kyoto is certainly historic and will help to counter the problems of climate change. The part played in those negotiations by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was extremely important and constructive. I expect that my right hon. Friend will be looking to make a statement in the House in the not-too-distant future. I cannot promise my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) the sort of debate that he wants in the near future, but I will bear his request in mind.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The right hon. Lady is rightly protective of the rights and privileges of the House and its Members. Does she agree that any threat to those rights and privileges, in particular any attempt to bully Members and any attempt to exert improper influence over Members of the House—I think that that is the definition that the Joint Committee on Privileges is now examining—should be resisted? The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) reported to the House that he had to change his view on a specific piece of legislation owing to the pressure exerted on him by the standing orders of the Labour party. Can the Leader of the House give us an explicit assurance that members of the Labour party who voted with the Liberal Democrats last night against a Conservative proposal will not be subjected to undue pressure of that sort, with their livelihoods being threatened if they cease to be Members?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If I had to rely on the hon. Gentleman, I would be dead.

Mr. Tyler: Can the Leader of the House give us an assurance that the new, draconian standing orders of the parliamentary Labour party will not be allowed to interfere with the proper judgment of Members.

Mrs. Taylor: That was a good try, but this is an internal matter for the Labour party. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, I do not think that he needs any help from the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider, perhaps in Government time and in the not-too-distant future, a short debate on a matter of which I have had personal experience: the success of treatment carried out in the national health service? We do not seem to have any intelligence unit to record that treatment, its results and the successes of the service; nor do we seem to have any means of recording best practice so that best practice initiated in one area can be disseminated to other areas. That may be a useful adjunct for us to debate.

Mrs. Taylor: Many Members will be aware that my hon. Friend has had experience of the health service, which was, I am glad to say, extremely successful. He may be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has, as part of the White Paper process,

taken on board some of the points that my hon. Friend has made and has said that he is in favour of a clinical audit and of the establishment of a national institute of clinical excellence. That organisation would be able to do the job that my hon. Friend rightly says is necessary if we are continually to improve the national health service.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Can the Leader of the House arrange to have a statement made early next week in connection with the agriculture industry? Is she aware that farmers and consumers alike are confused by the evidence being produced by the various scientific organisations? We are particularly concerned about whether the Government will make any compensation available to our agricultural communities as a result of the appreciation of sterling.

Mrs. Taylor: I cannot guarantee any statement on any particular day, but the hon. Lady will know that Ministers are well aware of the concerns of people involved in agriculture and that there was a full statement last week from my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I am hopeful that there may be a statement in the House on BSE issues and the current situation in farming before the recess.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I simply reiterate the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)? It is crucial that, as soon as the Deputy Prime Minister gets back and has had a chance to recover from all his negotiations in Kyoto, we have not only a statement, but an opportunity for a full debate. The implications of the agreement are so wide and far reaching that it is crucial that we set out in the House how we are to move the matter forward on the world platform.

Mrs. Taylor: We shall have environment Question Time on Tuesday, but I can well understand why my hon. Friend thinks that we need more time to discuss these issues and to get a full report from my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. The agreement is an important one: for the first time, it sets binding targets for developed countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions, and it is, therefore, something we should all welcome. The House will want to be informed of the details and I am sure that my right hon. Friend will want to take an opportunity to do that as soon as possible.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May we please have an urgent debate on the rights of Members of Parliament, especially when on the premises of the Palace of Westminster? Specifically, could that debate centre on the rights of all Members when voting together in the same Lobby—especially when the Conservatives are supporting the Government for supporting the Conservatives, as happened last night—and on whether, in such cases, all Members will be completely free to approach Ministers, particularly the Prime Minister, without being molested?

Will the right hon. Lady conduct an investigation into the disgraceful incident last night, when one of my colleagues was molested simply as a result of trying to approach the Prime Minister as a fellow Member of Parliament?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not think that there is any need for a debate and, following last night's point of order, I made inquiries among those who were present on that occasion. Several people made it clear to me that the Conservative Member who was the subject of the point of order approached the Prime Minister and tried to interrupt a conversation that was taking place, in a most boorish and ungallant manner. I do not think that there is any need to discuss matters of that sort.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): In view of the excellent work carried out by nurses and staff in our emergency services and of the growing concern about their safety among the public and professionals, will my right hon. Friend make time next week for a debate on the safety of our emergency units?

Mrs. Taylor: I know that there have been cases recently of violence in emergency units—they can be tense places, and people can become extremely upset. The Minister of State, Department of Health is looking at giving further protection to people, especially women, who require protection in that situation. I do not think that it is possible to have a full debate next week, although it might be possible to raise such issues during the three-hour debate on Wednesday morning.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): This is the third time in just over six months that the Government are imposing a guillotine motion. Does the right hon. Lady not appreciate that the European Communities (Amendment) Bill gives more powers to the European Parliament, extends the competencies of the European Union, extends qualified majority voting, reinforces citizenship and dwells on economic and monetary union? It is clearly a profound constitutional matter for the House, and to curtail debate by a guillotine, which is the most outrageous expression of Executive power, is wholly inappropriate.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Member, who is extremely well informed, will know that this is by no means the first occasion that a guillotine has been used on a Bill of that sort; it was used not least by his own Government in previous days. It is an important Bill and we have had 19 hours of discussion so far. We have had the same number of days of discussion as we had in 1986 on what became the Single European Act. Most people would agree that that was a major piece of legislation, yet consideration was completed satisfactorily following that guillotine. I notice that, on Second Reading of that Act, nowhere near as many Members voted as did on the Bill that we are now discussing. Although he has strong views, the hon. Gentleman has to realise that virtually no progress has been made on the Bill and it is for better discussion of all parts of the Bill that we are having a guillotine at this stage.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on procedures in the House? Following the statement by the shadow Leader of the House, I went to the Table Office and tabled a question asking what representations had been received by the Government on the possible link between the minimum wage and job numbers. That question was accepted without demur by the Table Office, but they expressed some bewilderment at the statement made a short while ago in the Chamber. Of course, questions that are hypothetical are not allowed

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

and they never have been. May we have a debate on procedure, as that would be useful for all Members and a particularly useful educational experience for the shadow Leader of the House?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend clearly knows better than Conservative Members how to exercise his right to know. As I said earlier, there is no possibility of the Government's trying to restrict the questions that are asked, and the Table Office would certainly not tolerate that.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), may I urge that we have a full debate on the agriculture industry and on the beef situation in particular? I would not expect the right hon. Lady to be aware of this, but last night 400 farmers descended on a meat distribution depot in my constituency; they stopped lorries going this way and that, and are planning further disruptions. I am sure that no one wants to see such action, but, on the other hand, many people are very sympathetic to the farmers' case, especially as we have a beef export ban and further bans on meat, but no guarantee whatever of the quality and safety of meat coming from abroad.

Mrs. Taylor: I can well understand why the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the disruptions he mentions. I said earlier that Ministers are aware of and concerned about the situation and that we are hopeful that there can be a statement before the House rises for the Christmas recess.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): May I thank my right hon. Friend for giving the House notice that European Standing Committee A will be considering the draft chocolate directive? She will be aware that the European Commission proposed a good compromise which did not discriminate against British chocolate or continental chocolate, but that the European Parliament proposed some quite extraordinary amendments backing up the commercial interests of some European chocolate manufacturers—those of France, Belgium and Germany—against those of others, including ourselves, the Irish, the Portuguese and those in Scandinavia.

Will my right hon. Friend convey to the Ministers who will appear before European Standing Committee A my strongly held view, as a Member of Parliament representing a constituency with many confectionery workers, that the European Parliament's proposal would be bad for the chocolate industry and bad for jobs, and that Britain should reject it and go for the fair compromise proposed by the Commission, which will provide a level playing field for all brands of chocolate manufactured by all countries in the Community?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): And all because the lady loves Milk Tray.

Mrs. Taylor: I do not know what is made in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley), so my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) had better be careful in what he says.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York is right to raise concerns relating to a subject about which I know he is well informed. I shall certainly bring the points he has raised to the attention of my hon. Friends who will be in charge of that debate. I take this opportunity to remind the House that all Members can attend such Committees.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the right hon. Lady will make time for a statement by the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning on planning procedures? The City of York council is currently undergoing a massive consultation exercise on a proposed park and ride scheme in the Vale of York. The only people who are not being consulted in that exercise are the residents of Rawcliffe, where the scheme is to be situated. I believe that they deserve a statement on that matter from the Minister responsible for planning, and I hope that the Government will make time for that.

Mrs. Taylor: Obviously, that is a matter for local consideration in the first instance, but I remind the hon. Lady that we have environment questions on Tuesday.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): Is my right hon. Friend is aware of the damning report produced by the National Audit Office on the performance of Ofwat and, if she is, given the high cost of water in the United Kingdom and the poor performance of water companies, will she make time available in the House to discuss that important issue?

Mrs. Taylor: I agree with my hon. Friend that the issue is important to every person in the country. The Government are undertaking a review of utility regulation and considering ways to strengthen customer protection. We welcome the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, and we have made careful note of his recommendations.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): When can we have a debate on the performance of the privatised rail industry and especially the train operating companies, not least Connex South Central, which services my constituency and has recently witnessed a 138 per cent. increase in complaints about its cancellation of services, overcrowded trains and generally inadequate investment in rolling stock? When can we have a debate so that we may discover the Government's plans for our rail industry and how they intend to make a difference to it?

Mrs. Taylor: There are also transport questions on Tuesday, so the hon. Gentleman may be able to raise issues then. I cannot promise a full debate of the type that he requests, but I remind him of the three-hour Adjournment debate on Wednesday.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the campaign by *The Independent on Sunday* to decriminalise cannabis, but I wonder whether she is aware that the National Association of Head Teachers today issued stringent guidance to schools on combating the menace of drugs. In the light of that, does she agree that we should have a more consistent line on that issue, and will she arrange

for an early debate in the House so that those of us who believe that the drugs menace should be fought, not given into, may have an opportunity to debate the matter?

Mrs. Taylor: I very much welcome and accept my hon. Friend's comments. I do not think that we are likely to get an objective assessment from a conference organised by a newspaper which has the explicit aim of decriminalising cannabis. On the other point that she raised, about the report by head teachers, we are aware that we need good education in schools. The Department for Education and Employment will be issuing some targeted guidance in the near future and Keith Hellawell, the UK anti-drugs co-ordinator, is developing plans to audit and do a full assessment of what works best in ensuring that young people do not fall into the drugs trap.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The Leader of the House will recall that, during the general election campaign, one of Labour's claims was that the election was partly a question of trust. Given the widespread disappointment in the country that the word "trust" has been interpreted as meaning either blind trusts in favour of some Ministers or offshore trusts in favour of others, may we have a debate next week to establish exactly what "trust" now means to new Labour?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman would do well to read the most recent poll of Tory Members.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): As it is not only Yorkies that are threatened by the dictates of the European Union but the livelihoods of many of my constituents who work in duty-free shops at Heathrow and on airliners for British carriers, and many Members' constituents who work at airports, or for airlines or shipping companies throughout the country, will the right hon. Lady ensure that the appropriate Minister comes to the House to explain the Government's policy which, until now, has been one of total acquiescence in the job-destroying policy of the European Union?

Mrs. Taylor: Ministers keep the House informed as appropriate. We had a debate on the European Union last Thursday.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I shall try to be in order this time, Madam Speaker.

The Leader of the House said that she hoped that, before the recess, we would have a statement on farming. That is a welcome small step, but is there any chance of a larger step in the form of a day's debate on farming issues as soon as possible? As I represent a rural constituency, I want to speak about the crisis in farming, but that is not the only matter that I want to raise. Today, a butcher telephoned me to say that hundreds of his customers—including four doctors—had told him that they still wished to buy beef on the bone, and that they were still doing so in his shop in my constituency. Is it possible to have a debate so that all these issues may be debated properly?

Mrs. Taylor: Many Labour Members have farming interests, including my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He has been very forthcoming in giving information to the House and the best that I can say at the moment is that we are hopeful that a full statement can be made before the House rises.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): During the general election campaign, not one Labour candidate in Shropshire told the electors of Shropshire that, in the event of a Labour Government coming to power, they would impose a local government settlement such as the one that was announced last week. It has brought £9.7 million in cuts and a 17 per cent. increase in council tax. The county is in a state of shock. May we please have a debate next week on that huge betrayal?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman ought to know that the orders are always debated when they are laid before the House. That will be done next year. However, if he is asking us to say why we could not anticipate during the general election campaign a settlement that was made only a short time ago, he should know that, in my opinion, it would have been outrageous for us to be audacious enough to suggest that we could precisely guess such details that far in advance.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): May we have an early debate on the role in the House, and in the general performance of his duties, of the Minister without Portfolio? We are increasingly seeing that his influence on his colleagues—such as his undermining of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—is making it clear that he is the modern Rasputin of politics.

Given the farcical performance at recent Department for Culture, Media and Sport questions—the Minister without Portfolio spins out his answers to the few friends that he has left sitting behind him, so that Opposition Members' questions are never properly answered—and given that the hon. Gentleman declines to answer written questions of the type that I have repeatedly tabled, is it not clear that we need the second most powerful person in the Government to be questioned properly, that we need his role to be properly debated and that we need to have a full debate so that the real Deputy Prime Minister is exposed to public view?

Mrs. Taylor: People see a great deal of the real Deputy Prime Minister, and I hope that he will make a statement on Kyoto when he returns.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In view of the right hon. Lady's failure properly to answer my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, will she undertake to find time next week for the Paymaster General to make a statement about his intervention in the coal industry, which is likely to result in miners who are thrown out of work losing up to £10,000 each of their redundancy money?

Mrs. Taylor: There is no need for any such statement.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Last night, when the heavies had finished duffing up my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) in the Division Lobby, the Prime Minister made a tough decision not to join his beleaguered colleagues on the Front Bench but instead to go to yet another glitzy soirée at Downing street. Can the right hon. Lady afford us time

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

to debate the £7.4 million that the Government have spent on entertainment since they came to office? It really is a case of "Hello Tony, Let's go party."

Mrs. Taylor: I have no plans to arrange an invitation to No. 10 for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Will the Leader of the House find time early next week for the Minister for Public Health to make a statement on the ban on tobacco advertising in sport, given that she appears not just to have failed to follow, but to have deliberately broken, the 1996 Cabinet guidelines?

Mrs. Taylor: There is no evidence whatever that that is so. My hon. Friend has made her position clear, and took clear steps at a very early stage to ensure that she complied with the guidelines. The permanent secretary and the Cabinet Secretary are satisfied that she did.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I thank the Leader of the House for what she said about a statement on Kyoto, and urge her to go further and to impress on Ministers the need for a debate in Government time on climate change. That issue concerns members of all parties—*[Interruption.]*—although it seems of less concern on the Conservative Benches. During the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union, perhaps the right hon. Lady will press Ministers to ensure that European Council meetings are promptly reported to, and debated in, the House.

Mrs. Taylor: We have followed the convention of making statements following Council meetings. I, too, have noticed considerable pressure from Labour and Liberal Democrat Members on the subject of Kyoto, although not one word has been said by Conservative Members. That may tell us something about their lack of concern for these issues. I have said that I hope for a statement; I will bear in mind the request for a debate.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I welcome the fact that the right hon. Lady has said that there may be a statement on BSE next week, but can she find time for a full-blown debate on agriculture, as previously requested? There was a short debate on the rural economy yesterday, but no sooner had the Minister spoken than he resigned. *[Interruption.]* We should like to know what the Government's position is. Members of all parties have constituents working in the rural economy, and the right hon. Lady must realise that there is a real crisis in farming, in south Leicestershire and elsewhere. There may not be a crisis in Dewsbury, but there certainly is in the rest of the country.

Mrs. Taylor: Many constituencies include farming interests and food interests. All our constituents consume food and need proper reassurance. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends found his question so amusing—I thought it was extremely serious, which is why I announced earlier that I hoped for a statement before the House rose. That is not a guarantee, it is a hope; but it is a sign of how seriously Ministers treat the situation.

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): Will the right hon. Lady ensure that the shipping Minister comes to the House before the recess to make a statement on the growing concern for maritime safety? There have been a number of incidents in the fishing industry, and more lives are being lost. I refer particularly to the recent loss of the Margaretha Maria, from Newland in Cornwall, when four fishermen died. Their children will face this Christmas without their fathers—and we still do not even know where the vessel is.

Mrs. Taylor: That is indeed a serious issue. I am sure that Members on both sides would like to express their condolences to the families involved in the tragedy. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to raise the issue before Christmas, but the open debate next Wednesday morning, which we have before each recess, is particularly useful for raising such topics.

Points of Order

5.4 pm

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) was a member of a Back-Bench cross-party fact-finding visit to Northern Ireland this week, during which we had a number of useful private meetings with parties and organisations. He left the visit early to come back to Prime Minister's questions, because his question to the Prime Minister had been selected.

Not only did the hon. Gentleman leave the visit early, but when he came back here he raised an issue arising out of one of these private meetings. The assertion that he made was totally—I cannot say untrue, can I?—misleading. I wanted to put the record straight and to ask for your guidance, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's point does not relate to this one, which I will deal with first. What Members say in the House is a matter for them. Providing the language that they use is good parliamentary language, I cannot intervene. Sometimes Members ought to be a little more circumspect in what they say after private meetings, however.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not conventional, when a Member intends to refer to another Member in such terms, that she should give the latter notice of her intention?

Madam Speaker: Indeed.

Helen Jackson: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I placed letters on the Board not just to the Member concerned but to the political party that nominated him and to the leader of that party.

Madam Speaker: I just hope that letters informing Members that they are to be mentioned will be put on the Board in good time, not at the last moment.

Mr. Paterson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to clear my name. I have been in the House for only six months, but I am accustomed to going up to senior members of my party, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), in the Lobbies, asking them questions and getting friendly answers. Last night was my first opportunity to ask the Prime Minister a question on equal terms in the Lobby—I understand that we are all equal Members of the House.

You, Madam Speaker, have just heard that local government funding is a burning issue in Shropshire. I have twice written to the Minister for Local Government and Housing, but she has refused to see me. I therefore approached the Prime Minister to ask whether he could bring his influence to bear. I assure you that I approached him in a friendly way. I waited for a chance when he was free, which he was—for a very short time. My story can be corroborated by my hon. Friends the Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn)—who is in a Treasury Committee meeting—and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). I can assure the Leader of the House that I am not "boorish".

Madam Speaker: That was barely a point of order, but the hon. Gentleman has got his point on the record. I regret the fact that a Minister has not been able to see him. When I was a Back Bencher I would never have approached a Prime Minister—I was always rather intimidated by Prime Ministers. I should like to help the hon. Gentleman, so if he will let me see the exchange of correspondence with the relevant Minister I shall try to be helpful. It is the Minister responsible, not the Prime Minister, who should be available.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

AGENDA 2000: THE NEW FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9984/97, Agenda 2000, as it relates to the new financial framework for the European Community; and supports the Government in its policy of achieving enlargement of the European Union while maintaining the Own Resources Ceiling of 1.27 per cent.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made,

AGENDA 2000: REFORM OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9984/97, Agenda 2000, as it relates to reform of the Common Agricultural Policy; and supports the Government's objective of a market-oriented CAP with less emphasis on production-related agricultural support and more emphasis on targeted environmental and rural objectives.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Amendment proposed, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and add

'whilst recognising the need for urgent and radical reform of the CAP, declines to take note of European Document No. 9984/97, Agenda 2000, unless and until the Government gives beef farmers the urgent support they need if there is to be a viable British beef industry in the future.'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees):—*

The House divided: Ayes 128, Noes 258.

Division No. 118] **[5.8 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Burns, Simon
Arbuthnot, James	Butterfill, John
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*	Cash, William
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Baldry, Tony	Clappison, James
Beggs, Roy	Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Bercow, John	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Blunt, Crispin	Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Boswell, Tim	Collins, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*	Colvin, Michael
Brady, Graham	Cormack, Sir Patrick
Brazier, Julian	Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter	Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Browning, Mrs Angela	
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*	

Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. James Cran.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul (Gillingham)
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria (L'pool Garston)
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond

Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jane Kennedy and
Janet Anderson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees), and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9984/97, Agenda 2000, as it relates to reform of the Common Agricultural Policy; and supports the Government's objective of a market-oriented CAP with less emphasis on production-related agricultural support and more emphasis on targeted environmental and rural objectives.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Environmental Protection

That the draft Air Quality Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 11th November, be approved.

Road Traffic

That the draft Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 24th November, be approved.

Rating and Valuation

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

Licence Transfers

That the draft Deregulation (Licence Transfers) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

INTERCEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

'.—In subsection (4) of section 9 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 the following paragraph shall be inserted—

"(bbb) an offence under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 including a scheduled offence within the meaning of section 1 of that Act;".'.— *[Mr. Trimble.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.23 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I am glad that we have an opportunity on Report to consider amending the Bill. It gives us a chance to put before the House several issues that we should have preferred to raise in Committee. Unfortunately, as things turned out, we were deprived of that opportunity. None the less, we now have a chance to do just that.

I appreciate that time is getting on and that hon. Members wish to move on to other matters, so I shall not dwell at great length on the points in the amendments. However, new clause 1 raises a very important issue to which we must pay some attention. I proceed in light of the assumption, which is clearly shared by the Government, that there is a continuing need for emergency law in Northern Ireland. That is clearly the case as the Government are extending the life of the legislation and providing for unified emergency legislation embodying both the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act and the prevention of terrorism Act.

I believe that the Government's judgment in that respect is correct and that there is a continuing need for emergency legislation. I believe that that need will become much more apparent in future months because I fear that the present lull in terrorism will not be much prolonged. Unfortunately, come the new year, I fear that we shall be dealing with some familiar problems.

One of the great difficulties that we face in combating terrorism is obtaining evidence for convictions. I should have thought that the Government would be extremely anxious to gather evidence for convictions. After all, in the Bill, the Government are removing from the statute book the power of detention or internment—measures to which Governments faced with terrorism have had recourse because of the absence of evidence and the consequent inability to obtain convictions. Therefore, the Government should be keen to gather evidence that supports convictions.

There is a source of evidence available that has not been used hitherto: evidence obtained from intercepted telephone communications. That is known in the United States as "wire-tap evidence". Such evidence is not admissible in the United Kingdom. I think that that is a mistake, and the intention of new clause 1 is to make wire-tap evidence admissible in cases that fall within the terms of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act.

Interestingly, this issue—which we have pursued over a number of years in the House—was considered by Lord Lloyd of Berwick in his inquiry into anti-terrorist legislation. In considering the arguments for and against the admissibility of wire-tap evidence, he made several points. I can do no better than to quote from one paragraph of his report. In dealing with the arguments in favour of an amendment of this nature, Lord Lloyd said:

"The first and most obvious argument is that evidence of intercepted material is admissible to prove guilt in each of the countries which I have visited, and in every other country of which I have knowledge. The United Kingdom stands alone in excluding such material. Thus in the United States the use of intercept material in evidence is regarded as essential. In many instances, including high-profile cases involving the New York Mafia, convictions otherwise unobtainable have been secured by the use of intercept material. I put to officers of the FBI the suggestion that they were having second thoughts about the use of intercept material. I could find no support for this suggestion. In France I was told that intercept material has proved very valuable in terrorist cases. Thus, some 80 per cent. of the evidence against those suspected of involvement in the 1995 bombings is derived from intercept. Similarly, in Australia interception is regarded as an 'extremely valuable aid to criminal prosecution' . . . 664 prosecutions for offences ranging from murder to serious fraud were based on intercepted material, nearly 500 of those prosecutions being for drug offences. Convictions were obtained in 87 per cent. of the cases. Often, when presented with the evidence of an intercept, the defendant pleads guilty."

I highlight the phrase:

"The United Kingdom stands alone in excluding such material."

Why on earth does the United Kingdom impose that unique handicap on itself when dealing with serious crime, including offences of this nature? There is no sense in that whatever.

Indeed, not allowing intercepted telephone communications to be admitted in evidence is highly illogical, given that other intercepted conversations are admissible. If a bug is placed inside a house and a conversation is tape recorded or transmitted by some wireless device to somewhere else and recorded there, that intercepted conversation is admissible in evidence. People can be wired up with recording devices attached to their body, and the conversations that they have with other people are admissible.

A number of years ago the important offence of directing terrorist organisations was created under the emergency provisions legislation. Only two convictions have been obtained, one of which was as a result of people who were wired up speaking to a suspected leader of a paramilitary organisation, whose admission of involvement was recorded, and that evidence supported a conviction.

The argument is clear and, on the strength of it, Lord Lloyd was asked to consider permanent legislation in the event of terrorism in Northern Ireland being over. He recommended that such provisions should be introduced. I have not bothered to check, but I think that the previous Government, when they received Lord Lloyd's report, said that they would implement that provision. The legislation should be amended as I have suggested.

The only argument against such a provision of which I am aware is that, if such evidence were admissible, those involved in terrorism and smuggling would know the

extent to which communications were intercepted. But people know that already, and in any case they still have to communicate; they cannot conduct their operations without communication.

Some people may be concerned about the implications of such a provision, but the new clause would not compel the Government to introduce wire-tap evidence: it would merely give them the power to do so. The intercepts would not have to be disclosed to the defence unless the prosecution thought it desirable to rely on such evidence. To that extent, it would be an enabling provision. It would end a serious anomaly: it is incredible that, alone in the civilised world, the United Kingdom does not make use of wire-tap evidence.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): The hon. Gentleman has made some valid and strong points, to which I shall respond. However, in his opening remarks he said that we were dealing with amendments now rather than in Committee, and he referred obliquely to the way in which the Committee procedure had been handled. I want to say for the record that no amendments were tabled in Committee. If they had been tabled, we could have dealt with them in an appropriate way and at an appropriate time. I also remind the House that something like 12 hours were dedicated to the Bill in Committee. That is also worth putting on record.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether a Standing Committee on a non-urgent Bill has ever sat on the first day of its proceedings from 4.30 in the afternoon to 5 o'clock the following morning? Is not that an abuse of our procedures, and also why there was not time for amendments to be dealt with later in the Committee stage, as is usual? Is not that the point that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was making, and is not the Minister ashamed of himself? Would he be good enough to apologise to the House?

Mr. Ingram: I am not ashamed of myself, and an apology is not necessary. If hon. Members are interested in the history of the Bill, they should add up the amount of time Conservative Members spoke in the debate, and then judge the quality of their contributions against the time taken. If amendments had been tabled, we could have had much more substantial debates. I am not criticising the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), but, as he said that we now have an opportunity to deal with amendments, it is important to point out that no amendments were tabled in Committee. The official Opposition did not table any amendments: they have tabled an amendment this evening. I was directing my comments at them, and if anyone should feel ashamed, it is the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), who failed to carry out his responsibilities and provide proper and adequate opposition. Perhaps we are now getting that opposition.

Mr. MacKay: I do not want to detain the House unduly, but I asked the Minister a specific question. Can he recall the first sitting of a Standing Committee not starting until—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Perhaps I can help the hon. Member. We are discussing a new clause, which is a specific matter, and we should refer to that, not to the length of the Committee or what happened in Committee.

Mr. Ingram: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to deal with the helpful comments of the hon. Member for Upper Bann. If new clause 1 were enacted, it would allow evidence from intercepted material acquired under an Interception of Communications Act 1985 warrant to be adduced in court if it related to a scheduled offence within the terms of section 1 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann raised this matter during the debate on counter-terrorism legislation on 30 October. He will recall that the Home Secretary referred to Lord Lloyd's proposals in respect of section 9 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. In response to the hon. Gentleman, he said:

"The hon. Gentleman asked about Lord Lloyd's proposals in respect of section 9 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. That is a complicated issue. Lord Lloyd sought to distinguish between interception evidence that arose in respect of a national security investigation—which he said should be adducible in evidence—and other interception evidence, from a customs, police or security service intercept, in respect of the investigation of a serious crime, which he said should not be adducible in court.

That is one of the most complex of Lord Lloyd's recommendations. Many take the view that it is very difficult to draw the distinction in practice. There is much to be said on both sides of the argument about whether intercept evidence should be adducible in court".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1997; Vol. 299, c. 1032-33.]

He went on to explain his proposals for dealing with this matter.

The hon. Gentleman gave a neat precis of Lord Lloyd's report. I am sure that he has gone through Lord Lloyd's examination of this matter, and agrees with me that it is extensive and detailed. Lord Lloyd weighed up the issues, and came down on one side. Rather than go through all the arguments, which would detain the House unnecessarily, I recommend that hon. Members read chapter 7 of the report, which will enable them to understand the detail and breadth of the arguments.

On 30 October, the Home Secretary said that the Government were considering this matter carefully. We understand why the hon. Gentleman has raised this issue: it is important and must be considered with particular care in the context of Northern Ireland. I repeat that the hon. Member has made a strong case for his point of view.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I accept that the Government are hesitant about changing this part of the Bill at such a late stage, but does the Minister accept that he now has a good opportunity to make a change which, although it may appear to be a housekeeping change, would significantly strengthen the security forces' opportunities to bring terrorists to book in the courts?

Mr. Ingram: Such matters must be weighed in the balance, and that is what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is doing. I do not think that housekeeping is the right way in which to deal with such important issues, especially in the context of national security and the relative importance of the crimes whose perpetrators we seek to bring to book. That is why my right hon.

[Mr. Ingram]

Friend the Home Secretary said that the matter must be examined comprehensively. He went on to say that it would be premature to proceed as had been proposed in regard to the general issue, and I agree. I think that it would be wrong to introduce a straightforward housekeeping measure, or to act in any other specific way relating to Northern Ireland, given that my right hon. Friend is considering the position in relation to the interception regime as it applies to the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the Minister accept that the general view in Northern Ireland is that the measures in the Bill are confidence-building measures aimed at those whose compliance the Government seek, namely the terrorists? Would not the confidence of the ordinary decent citizen be built up if the new clause could serve as another weapon in the armoury of those who are attempting to enforce law and order? Would that not build up the confidence of the vast majority of peaceable citizens in both communities?

Mr. Ingram: I entirely reject the hon. and learned Gentleman's opening remarks. If we engaged in a discussion about the underlying philosophy and purpose of the Bill, and whether or not it is a confidence-building measure, we would spend considerable time—time that was available to us on Second Reading, which was cut short an hour and a half before it was due to end. I have no intention of going into the details, but I entirely reject the suggestion that the Bill was designed to appease terrorists. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The hon. and learned Gentleman suggested that, given the mood in Northern Ireland, the Bill would somehow build up confidence on the other side of the community. As I have tried to explain, we want to get the legislation right. It is complex legislation. It is right for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to look at it in the context of the United Kingdom, and for us to ensure that it is robust enough to withstand detailed examination.

I ask the hon. Member for Upper Bann, and others who have spoken, to accept my assurances. We are undertaking an active and comprehensive examination. The last Government did not act, although they may have given an indication that they would; I cannot say whether they did, but it should be possible to verify whether they felt that action was necessary. They did not act because they, too, thought that the proposals should be examined properly.

On the basis of my assurances, I ask the hon. Member for Upper Bann to withdraw his new clause. I will ensure that his comments are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who will doubtless take full account of them. As he told the hon. Gentleman on 30 October, it is helpful to obtain the comments of those who have experience and knowledge of such matters.

Mr. Trimble: I shall try to be brief. I am afraid that I think the Minister made rather a meal of his response, especially in what he said at the beginning about the Committee. He knows that the Ulster Unionists were going to table amendments, and he knows that, in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) clearly stated that he was prolonging the proceedings only to enable amendments to be tabled. Rather than allowing that to happen, the Government unnecessarily prolonged the sitting until everyone was exhausted. That was unfortunate, but we now have an opportunity to consider the substance of these matters, and I think that we should take it.

5.45 pm

The Minister said one thing from which I draw sustenance: he advised hon. Members to read the relevant chapter of Lord Lloyd's report. I am confident that, if they do so, they, like me, will be convinced that evidence secured through wire tapping should be made admissible. Lord Lloyd recommended that it should be so only in cases involving national security, and that raises difficulties, to which the Home Secretary referred; but my new clause is much narrower. It deals purely with Northern Ireland terrorism, and does not give rise to the same evidential problems.

I echo what was said by the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). The Government now have an opportunity to consider the matter seriously, and I ask them to take it. I realise that they have not had long to consider it so far—if it had been raised in Committee, they would have had more time—but they will now be able to consider and consult, because the Bill will go to another place, where amendments can be tabled.

The Minister can act in regard to wire-tap evidence relating to terrorist offences connected with Northern Ireland before doing so in regard to offences relating to other parts of the United Kingdom. That would give the security forces in Northern Ireland a valuable additional weapon, as well as sending a signal that the Government will take matters seriously if there is a resumption of violence. It is important for that message to be sent now, because the Government have said nothing so far about what they might do in the likely event of a resumption of violence. The fact that their current approach is all carrot and no stick sends the wrong signals to the community in general, and, indeed, to those who are involved in terrorism. I ask the Minister to reflect on that.

I do not intend to force the matter to a Division, because I am not sure that votes are terribly important in the House now, but it was necessary for the issue to be raised, and it is important for the Minister to consider it. I hope that that will happen.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 3

CODES OF PRACTICE: COMMENCEMENT ORDERS

'—(1) Section 60 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 (orders and regulations) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2), after "30" there shall be inserted ", 54".

(3) In subsection (5), the words "or 54" shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Mr. Trimble.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Trimble: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 5, in clause 5, page 2, line 38, at end insert—

'(2A) Subject to subsection (2B) a recording or a copy of a recording made under subsection (1)(b) shall not be made available to any person.

(2B) A judge conducting the trial of a scheduled offence may require the production to him alone of copies of all or any of the interviews made under this section with the accused in connection with the subject matter of the trial.'.

No. 7, in schedule 1, page 4, line 26, leave out & ", 53A" & and insert & "or 53A' ".

No. 8, in schedule 2, page 4, line 37, at end insert—

'In section 60(5), "or 54".'.

Mr. Trimble: Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 are consequential on new clause 3, but amendment No. 5 deals with a separate issue that is quite important.

I must give credit for new clause 3 to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). In Committee the other week, when we were discussing a code of practice under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, the hon. Gentleman referred to the provisions in that Act enabling codes of practice to be properly consulted on and debated in the House. The Minister—this Minister—approved of the hon. Gentleman's comments; as a result, they are the joint progenitors of the new clause. As the Minister spoke approvingly of the proposal in Committee, I am sure that he will follow through the logic of that approach now.

Amendment No. 5 is a different matter. I will explain the thinking behind it. Clause 5 makes provision for the audio recording of interviews conducted by the police with terrorist suspects. It is a matter about which we have very grave reservations. Indeed, in previous debates we have advised against such audio recording.

I know that audio recording is normal practice with regard to other offences. I am also aware that some judges in Northern Ireland have expressed the view that there should be audio recording. From their perspective, such recording diminishes fights when people who have signed statements challenge them on the ground that they were obtained improperly. The trial within a trial on the issue is sometimes difficult for judges to resolve. While audio recordings of interviews might solve that problem, they give rise to other problems and dangers, which in the past have convinced my hon. Friends and me that they should not occur.

During interviews with terrorist suspects, much intelligence is gathered by the police. A number of things are said on the basis that they are not recorded in the note of the interview. That is a well-known practice, and it is not necessary for me to cite evidence of it; it is accepted by everyone who is familiar with the system. Many such statements are made, and they would of course be recorded if an audio recording were taken. Such a recording would become available to a wide range of people. I do not need to remind hon. Members that when a terrorist suspect is arrested and questioned, the very first thing that his criminal associates do is try to find out details of what happened and what was said during the interrogation. An audio recording would facilitate that.

There is no point in saying that the recording would not become available. If, in the normal course of events, a recording should be disclosed or come up in discovery, it will become available to the terrorists. They will then be able to check what their members or people associated with them have said in interviews. That is a very dangerous step to take and will have a serious effect by limiting the amount of intelligence that becomes available to the security forces.

I realise that the Government are determined to proceed with audio recording. Amendment No. 5 therefore tries to limit the damage. It provides that a copy of the recording can be furnished by the police to only one person—the judge conducting the trial—and that it would not be available to anyone else outside the police. That must go into legislation; it cannot be included in a code of practice because codes of practice cannot prevent the recording being discoverable. The amendment would limit the collateral damage which clause 5 will do to the activities of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman has raised a point which I had not considered. If the amendment is not accepted, the clause could be a gift to terrorists. All hon. Members are very well aware that Sinn Fein and the IRA are very good at manipulating any loophole—however small—in the law. The amendment should be commended by us all.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the hon. Gentleman. His phrase is quite right; the provisions in clause 5 are a gift to terrorists. The amendment would limit the damage. I acknowledge the arguments in favour of audio recording. We felt on balance in previous years, however, that even though there was an advantage to audio recording the disadvantage that I have mentioned outweighed the advantage. The amendment would prevent the disadvantages that would flow from audio recording.

Mr. Öpik: Are we to understand that the hon. Gentleman is trying to ensure that audio recordings do not become an additional weapon in the terrorists' armoury and that audio—and, more important, video—recording is used to protect the interests of prisoners as well as accuracy?

Mr. Trimble: Yes, indeed. Obviously, recordings can also protect the police.

What provisions do the Government intend to make with regard to the detailed operation of audio recording? I look forward to what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Member for Upper Bann made some strong and salient points about the new clause and amendment No. 5. I thank him for paying tribute to those who helped frame new clause 3. Given the debate in Committee, it is important that we get the matter right. The earlier proposal did not quite achieve the objective to which I was prepared to subscribe. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) can speak for himself on new clause 3, but since he has not tabled any other amendment I assume that he supports it.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann did not go into much detail, so it is worth setting it out for the record. New clause 3 and the consequential amendments Nos. 7 and 8 would have the effect that any order made by the Secretary of State bringing into operation or amending a

[Mr. Ingram]

code of practice made under the Act would be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. Currently, an order made bringing into operation or amending a code of practice under the Act is subject to the negative resolution procedure in the same way as orders pertaining to equivalent codes under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Codes of practice are required in connection with the detention, treatment, questioning and identification of persons detained under the PTA, and such codes are already in operation. Codes of practice are also required in connection with silent video recording and audio recording and may be made in connection with the powers of part II of the Act. We hope to be in a position to bring the silent video recording code of practice into operation in January 1998. It would be wrong to debate the details of that at this stage. If the new clause gains the support of the House, we shall clearly have an opportunity to discuss in detail the Government's proposals. The audio recording code has yet to be drawn up. Under the provisions of the amendments, its introduction after the Bill receives Royal Assent would be dealt with by the affirmative resolution procedure, which would allow debate and consideration.

Orders pertaining to the equivalent PACE codes are subject to negative resolution and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act currently mirrors the PACE provisions in this respect. However, codes of practice governing the application of counter-terrorism provisions are by their nature somewhat different. That is why I responded as I did in Committee and why I support new clause 3. Such codes of practice merit special scrutiny. All of us will gain from such an approach. I am happy to accept the proposals of the hon. Member for Upper Bann concerning new clause 3.

Amendment No. 5 raises a range of important issues. In effect, the hon. Member is seeking to place a restriction on disclosure of audio tapes. His amendment would have the effect that audio recordings would be made available only to the judge conducting the trial. The Government fully understand the motive behind that. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to remove any inhibitions that might be placed on the interviewee, and any fears that he may have in the knowledge that audio tapes of his interviews may become public.

Before I respond to amendment No. 5 in detail, I want to reassure the hon. Member for Upper Bann and the House that the audio recording system is being introduced with the full co-operation and support of the Chief Constable of the RUC, who has taken the view that it will not impair the ability of his officers to pursue terrorist crime. The details of the code of practice that will govern the system will be drawn up, in the usual way, in full consultation with the RUC.

The general matter of electronic recording in the police holding centres has been a subject of much discussion: it is no secret that the question of disclosure of tapes—whether audio or video—has been a major area of contention. Even those favouring the introduction of electronic recording have given thought to whether it would be possible to devise a scheme that would guard against tapes being disclosed, for precisely the reason the hon. Member has outlined.

6 pm

Sir Louis Blom-Cooper, the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres, in his annual report published in 1994, put forward proposals for a scheme involving the Lord Chief Justice to direct a judge, not being the trial judge, to view any tape that a detainee or his legal representative had sought disclosure of during the course of the trial. The Crown would then subsequently be invited to argue against any decision on the part of the judge to allow disclosure and in the end could withdraw its reliance on the disputed evidence. In other words, only if the Crown were still to pursue its prosecution, based wholly or in part on the contested evidence, would disclosure be ordered by the High Court judge.

Whatever the viability of the scheme, however, it would still face two major difficulties. The first is that, given that the possibility of disclosure would remain, the inhibitions on the person being interviewed—to the extent that that is still a problem—would also remain. Secondly, and more importantly, such tapes would represent best evidence in any criminal proceedings, and to devise schemes that circumvented the principle of disclosure of best evidence would surely go to the heart of the fairness and adequacy of those proceedings.

Similarly, the alternative of confining access to the tapes to the trial judge only was considered carefully in the past. I have looked at the idea again in the light of amendment No. 5 tabled by the hon. Member for Upper Bann. I have to say that it would be highly prejudicial to the process of justice if any judge were to hear recordings of interviews that were not in the end made available to the defence—all the more so if the judge noted any impropriety on the part of the police interviewing officers. It would place the judge in an impossible position, because his function is to administer justice in a way that is impartial to both parties in a case. We have an especially good record in Northern Ireland in achieving that objective against a difficult background.

The Government have taken the decision to introduce audio recording for several reasons. We believe that it will provide additional protection both for the detainee and for the interviewing officers, it will reduce the scope for the lengthy hearings within trials that have been such a feature of terrorist-related trials in recent years, thus speeding up the process of justice to everyone's benefit, and it will not undermine the ability of the police to investigate serious terrorist crime, which is the Chief Constable's considered view.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Can the Minister explain why the Chief Constable is now said to be in favour of audio recordings being admitted as evidence—and why he has apparently suggested that that will not prejudice the investigations or hamper the collection of evidence—when that did not appear to be the case on previous occasions when the subject was considered? What has brought about that tremendous metamorphosis in police thinking? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) says that it was political pressure.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Political direction.

Mr. Ingram: I am sorry—I misheard the hon. Gentleman. If the accusation is being made—from

a sedentary position or by implied intervention—that political direction has been given to the Chief Constable, I assure the House that that is not the case. If the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) wishes to know why the Chief Constable has changed his mind, the hon. and learned Gentleman should talk to him. That is what the Government have done as we discussed the changes. I am reporting the view of the Chief Constable to the House. I can assess why he changed his mind only on the basis of the discussions that we had with him.

Mr. Moss: So he has changed his mind.

Mr. Ingram: That is not in dispute. The reasons behind his change of mind are based on the facts and circumstances that he has to take into account, but how the Chief Constable reached his decision is a matter for him. The Government believe that there is merit in proceeding as we intend and the Government have to be held to account for that, not the Chief Constable. I suggest that the hon. and learned Member for North Down and others who are concerned should discuss the matter with the Chief Constable. He is amenable to talking to hon. Members and to giving full consideration to any points of view that they express.

Written records of interviews are already kept, and silent video recording will be introduced shortly—as the hon. Member for Upper Bann said. Audio recording is a natural and sensible progression. My genuine belief is that the best way to protect the process of bringing terrorist criminals to justice is to protect the police from unfounded and malicious allegations, and to enable the courts to satisfy themselves conclusively that admissions to police are properly obtained.

While I understand the purpose of the hon. Member for Upper Bann in tabling amendment No. 5, I do not believe that a system that sought to prevent audio tapes from being disclosed would be either workable or appropriate. That is why I cannot accept the amendment. We have not rejected it out of hand. Due thought was given to the amendment on the basis of the various examinations of the subject by others. However, on balance, we do not believe that the amendment would advance the cause of natural justice and I ask the hon. Gentleman to seek leave to withdraw it.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I wish to make three brief points. The first relates to the codes of practice. I seek an assurance from the Minister that the codes of practice that the Secretary of State is required to produce, however they are decided, will be implemented speedily. Silent video recording has been agreed and adjudicated on, but after some considerable time it has still not been implemented.

I heard the Minister's explanation for the delay and in some ways I accept it, but I would be more confident in accepting it if I could do so in conjunction with an assurance that the codes of practice for audio recording will not be delayed. I hope that the Minister will be able to give a target date for the implementation of audio recording, based on the codes of practice.

Secondly, I have listened with great interest to the points that have been made tonight, but one point seems to be missing. The person being questioned in police custody is in abnormal circumstances. He has been arrested abnormally under emergency legislation; he is being held abnormally, by people who have the right to refuse him access to a solicitor; he may be held for an abnormal length of time, in contravention of the European convention on human rights; and he is held in abnormal physical conditions, in holding centres that have been condemned as unfit for that use by all who have reported on them to Parliament. Abnormality surrounds the entire process from the time person is arrested until the time the person appears in court. The abnormality continues because there is then no jury. The abnormality stretches right through the entire process. For that reason, we must be ultra-careful.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I agree that there are a number of abnormalities, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that the most fundamental abnormality is the existence of terrorist organisations that, over a period, have murdered more than 3,000 human beings, destroyed enormous amounts of property and mutilated the persons of literally thousands of people? That is the fundamental assault on society and everything it stands for which has given rise to the abnormalities of which the hon. Gentleman so eloquently speaks.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for making that point, and I do not dispute with him the obscene abnormality of violence and what it has done to everyone living in the north of Ireland. That is incontestable. What is open to question, however, is the capacity of any abnormal system to end that state of affairs.

In some ways, the question posed by the hon. and learned Gentleman confirms that. The more abnormal the process of law has become, the more abnormalities are sought. We must think about that even when there is peace—I know that that will crop up later in the debate. Please do not despise that peace. For someone who lives where I live, it is very precious. Do not let a wish list damage the prospect of its continuing. Do not let the need or the desire to predict accurately cloud judgment on the issue.

It is within that context, on the three key issues, that I greatly welcome the changes made. However, I have been and am still critical of the fact that at a time when we are, I hope, moving into lasting peace, the legislation is being extended beyond the year 2000.

We as a society, whether in Northern Ireland or anywhere else, must never forget the need to protect the rights of individuals. It is true that some of those individuals do not respect other people's rights, but that is no reason why a Government, a Parliament or a system should take up the abnormalities and make a virtue of them.

I look forward to hearing the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) argue his case from a legal point of view, but as a layman I simply pose one question about the amendment. Can it be just or equitable that the evidence on tape is not available to everyone involved in the process of a person's trial? Can that be right? Can that be legally acceptable?

We should not make the assumption that if the judge sees the evidence he, in his overpowering wisdom, will make the right decision. Surely a lay person who respects the law and wishes to protect it should demand that if there is evidence available, it should be available as of right to everyone. It should not be withheld.

[Mr. Mallon]

Over the years, one of the greatest criticisms of the application of both the emergency provisions Act and the prevention of terrorism Act has been that legislation designed to protect society was used to trawl for evidence. Ministers admitted as much in the House. When the provisions were first introduced, Sir Leon Brittan confirmed on the Floor of the House that one of the purposes was to trawl for information. That fact was also confirmed by a junior Minister in a famous Standing Committee debate.

Is there not an element in the debate on the new clause which suggests that what is being protected is not the chance of a valid conviction, or even the right of the individual, but the capacity of those who are doing the questioning to trawl for information rather than pursuing whatever evidence there may be against the person being questioned?

That goes to the heart of the problems as many of us in the north of Ireland see them. In response to a comment made earlier, I must say that I believe that there is no general view in the north of Ireland, and that we must accept that fact. However, there is one subject on which there is an absolutely general view—the end to the terrible violence that the hon. and learned Member for North Down talked about. And there is the absolute desire for peace.

There is also a strong view that, whatever tactics may be used by the terrorists and the others who have inflicted the obscenity of terrorism on the rest of us for so long, the legal process must retain its integrity and should never even step towards using the same type of tactics as the terrorists. I am afraid that the implication that the provisions allow trawling for information goes down a road that we should not travel. It does not protect what we should protect, and over 25 years it has not achieved the results that some assume.

6.15 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney: In connection with the proposed amendment, may I first point out that although I sought from the Minister some indication of the reasons for the Chief Constable's change of heart about audio evidence, that was not necessarily done for the purpose of supporting the amendment.

There are difficulties about the amendment. The most basic, which has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), is that it is a fundamental principle of our judicial system that evidence that is to be tendered against an accused must be made available to him. If it is made available to the judge alone in certain circumstances, that is a breach of a fundamental principle.

The Minister would be correct to have reservations about that, and perhaps it is a good basis for not accepting the amendment. My objections, and the reason for my question to the Minister, involved whether audio evidence should be accepted at all. I did not mean that it should be accepted and an attempt made to tailor it to our present difficulties by overriding what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh rightly pointed out is a fundamental and necessary principle of the administration of justice in the United Kingdom.

May I in turn refer to other matters that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned? I see nothing objectionable if those charged with bringing criminals to justice seek to obtain information in any circumstances, provided that those circumstances are lawful and are not in breach of any of the principles according to which evidence should properly be obtained.

There should not be any objection in principle to extraordinary or emergency measures being used to deal with extraordinary and emergency cases. The fundamental question is how far a democracy is entitled to take measures of an emergency nature to protect democracy itself.

That is no new principle. When the state itself was threatened, both Abraham Lincoln and F. D. Roosevelt, who in any democratic society would be respected as great servants of democracy, introduced emergency measures to which in normal circumstances they would have objected. During the war between the states, Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus, opened US mail without authority and interned people without trial. Similarly, we forget that, in more recent times, the US Government interned 100,000 Japanese citizens—the Nissei—in 10 different camps when the United States was threatened by Japan.

No one would pretend for a moment that they like these actions or that they should be given any credence—except in particular circumstances where even greater damage would be done to society itself were these emergency measures not in place. During the second world war, people who were thought to be a danger to the security of the state were placed in positions where that danger could be averted.

All this may lead the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh to suggest that these measures are not necessary, but let us look at what happened today. In 1984, a group attempted to assassinate the entire Cabinet of the United Kingdom. In 1991, the same people attempted to direct rockets to destroy No. 10 Downing street and those within it. In 1997, they are coming through the front door of No. 10 Downing street, without having surrendered a single weapon or handed over a single ounce of Semtex. It is a myth that violence does not work—violence works if Governments do not have a commitment to take the necessary emergency measures to protect the person and property of its citizens.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Can I return the hon. and learned Gentleman to the question of persons being interviewed by police officers? Does he agree that there should be no unseemly delay in the access to legal advice for those persons?

Mr. McCartney: In principle and in appropriate circumstances, everyone should have the quickest access to legal advice. Again, however, we must balance whether or not prompt and vigorous—although not unlawful or not objectionable—interrogation methods are necessary to obtain information that might prevent horrendous crimes from occurring.

What is not generally appreciated—except by those involved—is that, very often, those who are being interrogated in holding centres are already known to have committed the crimes for which they are being interrogated. Very often in Northern Ireland, witnesses come forward and specifically identify people and give the most positive and clear evidence against them. However, they say to the investigating police that because they live in the area and because they, their children or

their relatives may be murdered or mutilated, they will not give evidence. However, they will identify people on the confidential phone or in an interview. The people concerned are then picked up and interrogated. Within the necessary strictures that must be placed on the police, that interrogation or trawling for evidence—call it what you will—is perfectly justified.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. and learned Gentleman has long experience of practising in the courts in the north of Ireland. I have long experience of the other side of the coin in relation to this legislation. Is it ever right under law to arrest people under emergency legislation—usually at six o'clock in the morning—take them to a holding centre, question them and keep them there, when those who are arresting and questioning them know that there is no suspicion attached to them? Are not the persons arrested losing their freedom and human rights in the search for information, perhaps about someone who the police know is guilty, or about an incident? The figures for the EPA and the PTA down the years clearly show that that has been the case. Surely that is wrong, and we should not allow it to happen again. The amendment would do just that.

Mr. McCartney: Certainly a strong case can be made that only in exceptional circumstances should persons who are not themselves suspected of committing a crime be arrested and subjected to interrogation for the purpose of implicating others. However, there may be circumstances known to the police—it would have to be left to their discretion—where such measures may be justified if they would save lives, prevent a horrendous crime or, in other unspecified ways, protect the community. It is very easy to make specific judgments and to ask for a generalised approval of a principle which, in practice, may cost people their lives and cause massive destruction.

Mr. Trimble: I shall try to respond to the debate briefly. Amendment No. 5 has been touched on, and we can exaggerate the abnormality of the situation with which we are dealing. In tabling the amendment, I recognised, as has the Minister, that we are attempting to balance advantages and disadvantages with regard to a course of action. There are some advantages in the course that the Government are taking, but there are also disadvantages. The amendment tries to steer between them to achieve the best balance.

The Minister acknowledged that the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland has changed his mind on the matter. Until quite recently, it was not just the view of the Chief Constable, but the settled view of the police force that it was inadvisable to have audio tapes of interviews with terrorist suspects. Although the Chief Constable may have changed his mind, I think that I am right in saying that other senior members of the police force prefer his former opinion to his present one.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) referred to the European convention on human rights. There would be only a mere technical breach of the convention if the amendment were accepted; a technical breach which could have been solved a long time ago. I am glad to see that the Home Secretary has announced that he is to try to solve that problem, and the solution is fairly obvious.

I suggest to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh that the situation about which he is concerned will not be aided in any way by the amendment. The amendment is not directed at a person who is brought in for what he called trawling but is not charged with an offence. The amendment would be relevant only to those who are charged with an offence and to the subsequent trial of that offence.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) made the correct point—with which I fully agree—that evidence to be used against someone should be available to them. However, the evidence is the statement that that person has made. The audio recording is relevant to the circumstances in which the statement is made, and may be relevant to the admissibility of the statement. It may not be ideal for the audio tape to be available only to the judge, but this is not unusual.

Where material has been withheld under public interest immunity certificates, for example, the judge alone looks at it to see whether the certificate should have the effect of taking the material out or whether it should be available. That can be relevant to criminal cases—for example, material that the judge alone considers can be crucial to the outcome of the trial, as in the Matrix Churchill case.

6.30 pm

The abnormality of the case can be exaggerated. To return to my first point, it is a balancing exercise and the Government are making a mistake in where they are putting the balance. That mistake will become clear in subsequent days. It is a pity that that is happening and I am sorry that the Government are taking that line. None the less, I do not intend to press amendment No. 5 to a vote and I shall seek the leave of the House to withdraw it.

I am delighted at the Government's acceptance of the new clause and amendments Nos. 7 and 8. I am glad that they are employing such an open approach to this legislation. In this sort of situation, it helps if the Government are prepared to look seriously at the merits of clauses. As the Minister said, new clause 3 would ensure a debate within Parliament on the codes of practice, so that they are under parliamentary control, or are at least given a degree of parliamentary scrutiny. That is right. The fact that we are dealing with emergency legislation, increases the argument for parliamentary scrutiny. If we are doing something outside of the normal course of events, there is all the more reason for the House, which is authorising the departure from the norm, to examine and scrutinise. Hon. Members on the Ulster Unionist Benches have made that point year in and year out.

Parliamentary scrutiny of emergency legislation is inadequate and this is a small step to strengthen it. I appreciate the fact that the Minister has accepted those amendments. Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker I beg leave to withdraw amendment No. 5.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have not yet got to amendment No. 5. We are only debating it with new clause 3 at this stage, so the hon. Gentleman does not need to withdraw it.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 1

DURATION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) ACT 1996

Mr. Trimble: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, leave out lines 7 and 8.

I shall try to be as rapid as possible. I have already pointed out that legislation of this nature ought to have parliamentary scrutiny. Amendment No. 1 would restore the debate that would otherwise have taken place in 1998 on the continuation of the 1996 Act. The Bill will knock out the annual review of the legislation in 1998, which is a mistake. As long as this legislation remains on the statute book, it ought to be debated in the House at least once a year, as has been the practice. As I said, the legislation has not had much by way of parliamentary scrutiny. I am surprised that new Labour—or indeed, old Labour—is attempting to remove the House's annual debate on the emergency provisions. It is surprising that virtually the first thing that the Labour party did on coming to power was to diminish the parliamentary scrutiny of emergency legislation. That is an astonishing move and I hope that the Minister will accept the amendment.

Mr. Ingram: Hopefully, we can debate this quickly. As I understand it from listening to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the amendment would ensure that, to remain in force, the temporary provisions of the 1996 Act will be required to be continued by order approved by resolution of each House of Parliament before 15 June next year. I was not clear whether that was the hon. Gentleman's intention.

Mr. Trimble *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ingram: The fact that the hon. Gentleman is assenting indicates an understanding of the effect of the amendment. The Government included the subsection that the hon. Gentleman seeks to remove so that if the Bill is enacted before June 1998, we can dispense with the need for the annual renewal debates, so he is right in his assessment of what we are seeking to do. However, renewal debates will take place in 1999 and 2000, if necessary, to continue the temporary provisions in force until their expiry on 24 August 2000.

As the hon. Member said, the renewal debates are an important safeguard, but since Parliament will have fully debated all the provisions of the Act during the passage of this Bill, parliamentary time could and should be saved by dispensing with the 1998 annual renewal debates if the Bill is enacted in good time. Because we are debating this Bill within the time scale in which the 1998 provisions would have been debated, there is no need for a subsequent debate. The legislation will also be considered in another place and may be referred back to us.

Under those circumstances, I cannot accept the amendment. We have had a full debate—12 hours in Committee and considerable time on the Floor of the House on Second Reading and this evening—and there may be further debate on the matter. Simply going through the whole exercise again would not be the best use of parliamentary time. While the debate is important, we have had that debate during the passage of this Bill, so I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. Trimble: Having listened to the Minister, my astonishment at the Government's position is, if anything, greater than it was before. This is 1997. After tonight, this House will not debate the issue again until June 1999. We are to be deprived of the debate that would have taken place in June 1998, which is nearly six months away.

Mr. Ingram: The debates do not necessarily take place in June. Usually it is earlier, in May, and they can take place earlier than that. Under the procedures of the House, the provisions have to be renewed by that date. We are giving the issue full consideration. What more would be gained by having another debate in a month or so? Anyway, we do not know when the Bill will be referred back to us from another place.

Mr. Trimble: That answer is wholly inadequate. The renewal debates take place against the background of a report by someone who looks into the operation of the legislation during the year. During the passage of this Bill, we have not considered the detailed operation of the legislation against the background of such an expert report. It is a different sort of debate.

Whether the debate is in May or June does not detract from the fact that the Government are ensuring that there will be no debate in 1998 and that it will be another 18 months before the operation of the legislation is given any parliamentary scrutiny. In these debates on the Bill, hon. Members can by inference make points about the operation of the legislation, but the debates are not focused on its operation as renewal debates are. Even in recent years, parliamentary scrutiny of the emergency legislation has been woefully inadequate. In the next 18 months, it will be non-existent.

I am amazed that that is the position that the Labour party has adopted, but it has done so and time is getting on. I have made my point and I will not press it to delay the House unnecessarily. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

SCHEDULED OFFENCES

Mr. Trimble: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, leave out lines 1 and 2.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 2, leave out line 3.

No. 4, in page 2, leave out line 6.

Mr. Trimble: The amendments concern the certifying out of scheduled offences. The effect of the legislation is to enable certain offences to be certified out. The point of the amendments is to allow us to ask the Minister to give us the detailed reasons why it is now proposed to certify out offences—making or possessing a petrol bomb; throwing or using a petrol bomb; possessing a firearm

with intent to endanger life; use or attempted use of firearms; causing explosions—that are clearly terrorist offences.

Those offences are not outside the ambit of paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland. Can the Minister give any coherent reason why those terrorist offences should not be handled in the same way as other terrorist cases?

Mr. Ingram: The amendments refer to offences involving intimidation, petrol bombs, firearms and explosives, and the hon. Gentleman objects to such offences being made capable of being certified out of the schedule of terrorist offences. The amendments would not only preserve the status quo in relation to certain offences that the Government seek to make certifiable out, but would remove certifiable-out status from all scheduled offences under the headings of the Protection of the Person and Property Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 and the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The amendments do not make it clear whether that was the hon. Gentleman's intention, and he did not give us a full explanation, but that is the thrust of the amendments.

Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are not suggesting that such offences should invariably be treated in the ordinary way. On the contrary, where the Attorney-General judges it appropriate, they will be tried before Diplock courts. Equally, however, the Government are anxious that, in cases where there is no terrorist involvement or connection with the emergency, the flexibility should exist to enable such cases to be certified out.

Mr. Trimble: Is the Minister seriously suggesting that there are cases involving explosions and firearms in which there is no terrorist involvement?

Mr. Ingram: I was coming to that. If the hon. Gentleman holds on for a bit, I shall set out my reasoning on the matter.

The hon. Gentleman seeks to preserve the present arrangements, whereby certain offences are automatically tried by Diplock courts. Let me illustrate by quoting from the appropriate statutes. Section 2 of the Protection of the Person and Property Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 says:

"any person who makes, or has in his possession, any apparatus, instrument, article or thing which

(a) contains any inflammable liquid or substance; or

(b) is constructed or adapted for use in conjunction with any such liquid or substance so as to cause injury or loss of life to any person or damage to any property; under such circumstances as to give rise to a reasonable suspicion that he is not making it or does not have it in his possession for a lawful object shall, unless he can show that he made it or had it in his possession for a lawful object, be guilty of an offence under this section."

Let me describe briefly some of the relevant offences under the other headings. Paragraph 17 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 says:

"a person who has in his possession any firearm or ammunition with intent by means thereof to endanger life or cause serious injury to property or to enable any other person by means thereof to endanger life or cause serious injury to property, shall be guilty of an offence whether any injury to person or property has been caused or not."

Section 3 of the Explosive Substances Act 1883 says:

"any person who unlawfully and maliciously causes by any explosive substance an explosion of a nature likely to endanger life or to cause serious injury to property shall, whether any injury to person or property has been actually caused or not, be guilty of felony".

Those are the three areas that we are examining in relation to the amendments. It is important to put the relevant parts of the legislation on the record.

6.45 pm

The hon. Gentleman seeks to ensure that such offences must invariably be tried by Diplock courts, as he calls them terrorist offences. That is not all: he also seeks, for example—I shall not list every offence—to consign automatically to Diplock courts any offence of intimidation and any offence of manufacturing, dealing in, or repairing a firearm or ammunition without being registered.

Let us assume that there was an unprovoked attack on a member of the public by criminal elements not connected with terrorism; for example, someone spraying an individual with lighter fuel in order to steal his possessions. That would fall within the ambit of the relevant section.

As another example, suppose that there was a domestic crime involving possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life; or suppose that ordinary criminal elements used explosives to gain entry to a safe; or that in a dispute between neighbours one party felt threatened and intimidated into leaving the premises.

Those examples would fall within the ambit of the sections that I read out. The hon. Gentleman would classify those acts as terrorist acts, and would deny those who carry them out the right to trial by jury. I hope that he has accepted the thrust of my argument: not every crime that falls within the ambit of those sections could by any classification be determined to be a terrorist act.

The hon. Gentleman sought an explanation. On the basis of the explanation that I have given, there is no way in which I could accept the amendment, and I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Öpik: It seems to us that the Government's intention is to introduce, as we would all wish, an element of normalisation in the legal system in Northern Ireland. Certifying out is an attempt to make that process a bit more expeditious.

My party finds no great danger in certifying out because, after all, if we understand it correctly, cases will still be evaluated on an individual, case-by-case basis. The cases that should not be exposed to the many dangers of corruption that a normal trial might engender will still be tried under the Diplock court system.

We should encourage confidence in the decision makers, and in the idea that certifying out will not harm the process, among those who are keen for the normalisation process to be accelerated. We object to the amendment and support the Government in their attempt to normalise this aspect of the legal system in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney: While I can fully appreciate your anxiety to normalise as far as possible the trial of various criminal offences in Northern Ireland, you will be aware that there is at least a feeling among many people in Northern Ireland that the proposals are part of a process of confidence building.

[Mr. Robert McCartney]

Has any research been conducted or statistics produced on the number of occasions when someone who could have been charged as a petrol bomber was in fact engaged in ordinary criminal activity with his butane lighter fuel? Perhaps you could also tell us—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman keeps using the words, "you" and "your". The Chair is not responsible for the matter.

Mr. McCartney: I am sorry, I accept that entirely.

Some statistics or evidence about the Government's proposals would help. Clearly, the Government believe that some requirement of justice means that such potentially ordinary criminal cases should be dealt with in a non-Diplock way by juries. Has any research been done? Do statistics show that a significant body of cases of the sort that the Minister described is being dealt with under the Diplock process, when under the proposals they would be dealt with by trial by jury? Or are the Government saying in a blanket way that the bare possibility of such crimes being effected means that it is necessary to make new arrangements?

Mr. Mallon: It is with some trepidation that I speak on the matter. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), and the Minister, but I am still slightly confused. I am not quite sure whether that reflects on the powers of persuasion of those three gentlemen or on my powers of understanding.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down asked for statistics. I understand that the vast majority of work in the Attorney-General's office, some 85 per cent., involves certifying out. I commend the Minister for moving gradually towards having all cases dealt with through the normal process of law. I do not think that the proposals go far enough. Other instances could have been included. I do not want to confuse myself or the issue any further by attempting to mention them, but I believe that this is an opportunity for at least some movement. I commend the Minister for having taken it.

Mr. Trimble: These were probing amendments to try to elicit an explanation. The Minister gave us a theoretical explanation, not a practical one. I endorse the points of the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). I wanted to know from the Minister whether, in the circumstances in Northern Ireland, there were any instances of such offences that could genuinely be described as non-terrorist. My limited knowledge suggests that all such cases are paramilitary or paramilitary related. That is the practical reality as I understand it in Northern Ireland. Of course, one can construct theoretical situations such as the example that the Minister gave about lighter fuel. I wanted a practical explanation, and I am sorry that I did not get one.

This was a probing amendment to find whether there was a coherent reason behind the proposals, it is clear that there is not. None the less, having found that out, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

DETENTION ORDERS

Mr. MacKay: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 2, leave out lines 9 and 10.

Those who watch our proceedings from outside will find it bizarre, to say the least, that we are debating rigorous anti-terrorist legislation on the very day that the leaders of Sinn Fein-IRA are invited into 10 Downing street with the Prime Minister. It will be difficult to explain to our constituents why that is happening.

The amendment would delete the clauses that refer to internment. We believe that it is right and proper that internment should stay on the statute book. Let me explain precisely why. We are not necessarily in favour of internment. The Government Whip has suggested from a sedentary position that it was not necessarily successful last time. He will be pleased to know that I largely concur.

Mr. Ingram: To avoid unnecessary debate, does the hon. Gentleman consider that the Government should not talk at all to Sinn Fein? Should anyone talk to Sinn Fein to move the peace process forward?

Mr. MacKay: I suspect that that intervention was not in order, but if you will allow me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond briefly. I have said on the record on several occasions that I am entirely in favour of the political talks under way at Stormont. It is right and proper that after a ceasefire has been in place for a certain time, Sinn Fein-IRA should be in those talks. We have also said that it is decidedly premature for a British Prime Minister to invite Sinn Fein-IRA leaders to Downing street. I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to confirm that yet again.

Let me explain why we tabled the amendment. We readily acknowledge that internment does not always work and that it was not successful in the early 1970s. However, it is quite conceivable that if the political talks at Stormont succeed, and we all dearly hope that they do, there will be splinter groups in both communities that do not accept their results and will resort to violence. Anyone with even a passing interest in the history of Northern Ireland and Ireland will recognise that that almost inevitably happens. I suggest that the moment when, just possibly, the Government might need to introduce internment is after a political settlement has been reached and the splinter groups resort to violence.

It is decidedly premature to take internment off the statute brook. I wonder why the Minister is bothering to do it in the Bill, not least when the Government of the Republic of Ireland are retaining internment on the statute book in Ireland, for understandable reasons. We urge the Minister to reconsider the decision. We are not asking him to introduce internment at any particular point.

Mr. Godman: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Government of the Irish Republic. The other day in the Dail, the Minister for Justice, when questioned by two deputies—I think one was John Gormley—said, as a direct response to this Bill, that his Department would review the Irish legislation on internment.

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman sits on the Government Benches, so he is well aware that a review

is totally different from action. The Government have initiated 40-odd reviews, but if they are telling me that they will all lead to action, they are very much mistaken.

Mr. Ingram: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the Labour party in opposition carried out the review, and we are now implementing it in government?

Mr. MacKay: I have never said to the Minister that this matter is one of the numerous examples of the Labour party saying one thing in opposition to the electorate and another thing when it came to power. I willingly accept that the Minister does not have the same problem of misleading the British public as his colleagues in the Department of Social Security had to face in the House last night. If the hon. Gentleman wishes me to commend him, which was obviously why he made that intervention, I am happy to commend him on his consistency, even though I gently suggest to him that he is mistaken.

7 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that pragmatism in the approach to the problem is the key? Does he agree that what causes anxiety to Conservative Members is the fact that whereas the Government have embarked on a pragmatic policy, even to the point of being willing to speak to Sinn Fein today—even if we have anxieties about that, we can still respect that decision—they are not adopting a pragmatic policy on internment? They seemed to make up their mind about it some time ago, and are not applying their mind to the current realities in Northern Ireland.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be much better to keep internment on the statute book as an available reserve power, because that would display the Government's willingness to negotiate and look for a peaceful settlement and, at the same time, their unwillingness to dispose of any part of the armoury that a lawful, democratic Government should have in resisting terrorism?

Mr. MacKay: I concur whole-heartedly with my hon. Friend.

We are not asking the Government to introduce internment at any particular time; we are simply saying that we think that it is in their interests to have the flexibility of retaining internment on the statute book in case they need it at some time in the future. We see no possible advantage in taking it off the statute book, nor any need for it, and we are surprised that the Government are doing so. Many will be suspicious of the Government's motives, and we ask them, even at this late stage, to think again.

Mr. Mallon: I should like to restate my position, as I did on Second Reading and in Committee.

I believe that the Minister and the Government have made the right decision in terms of the integrity of the law as it applies in the north of Ireland. It is the right decision in terms of the integrity of their own political position and it is the right decision in terms of the immediate future and the future beyond that.

We had a brief discussion about the renewal of this legislation and the fact that it may not be debated in 1998. I was torn when I heard that, because my instinct is to take every opportunity to consider the legislation. But one thing I am sure of is that whatever happens in 1999, when we next debate the legislation, things will have got either an awful lot better or terribly worse. That is for sure.

There are those who believe that the capacity for things to improve is greater than is sometimes recognised. Reference has been made to a visit to 10 Downing street today, and the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) described it as bizarre. Everything to do with what will solve the problem in the north of Ireland will be bizarre. I live a fairly bizarre life, especially for three days of the week in a place called Castle Buildings, with Sinn Fein representatives on one side of me and representatives of the Ulster Democratic party and of the Progressive Unionist party on the other. That is bizarre. It is even more bizarre that that is happening when a man was murdered in Belfast at the weekend, yet not a word, not a question was asked about which organisation might have killed him. No question was raised in the House when the leaders of loyalist paramilitarism did a bizarre thing. Guess what it was? They went to 10 Downing street to meet the Prime Minister.

Is it not bizarre that in a fundamental debate as important as this, the most bizarre element of all has not been comprehensively dealt with? I believe, and we have nothing else to hold on to except our belief, that when we come to debate the legislation again, things will have changed radically. A new beauty will have been born, not the terrible beauty of Yeats, but a beauty based on pragmatism, reality and political progress. I cannot ever foresee circumstances on the island of Ireland when internment will be used again.

As I have said before, internment has been used in every decade since the 1920s—in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Some of us are a product of those years, and our experiences on the receiving end go back long before the emergency provisions Act and the prevention of terrorism Act. I make the following prediction confidently, to whatever party is in power: never again will internment be used on the island of Ireland. If it were, it would be a fundamental acceptance almost of defeat, not of victory, and an act of ill faith in the capacity of the people on the island of Ireland to move away from violence and create a new future. It would hold to us one of the monuments of emergency legislation which has failed by the admission of every party in the House. The last thing that we want are monuments to failure rather than signposts to the hope and potential of the future.

The Government are right for the three reasons that I gave previously. I commend them on their action. I have made my criticisms that they have not gone far enough down that road of faith. I believe, however, that when we debate the legislation again in the House, the evidence will be there that the step that they have taken today is the right one.

It is in that sense of faith that I commend the Government for taking a step which is more difficult for a British Government or an Irish Government than probably any other step relating to their own legislation. I want to see the Irish Government respond—I make no distinction between bad pieces of legislation—by removing their power of internment immediately from the statute book. They know my view on that as clearly as I have tried to put it here.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I was sorry to see the amendment, which has been signed by the Conservative Front-Bench team on Northern Ireland, because I recognise that it represents a possible dent in the bipartisan approach which is critical to addressing the problems.

When I first heard about the possibility that internment might be removed from the statute book—I believe that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland mentioned it at the Labour party conference, or at a fringe meeting there—I was surprised, because I had not heard about any such proposal. I understood its significance, as would anyone familiar with Northern Ireland.

I consulted my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), the shadow spokesman for Northern Ireland, on what consultation there had been and what notice he had had that this proposal was to be introduced. I discovered from him that there had been none, and I regretted that because it is obviously desirable, as we go forward with this difficult process, to have the closest consultation between the main parties in this country.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), along with his colleagues, has responsibility for carrying forward a process in which some of us have invested a significant part of our life as we have tried to make it succeed. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) knows, as do one or two other hon. Members, some of the pressures and hostility that I had to endure, from not just the loyalist, but the Unionist community, when I stood firmly in support of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I saw the recent speech of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the British-Irish parliamentary body, in which she described the long process that this has been. She took her starting point as the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It was difficult to hold the line at that time; there were enormous pressures. Some will remember the famous speech that the then right hon. Member for South Down, Mr. Enoch Powell, made and the abuse directed at the then Prime Minister, now Lady Thatcher, at the time of the signing of that agreement. I was the personal recipient of some of the more direct views of the people of Northern Ireland on that subject, not least in the city hall in Belfast.

I mention that only to show that this long journey towards what I profoundly hope will be peace is a journey in which each of us who picks up the baton on behalf of the Government of this country—to carry it forward in the interests of everyone in these islands—has a heavy responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to take as many people as possible with us.

I have concerns about certain things that happen in Northern Ireland. There is a long-standing convention, which I have always tried to respect. Everyone who has taken on the ultimate responsibility in difficult circumstances—we have just passed the 10th anniversary of the Armistice day outrage at Enniskillen, an all-too-vivid memory which I shall take with me throughout my life—recognises the pressures on the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the difficult problems faced by the Minister of State who has responsibility for security in the Province. Therefore, the Opposition do not seek to second guess, carp and criticise unnecessarily; it is easier not to do so if there is consultation between the parties, because comments can be made in private.

I am concerned about the spirit of consultation and the bipartisan approach, which has never been more important if the process is to go forward as there are some difficult issues ahead. As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has said, it is a time when people will have to take brave decisions. Those decisions will have to be made not just by Governments from behind the security of Downing street and Stormont Castle, but by politicians out in the streets who have much less protection than I and others have enjoyed. They will have to take brave decisions that will undoubtedly upset some people in their community. In recognising the need for those decisions, it will be important that we maintain the closest consultation and carefully consider their impact.

I talked about taking risks, and I recognise that a number of steps that the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have taken have pushed back the frontiers of what was previously considered acceptable. I do not necessarily agree with all their actions, but a number of them contain the necessary elements to achieve a change of attitude, provided that there can be seen to be a genuine willingness on the part of those to whom the concessions and opportunities are given to respond with a positive attitude. That will be the test and challenge facing the Prime Minister, the Minister of State and their colleagues.

I have concerns about the Bill. If my right hon. Friends press the amendment to a vote, I will support them. After one or two of the appalling incidents that I faced in Northern Ireland, different options were always considered and someone always asked why I did not reintroduce internment. I rejected that suggestion because—given the background events and the manner in which internment had been introduced on that earlier occasion—I knew that many saw it as the ideal recruiting sergeant for another expansion of the IRA.

7.15 pm

I believe that circumstances might be different now and that some of the problems that previously existed have changed. There are arguments suggesting that the abolition of the measure would make more sense, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell suggested, the abolition of the measure may not contribute to the peace process. Eventually, with great courage and in the teeth of every possible problem, we may reach the position where the vast majority of people realise that, in the interests of peace and on behalf of the people, not just in the Province, although they are of overwhelming importance, but of people throughout these islands, we should reach some sort of agreement. However, I find it impossible to believe that we shall achieve a unanimous result and my great worry is that I fear—and the history of the island of Ireland shows—that there will inevitably be a risk of splinter groups and breakaway groups.

The final judgment, not just of this Government and this House, but of the Irish Government, the Dail and the overwhelming majority of people throughout the island of Ireland, may be not that internment is a threat to the peace process, but that it is the only way to save it: the only way to sustain the peace that has been so painfully secured may be to have internment. Despite its imperfections and the affront that it is to a normal system of democracy and justice, there may be some people who will not accept any outcome and will be prepared to continue to murder,

kill, terrorise and intimidate in all the ways that I know to my cost many people in Northern Ireland have had to suffer .

I was concerned about what the Government had proposed. The proposal would not actually change anything, as internment is not active at present; a residual power remains which successive Secretaries of State have, on reflection, decided not to abolish. It has been decided, in the course of a number of courageous steps that have been taken, not just by this Government, to retain that power. I slightly sensed that the Minister of State was trying to suggest that the present Government had invented the peace process; if anyone deserves the greatest credit for our current position it is my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) for the way in which he carried forward the process. He did that while keeping the power of internment, recognising that the power might be needed in future.

I say this with some sorrow, because I realise that others may seek to exploit my words, but others, including the Minister, may profit from them, because his action may be seen as a more courageous step if I stand up to oppose it; in front of a certain audience, that may help him on his way. He may not understand my point, but, in the world of Northern Ireland, if one person disapproves, another approves.

I profoundly hope that reintroducing internment will never be necessary and I would never have done it myself if I could possibly avoid it, but I would not take the power to do so away from a free democratic society and from the people who might ultimately depend on the Government's being prepared to come to their assistance and provide the necessary security. I would not have abolished the existing but latent residual power.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I can understand to some degree the feelings of the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) about the fact that there was no consultation between the Government and the Opposition on the presentation of the Bill, but surely he, more than anyone else, realises that the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in which he was heavily involved, is the prime example of the way in which people are left feeling aggrieved if they have not been consulted. With the greatest respect, I say to the right hon. Gentleman that it does not lie in his mouth to complain about the absence of consultation.

Mr. Tom King: In a way, I have made exactly the same point. My criticism of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was not based on its substance, but on the lack of consultation. There should have been more consultation and it certainly would have been preferable. Holding the views he does, the hon. and learned Gentleman must accept my remarks about the need for consultation in all things.

Mr. McCartney: That is true, up to a point, but, when the agreement was passed, I vividly recall the right hon. Gentleman telling us in the Northern Ireland assembly that, when we all got to grips with it and understood it—as if we were people of limited intelligence—we would fully appreciate how peace, stability and reconciliation would be the fruits of that great agreement. However, I have read today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, which carries a year-by-year account of those who have been murdered by Sinn Fein-IRA, and I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that the passage of time from 1985 and the roll call of the dead at the hands of Sinn Fein-IRA and the equally despicable terrorists who masquerade as loyalists provides no evidence of the peace, stability and reconciliation that foolish pro-Union people fail to recognise in the interstices of the agreement created for them by others.

If my recollection is correct, when that agreement was being put through the House, the right hon. Gentleman, who was then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, told the House and the world at large that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was for the purpose of strengthening and securing the Union. Mr. Kinnock, then the Leader of the Opposition, told the House that he welcomed the Anglo-Irish Agreement because it was a step, albeit a small step, towards the fulfilment of the Labour party policy of a united Ireland by consent.

Mr. Tom King: The hon. and learned Gentleman might recall that, at the identical moment, Mr. Charles Haughey, who was then either the Taoiseach or the Leader of the Opposition in Ireland, was berating Dr. Garret Fitzgerald for saying that he had copper fastened partition.

Mr. McCartney: I take that point, but I would rather confine our debate to events in this House, because this House, then as now, is the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—a position that Mr. Haughey has never at any time occupied, although he had aspirations to do so.

We should bear in mind the fact that, from their viewpoint, the pro-Union people in Northern Ireland were receiving conflicting messages from those involved in a bipartisan policy. It has been rightly said that when Government and Opposition are in unctuous and pious agreement about the way forward, one thing is absolutely certain: someone somewhere—in this case, the pro-Union people of Northern Ireland—are being treated very badly. That was certainly the impression in 1985, and it is increasingly what the pro-Union people of Northern Ireland feel today. I am pleased that there is some disagreement today about the bipartisan policy, because it give me some hope that an objective assessment is being made in the House of the relative merits of the measure.

I shall speak briefly about internment. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has done some violence to the historical record on internment, because internment has been an enormously effective weapon in maintaining the integrity of, and democracy in, the Republic of Ireland. On each occasion when internment has been utilised in the Republic of Ireland to put down terrorist activities in the form of private armies, it has worked admirably.

As far as Northern Ireland is concerned, I, as a common lawyer who is very conscious of the rights of the individual, have an antipathy to internment. I agree entirely with what the right hon. Member for Bridgwater said; internment should be used as the very last option, but there are clearly foreseeable circumstances in which internment may be necessary. It is informative to note that those who have been most closely involved inside the IRA, but who have forsaken it and become its most constructive and successful critics, have all said that their ultimate fear is of internment.

No one is suggesting that internment should be put into effect, but, while it is retained on the statute book, it can be introduced in certain circumstances—for example,

[Mr. McCartney]

when it is essential to copper fasten a peace—to ensure that an agreement arrived at among democrats is held firmly in place against attack by small splinter groups. We should remember that in a complex and modern society small splinter groups need only to have the means to shut down 10 or 12 electricity sub-stations in the City of London in order to bring down every computer there. We must not underestimate how effective a small group with modern equipment can be and the threat that it can pose. In those circumstances, it may be necessary to hold the measure in reserve.

We should retain the measure, not as a result of any feeling of oppression, but because of the speed with which it may be introduced. If it ceases to be primary legislation, we can reinstate it only over a period, thereby losing the surprise and speed of execution that may be among the most effective attributes of this ultimate safeguard of democracy. We throw away surprise, and the strength of holding it in reserve—and for what purpose? To build the confidence of terrorists. Can there be any other reason for doing so?

7.30 pm

It does not serve for the Minister to say, "We said in opposition that we would introduce this measure if we were the Government." That does not make it better. It provides some consistency, but some people have been known to be consistently wrong. It behoves everyone to think very carefully about the ultimate situation that the right hon. Member for Bridgwater spoke of, and to consider whether the peace that everyone hopes for, and which everyone is striving to secure, may ultimately fail because we are incapable of removing from society the small number of people who will never, in any circumstances, come into the democratic fold.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): It is appropriate to allude briefly to the situation that pertained today, when three unreconstructed terrorists—Adams, McGuinness and Ferris—were invited into the heart of democracy by the leading politician in the United Kingdom, our Prime Minister. Whether we oppose or support the Labour party, he is our Prime Minister, and representatives of our Government are sitting on the Treasury Bench. Today, they invited those people who were specifically named in a recent "Newsnight" programme as active members of the—

Mr. Trimble: The "Spotlight" programme.

Mr. Maginnis: I thank my hon. Friend. They were named in that documentary, shown on "Newsnight", as leading members of the IRA's Army Council. They were invited into Downing street to placate the threat that they still pose, which is still recognised, from the IRA to society throughout the United Kingdom.

That approach has not worked in the past. In the early to mid 1970s, the Government decided that the one way to placate terrorists was to set up incident centres on the streets of our towns, to finance those incident centres and to supply telex machines to people who were not terribly well-organised. Those people were carrying out acts of terrorism, but they were not organised in the sophisticated way that they are today. As an act of good will, the Government of the day taught them how they must become organised, how they must create a communication structure and how, in effect, they must become more efficient at the terrorism that they were carrying out against society.

That was done as a reaction to internment, which we all now admit was carried out with a degree of expedition that was unwise because the information was not available. However, the information is available today. We know today who are the godfathers, the people who do not prime or carry or plant a bomb, who do not actually put the gun to the back of the head of community policemen in Lurgan and pull the trigger, but who sanction every wicked act that is carried out in the name of the IRA and in the name of other illegal paramilitary organisations.

I do not want to embarrass him, but I have some regard for the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). I believe that he, like myself and others, sincerely wants peace throughout society in Northern Ireland. I do not doubt him for a moment, but when I heard him today describing things as abnormal and bizarre, I cast my mind back to the time when he engaged in amateur dramatics, and I thought that he had lost none of his talent. He communicated in very acceptable terms something that is fundamentally flawed—something wrong. He suggested that Governments did not have the right to employ emergency measures in an emergency situation.

The hon. Member knows better than that. He and other members of the Social Democratic and Labour party sat for more than a year in the Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, predominantly a nationalist forum, in which the IRA sat facing every other nationalist party in Ireland. Every other nationalist party in Ireland said to the IRA, "You are wrong to pursue a violent course. You must abandon violence. You must recognise that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland is absolutely necessary if we are to have an equitable and peaceful society and if you want to be part of it."

At the end of a year, in that cosseted environment, the IRA representatives pointed their fingers back at the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh and his colleagues and said: "No. Consent is not on our agenda." They were telling us that they still adhered to a strategy of holding an Armalite in one hand and a ballot box in the other. They are prepared to put the Armalite behind them and exploit the ballot box, and they will exploit the ballot box for a considerable time, as long as the Government are prepared to set up incident centres and supply them with telex machines, or to give them concession after concession as they are doing now.

There has been nothing quite as humiliating, in the entire 27 years of violence, as seeing the three top leaders of the IRA walk through the door of No. 10 Downing street today, entering what, together with this place, represented the heart of democracy. Then they came out and went in for some showboating. There was not a word about the consent of the people being an essential part of democracy;

not a word about dismantling the terrorist organisation; not a word about disarmament. There was, however, a suggestion that, if the leader of my party were willing, they would engage in another showboating exercise.

God knows how these showboating exercises will end. To please Gerry Adams and his cohorts, perhaps we shall all have to dance the conga along Whitehall—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend and I are good friends, because I am a Conservative and Unionist, and I support the Unionist cause in Northern Ireland. Does my hon. Friend share my view that if Mr. Adams, Mr. McGuinness and Mr. Ferris do not get their way, they will return to violence? Would he therefore agree that internment should remain part of our primary legislation?

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman brings me succinctly back to the point I wanted to make. However we try to placate these people, their appetite is insatiable—nothing short of a united Ireland will placate them. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater said that if there were a settlement there would be splinter groups with which we should have to deal. It is much more serious than that. There is not an ounce of sincerity in Provisional Sinn Fein: the Armalite has not been put away. So when the bribes—the Danegeld—that have to be paid to keep these unreconstructed terrorists at the table of democracy run out, they will resort again immediately to violence. Then we shall have to decide how to deal with the godfathers.

Mr. Mallon: With reference to the "cosseted" situation in which I and others spent more than a year trying to persuade people that the principle of consent in relation to any change of status for the north of Ireland is the only viable democratic approach, I want to assure the hon. Gentleman that there is nothing very cosseted about doing a week's work here and then heading off to spend another two days trying to convince people of the validity of that argument. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point; I, too, know how the prodigal son's brother felt—the more so given some of these antics—but surely every opportunity should be taken to put this case and to test these people out.

Mr. Maginnis: I have some sympathy with that, but when do we stop testing? When do we decide that the product is fit for human consumption? Nothing has emanated from IRA-Sinn Fein to suggest that they can be seriously incorporated in the democratic process. Today was a humiliating today for British democracy. Surely people still remember Warrington, Enniskillen and Regent's park—the list is endless.

Some people say that Enniskillen was a mistake, and that it was never intended that civilians should be killed. The town is in the heart of my constituency, and I know better. I remind the House that on that same Sunday, about 25 miles from Enniskillen in a place called Tullyhomman, another church parade involving youth organisations and children aged between 16 and 18 was assembling ready to move off. Right in the heart of their assembly area was a huge bomb, every bit as dreadful as the one that exploded in Enniskillen. But it was discovered and subsequently forgotten, because the discovery prevented 30, 40 or 50 deaths. It would have wiped out an entire generation in the locality. That bomb, now forgotten, was approved by the IRA's hierarchy.

7.45 pm

The right hon. Member for Bridgwater says that although he approves of internment being on the statute book he never saw any justification for using it. I have seen such justification time and again in the past 27 years. Instead of bolstering Sinn Fein-IRA with incident centres and telex machines, we should have been perfecting the gathering and collating of intelligence. By 1985, when our intelligence was perfect, we should have removed the godfathers by detaining them under the internment powers. Had we done so, I do not doubt that others would have filled their shoes. They would have taken the places of the quartermasters and the brigade commanders, but if one keeps removing the finance officers, production managers and sales managers from a business, that business will soon be brought to its knees.

That is not to say that we should intern hundreds of people, but I am afraid that neither the previous Government nor this one have had the courage to face up to what terrorism really means to the people who have to endure it daily.

The Government continue to cling to the vain hope that if we give the terrorist what he wants, he will eventually become a democrat. But we democrats who sit in this Chamber do not always get what we want—yet we abide by the collective decisions made here. Certainly, we question those decisions, but we abide by them willingly because we know that that is the best way of maintaining order in society. Adams, McGuinness and Ferris, and people like them, will never acquiesce in that idea. I therefore say that the Government of the time were negligent, in that they failed to use internment when they had the chance to use it at the right time.

May I comment on the rumour that the Irish Republic will review its situation with regard to internment? Despite all the clamour that there has been for the past 20 years for this jurisdiction to remove internment, the Irish Republic has never volunteered to initiate that process, because it recognises that internment is a legitimate weapon in the hands of a responsible democratic Government, and that internment on the island of Ireland must be implemented south and north if it is to have maximum effect against the terrorism of the IRA.

The case of loyalist terrorism is slightly different; we can probably contain that within our own jurisdiction, by the use of internment there. With respect to IRA terrorism, the Republic recognised that it should keep that facility as long as we had it in our jurisdiction. Unfortunately, there has not been the courage to sustain it here, so the Republic will no doubt be obliged to follow the flawed example proposed by the Government.

The word "affront" has been used tonight. The greatest affront that we can give to the electorate throughout the United Kingdom is to bow our knee to those who would use violence in place of the ballot box. Sadly, we are on that slippery slope. On behalf of my party, I support those who have proposed that the power of internment should be retained.

Mr. Godman: I shall be brief. I want to return to some of the observations made by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) and a comment made by the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay).

I took note of what the right hon. Member for Bridgwater said when he warned his colleagues about unnecessary criticisms being fired at Ministers when

[Mr. Godman]

they—Ministers—are making difficult decisions. However, the right hon. Gentleman was utterly wrong to observe that Labour Ministers claim authorship of or responsibility for the peace process. We have always acknowledged the work of the previous Tory Prime Minister in that regard. If the bipartisan approach is breaking down, it is because of the carping criticism being levelled at our Ministers from the Opposition. The Conservatives take badly to being on the Opposition Benches. One of the consequences is that they cannot support a bipartisan approach.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) on the need to ban internment from the whole island of Ireland. In response to what the Minister said about reviews, I hope that the Irish Government do not conduct too many reviews.

With reference to the rumour concerning the Irish Government's decision to review internment, may I quote from the *Official Report* for the Dail. Deputy John Gormley, who I think is a member of the Green party, tabled a question to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, asking the Minister

"if he will take steps to initiate the repeal of the portions of the Offences Against the State Acts, 1939 to 1984, which allow for the introduction of detention without trial in this jurisdiction in view of the intention of the British Government to remove the power to detain persons without trial from the statute book in relation to Northern Ireland."

Minister O'Donoghue responded:

"The Government have already welcomed the intention of the British Government to repeal section 36 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996, which will remove the provision for detention (internment) in Northern Ireland."

The Minister went on to say:

"The Government are equally committed to keeping legislation covering offences against the State under constant review and to amending it in the light of changing circumstances as necessary."

He finished by saying:

"Accordingly, it is my intention to bring proposals to Government shortly with a view to initiating a wide-ranging review"—

I know that the hon. Member for Bracknell has heard that before—

"of legislation in the areas of offences against the State, including, in particular, the issue of internment."

I would say to Minister O'Donoghue, whom I have met, that he needs to do more than review the legislation. He needs to follow the radical lead of this Government.

I said that I would be brief. I support the decision of the Prime Minister to meet those people today. Ministers must make unpalatable decisions. They have to take risks. That is what the Prime Minister has done, and he has my support.

I detest and abhor the people whose names were put to the House a few minutes ago. They claim to have been associated with an armed struggle against the British Government. That is both obscene and absurd. One cannot conduct a military campaign in a mature parliamentary democracy.

Having offered that qualification, I believe that the Prime Minister was right to meet those people at No. 10 Downing street. They will claim that it is almost as historic an occasion as that remarkable day in 1921 when Griffith and Collins went along to No. 10, but it is nothing of the kind. Mr. Adams is a brilliant propagandist and he will make that claim, but he knows that this is part of the peace process.

I say to our Prime Minister, "Well done. You had the guts to do it." I support him all the way.

Mr. Öpik: These are strange days: Sinn Fein at No. 10, talks between foes, hopes for a settlement from all sides, and above all, a Province in anticipation. How far we have come. The change is this: the suppression of violence is no longer the primary motive. The primary motive is now the promotion of a peaceful and lasting settlement. To that end, internment has never been effective and it never will be.

Let us remember what internment is. It is the power to have people detained, just by giving their names to the security forces. Those people have no trial and no right of appeal. The Liberal Democrats specifically called for the repeal of internment, and we welcomed the Secretary of State's announcement in September when she said that she would do that.

When the powers were used, they were almost universally acknowledged to be counter-productive. That is why they were not used in the 1980s—not in 18 years of Conservative rule. Furthermore, even the hon. Member for North–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) said:

"I think that everyone, including Conservative Members, would accept that in the 1970s the introduction of this measure was clumsy—ham-fisted, even—and ineffective. . . It probably had the opposite effect from that which was intended."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 25 November 1997; c. 70.]

If the situation in Northern Ireland deteriorates greatly and for a long time, there will be ample time to reintroduce such powers. The argument that internment might be needed in the future is not acceptable—we do not keep conscription on the back burner, just in case there is a war. Do the official Opposition argue that we must keep legislation for everything, just in case? I could not support that.

There can be no excuse for keeping such draconian powers on the statute book. The right to a fair trial is one of the most basic rights. We need to normalise Northern Ireland, as we discussed earlier. That means a move towards more normal legislation. By no stretch of the imagination can internment be regarded as normal.

As long as the powers remain enshrined in Government legislation, we might use them on the people who would benefit from the propaganda that those powers promote. Such people could use the powers to convince their foreign funders that they needed more money for their cause. Therefore, the powers are almost as counter-productive in terms of promoting the support of terrorist organisations as they are effective in apprehending terrorists.

This is an important confidence measure not just in terms of the terrorist but in terms of the communities that have often felt oppressed by the mere presence of internment powers. The assertion that losing internment makes us more vulnerable to terrorist activity is simply not acceptable. In addition, those who claim that the Government are weak in abolishing internment ignore the fact that it is a far more laudable option to work to encourage conciliatory behaviour between the communities and to strengthen empathy regarding the basic problem.

8 pm

In conclusion, I fully recognise the contribution made by the former Government in promoting the initial steps that led to the peace process. They made many mistakes along the way, but I do not take away from them the fact that the initial talk of a settlement began with the former Government. It is only fair to acknowledge that point.

However, I think that it is inappropriate for the Conservatives to try to preserve the existence of internment. I should like to think that tonight's debate is the final echo of that discredited system and will serve to remind us how far we have come from the darkest days of the troubles in the Province when internment was introduced as a panic move by those who did not know what else to do.

Mr. Ingram: I shall deal with some of the points raised in this very serious and genuine debate. It is worth mentioning that the internment issue was considered at length on Second Reading and that nearly four hours was contributed to it in Committee. Nevertheless, it is an important issue.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—who, unfortunately, is not in his place—and to some of his speech. He brought a breadth of personal experience, as a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to the debate. I did not agree with everything he said, and I regret that he is not in his place to hear me correct his assertion that, somehow or other, the Government are claiming credit for the peace process. That is not the case. We have always taken the view that we are placing bricks on foundations that others have laid.

I am reminded of the famous quote by Abba Eban who said that peace is not an event but a process. Many people have taken forward the Northern Ireland peace process. There have been many stumbles along the way and many steps backwards, but I hope that we are now moving towards a long-lasting peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to everyone who has contributed to that process.

Clearly, the internment issue provokes very strong views. The reality is that internment involves a decision by Government to deprive individuals of their liberty without trial and without the normal safeguards that the law provides for the protection of the accused. In Committee, these words were spoken:

"Opposition Members believe that internment is undeniably an infringement of civil liberties. It would be folly to pretend otherwise. It would be equally foolish to deny that when internment was introduced in the 1970s, it was a disaster. It was entirely counterproductive, and it left the IRA stronger. The Committee should not spend much time discussing these issues. It should acknowledge that internment is an infringement of civil liberties and that it failed drastically in the past."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 25 November 1997; c. 77.]

They were the words of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), who unfortunately is no longer in his place—although he was in the Chamber earlier. Those arguments justify everything that the Labour party has said consistently, both in opposition and in government, as to why internment should be removed.

Internment does not achieve any of the objectives that some hon. Members have offered as justification for it. It does not bring stability within the communities: historically, it has increased community tension. It causes serious damage to respect for the rule of law, strengthens terrorist organisations, creates political prisoners and, ultimately, prolongs the violence. Every major review and examination of internment has found conclusively that internment has no place in a democratic society. The 1975 Gardiner report criticised both the theory and the practice of detention under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973.

In 1980, the detention provisions were allowed to lapse—although they remained on the statute book—under a Conservative Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who said that the lapsing of the powers would be an expression of confidence in the minority community's rejection of terrorism. In 1990, Lord Colville reviewed the matter again, and he considered in detail the difficulties associated with the operation of internment and its repercussions for the nationalist community. He said:

"perhaps the most sinister by-product was the tendency actually to strengthen terrorist networks through increased hostility and criminal skills among those detained."

He went on to criticise trenchantly the way in which internment operated. In 1995, the matter was considered again by Mr. John Rowe QC as part of his fundamental review of the EPA. His view was also straightforward: he recommended that the provisions should not be re-enacted.

Why are we having this debate tonight? I hope that it does not signal a breakdown in the bipartisan approach. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater made some telling points on that subject. I hope that the House will not divide on the amendment—although I know that the official Opposition have organised themselves on that basis. Such an action could be read as a breakdown in the bipartisan approach.

When the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) moved the amendment on behalf of the Opposition, he did not take account of the debates in Committee when I set forth justifications for the Government's action. I have touched on those reasons only briefly this evening. The hon. Gentleman did not challenge the arguments of those experts who have conducted thoroughgoing reviews of the internment provision. If he had done that and knocked down those arguments, a Division tonight could be justified. We are moving the process forward slowly.

Mr. Maginnis *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman spoke for 20 minutes tonight and he set out his arguments in detail in Committee. I am trying to explain why we have taken this decision.

Not one of the arguments that I advanced in Committee and that were explored on Second Reading has been challenged by the hon. Member for Bracknell. He did not attempt to take on those issues, but he intends to divide the House tonight.

Mr. Maginnis *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is very persistent.

Mr. Maginnis: I am grateful to the Minister. I have one question for him. He has been part of the process that has made concession after concession to the IRA in the

[Mr. Maginnis]

past weeks, culminating in the abandonment of internment tonight. Will he tell us one advance that has been made in respect of the IRA's abandoning terrorism? If he can give us one example, we shall be impressed.

Mr. Ingram: Both a loyalist ceasefire and a ceasefire on the part of the Provisional IRA are in place. We are moving the process forward. No one believes for one moment that it will be easy. There are many difficulties ahead, but we all have a contribution to make in taking forward the process. Abraham Lincoln was mentioned earlier in the debate. He said, "I may walk slowly, but I never walk back." That is a very apposite quote in the context of Northern Ireland. If we go only forward and not back to the old positions, major progress can be made.

I shall conclude, because these points have been made in previous discussions of this aspect of the legislation. I ask the spokesman for the official Opposition to consider his position. There are no cheap political points to be made. I understand the strength of feeling, but I ask him to consider the fact that every time previous Governments tried to achieve peace in Northern Ireland, they had the full co-operation of the Labour Opposition. We are now in government. The hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to justify his position, but he did not do so in his brief opening comments, so a Division on this issue is wholly inappropriate.

Mr. MacKay: Will the Minister tell us whether he voted for all the emergency provisions Acts that we introduced? The answer is no. The Labour Opposition used to vote against them or abstain. Given that he acknowledges that we feel deeply about this issue, it is unreasonable of him to say that by voting against the Government—which we shall do—we are no longer taking a bipartisan approach. That is unreasonable and unfair, and I hope that he withdraws those remarks.

Mr. Ingram: That is helpful, but the right hon. Member for Bridgwater implied that that was a possibility, and I am responding to the points that he made. If it is not a breakdown of the bipartisan approach, that is good.

The hon. Gentleman asked me for my past voting record. He should do his own research, because it may surprise him. Labour Members tried to maintain the bipartisan approach. A great debate took place on this issue.

The Labour party opposed previous emergency provisions Acts primarily because internment remained on the statute book. We have now introduced this measure, and I ask for the amendment not to be put to a vote, so that we can conclude our consideration of the Bill.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 118, Noes 223.

Division No. 119] **[8.11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, William
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Cran and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Canavan, Dennis
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm

Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Janet Anderson and
Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 1

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 7, in page 4, line 26, leave out & ", 53A" & and insert & "or 53A' ".—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Schedule 2

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 8, in page 4, line 37, at end insert—

'In section 60(5), "or 54".'.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Parliamentary Broadcasting

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

8.24 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On 14 July, I raised on a point of order a matter that the press was reporting at the time. It was being said that the BBC was intending to end the Tuesday-to-Saturday item on Radio 4, "Yesterday in Parliament". On that occasion, my protest was supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Madam Speaker informed the House that she would write to the director-general of the BBC, which she did. I have seen the reply that was sent to her. I have also seen the second letter that she wrote, telling the chairman of the BBC that she was not satisfied—and that Members of Parliament were not satisfied—with the reason given for ending "Yesterday in Parliament".

I, too, took the matter up with those at the BBC, including its chairman. It is clear from the replies that I received, and from the letters sent to Madam Speaker, that a decision has nearly been reached to drop the programme, probably next April. The BBC's favourite line is that apparently some 350,000 listeners switch off when the item is due to start. That is the figure which the chairman quoted in a letter to Madam Speaker, and the BBC has used it a number of times.

It so happened that, two weeks after I raised my point of order and when the summer recess had already begun, I telephoned the BBC to try to establish the figures relating to the non-parliamentary substitute slot. The item in question is broadcast at more or less the same time as "Yesterday in Parliament"—at 8.40 or 8.45 am, ending at 9 am. Having been unable to secure that information in my telephone call, I wrote to the controller of Radio 4, and was told by Mr. Boyle that the same number of people listened to the substitute slot as listened to "Yesterday in Parliament".

It is understandable that Radio 4, and other radio stations, lose many listeners after 8.40 or 8.45 am. The BBC does not need to carry out a survey to realise that people are getting ready to leave for work at that time, or parking their cars and preparing to go into the workplace. In fact, the listening figures decline from 8 am for those reasons.

"Yesterday in Parliament" is broadcast from Tuesday onwards. The figures show that the decline in listening on Mondays—when, obviously, it is not broadcast—is the same as on the other days. In more recent times, there has been, if anything, a slight increase in the listening figures in the period after 8.30 am, including the time when "Yesterday in Parliament" is due to start.

The BBC has come up with a number of excuses to try to justify what it intends to do. The latest excuse is that listeners find "Yesterday in Parliament" too demanding at that time of the morning. When the BBC is asked why more people do not listen to the substitute programme that is broadcast when the House is not sitting—on Mondays, for instance—various facile excuses are given. One, which featured in a letter that I received from the chairman of the BBC, is that potential listeners do not switch on because they think that "Yesterday in Parliament" is being broadcast. It is very difficult to believe that, in the middle of August, people who are quite well informed are frightened to switch on Radio 4 at around 8.45 am because there is a possibility that "Yesterday in Parliament" is being broadcast. That is a lot of nonsense, and I am sure that the chairman and director-general of the BBC know it. More than 1.2 million people listen to "Yesterday in Parliament".

The BBC agreement says that it should broadcast an account of Parliament. The appropriate clause of the agreement states:

"The BBC shall broadcast an impartial account day by day of the proceedings of Parliament."

That was agreed more than 50 years ago. The BBC argues that dropping "Yesterday in Parliament" would not undermine that agreement, since "Today in Parliament"—which goes out at 11.30 pm—will continue. That is one of the most flimsy excuses that has been put forward by the BBC since I raised the point of order in July.

"Today in Parliament" now goes out only on long wave, which many listeners are unable to get. There has probably been a reduction in listeners since 1994 as a result. Incidentally, on Fridays it goes out on both FM and long wave, a matter to which I shall return. "Yesterday in Parliament" has always had more listeners than its sister programme, which is perfectly understandable due to the time that "Today in Parliament" is broadcast. More people listen to the radio early in the morning. I understand that the same staff are responsible for both programmes. I am sure that it would be generally agreed that both programmes are excellent accounts of parliamentary proceedings. My wish is that they should both continue. I believe that that is the strong feeling in the House.

The BBC says that "Today in Parliament"—the evening programme—will be extended on a Friday, which of course is welcome. Instead of a 15-minute slot, the programme will be half an hour long, as it is on other evenings. Although the BBC intend to extend the programme on Fridays, it will go out only on long wave—not on both frequencies as it does now on that day. Even in that aspect, the BBC is not being honest with the House or with listeners who would like to hear what has been going on in both Houses of Parliament.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Arts will wish to respond to the fact that "The Week in Westminster", which has been the subject of an early-day motion, is being moved from Saturday morning to Thursday evening. That will undoubtedly mean far fewer listeners. The BBC says that to keep "The Week in Westminster" on Saturday morning is too demanding—much the same reason that it gave for dropping "Yesterday in Parliament".

Have the people who listen to "The Week in Westminster" protested about its being too demanding and said that they would like it on some other day? Have letters been sent to the chairman and director-general of the BBC saying that it is much too serious a programme for a Saturday morning? No, the BBC is showing contempt—I can put it no other way—for what goes on in the House by seeking to drop "Yesterday in Parliament" and by the way in which it is dealing with the long-established "The Week in Westminster". Those programmes are accurate, impartial and give a good indication of what goes on during the week in both Houses. There is no possible reason for the BBC to proceed as it intends to do.

As I said in my letter to the BBC, it should recognise that the liberty of all of us depends on the maintenance of parliamentary democracy. Such freedom would not last

five minutes if there were no Parliament and the free democratic institutions which arise from the very existence of the two Houses. Those in control of the BBC should certainly take that into account. It should not be the job of the most senior BBC executives to sideline and marginalise the proceedings of Parliament, and then use any excuse, however flimsy, to stop broadcasting what has occurred in the House the previous day.

We all agree that some days are more dramatic than others. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), the duty Whip, would not like a repeat of what occurred in the House yesterday—but it did occur, and should not listeners hear what has been happening? Why should they hear only a studio discussion, an interview with a Front Bencher or, as often happens, a discussion between two lots of journalists?

Before the 1970s, before there were facilities for broadcasting parliamentary proceedings, the BBC was very keen that there should be radio broadcasts, as later it was keen that the House should be televised. It was right, and the House was wrong to be reluctant to do what was necessary to ensure that radio and televisual broadcasting facilities were provided.

The BBC has always had many friends in Parliament. That was highlighted not so long ago when, in the previous Parliament, it seemed that the Foreign Office intended to cut the amount of money given to the World Service. The reaction of hon. Members on both sides of the House showed that we recognise the excellent work that the BBC does in broadcasting to people abroad. One hopes that that will continue.

There is a fear that the BBC will stop having so many friends in the House if it shows such disregard of hon. Members' wishes. The matter is not one of hon. Members' wishes or egos, and whether we appear in the programmes or not. We want a well-informed democracy. I deplore the fact, for instance, that the serious papers no longer report Parliament; the tabloids never did, of course. The broadsheets carry a sketch, but that is about all.

Once *The Times* decided that it would not carry a daily account of our proceedings, the other broadsheets followed suit. Obviously I do not seek to justify that, but they are commercial organisations and have no obligation to Parliament. The BBC is not a commercial organisation; it is a public service broadcasting organisation. It should recognise that it has a duty to keep people informed about what is happening in this House and in the other place. It is not simply a question of hon. Members' pride being hurt; our case is not made on that. There is a need to continue the broadcasts so that people know what is going on. If anything, coverage should be extended because a well-informed society helps democracy to survive. That is another point which those who control the BBC should not forget.

I should like the chairman and director-general of the BBC to come in person to see Madam Speaker, the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House to discuss the reporting of parliamentary proceedings. So far, there has just been correspondence. It is clear from the most recent letter to the BBC chairman that Madam Speaker is not satisfied. She also makes the point that parliamentarians are not satisfied, and she is absolutely right. Let us end the correspondence. Let the chairman, the director-general and the controller of Radio 4 come and put their case to Madam Speaker, the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House. Let the BBC try to justify what it intends to do.

Rumours are going around that as a concession some parliamentary reporting might be scheduled before 7 am for five or 10 minutes. My hon. Friend the Minister looks puzzled, and well he might, because that would not be a concession: it would show contempt. I accept that my hon. Friend has no powers in the matter, and that is right: the last thing I want is for the Government to tell the BBC what to do, except through the agreement that was drawn up 50 years ago.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will remind the BBC—as Madam Speaker, other hon. Members and I have done—that it has an obligation to report our proceedings and no justification for dropping "Yesterday in Parliament". If my hon. Friend makes those points today—they were also made on 14 July by the deputy shadow Leader of the House—I hope that the BBC will reconsider. "Yesterday in Parliament" should continue, not in some slot hidden away before 7 am but at its present time. That is what I and other hon. Members want, and we have every justification for requesting the BBC to hold to its obligation—not for ourselves, but for the public, who have a right to listen to what has been happening in both Houses of Parliament.

8.41 pm

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on securing this debate. I am well aware of the considerable concern among hon. Members about the broadcast coverage of parliamentary proceedings, and I welcome this opportunity for some of those concerns to be aired.

The obligations placed on the BBC in respect of its broadcasting services are set out in its royal charter and agreement. In relation to its domestic public services, those include broad obligations about the number of television and radio services, objectives and programme content, standards and scheduling. For example, the BBC is required to provide a properly balanced service consisting of a wide range of subject matter which serves the tastes and needs of different audiences. The BBC agreement also contains one specific programming requirement introduced—as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North said—in 1948 and reiterated in 1996, that the corporation

"shall transmit an impartial account day by day, prepared by professional reporters, of the proceedings in both Houses of Parliament".

Within that framework, decisions about programme content and scheduling are wholly a matter for the corporation itself.

That position reflects the independence of the BBC in all editorial and management matters, including the content of its programmes and the times at which they are broadcast. That independence was, for the first time, enshrined in the 1996 agreement, but it is not a new concept. The need for editorial independence, from both political and commercial influences—as recognised by my hon. Friend—has been one of the fundamental principles governing the BBC since its establishment as a public corporation, and a public service broadcaster, in 1927. The Government fully support that principle.

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

The BBC's independence brings with it obligations, including the need as a public corporation to be—and be seen to be—accountable to licence fee payers, as viewers and listeners; to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, as the custodian of its charter and agreement; and to Parliament as the public authority for the moneys paid through the licence fee. To realise that accountability, the BBC must keep in touch with its audiences and be responsive to their concerns.

It is clear from questions raised in the House, from this Adjournment debate, from early-day motion 246 signed by hon. Members from all political parties, and from the active interest taken in the matter by Madam Speaker that Members of Parliament are extremely concerned about the proposed changes that the BBC announced on 30 July.

Those changes include the transfer of "The Week in Westminster" from Saturday morning to Thursday evening; the extension of "The Week in Westminster" and "In Committee" from their present 42 weeks and 18 weeks respectively to a full 52 weeks a year each; and the possible dropping of "Yesterday in Parliament". It is that last proposal, and the rescheduling of "The Week in Westminster", that have caused Madam Speaker most concern.

It may be of interest to the House if I quote from Madam Speaker's exchanges with the BBC chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, which illustrate the arguments well. Madam Speaker wrote to Sir Christopher on 15 July:

"you will note that there is serious concern amongst Members at the report that this programme is to be discontinued. I share this concern. 'Yesterday in Parliament' performs an invaluable function in bringing Parliament closer to the people. That is a proper function for a public service broadcasting organisation to perform and I hope that you can give me an assurance to pass on to the House that 'Yesterday in Parliament' will not be affected by the programme changes that I understand are under consideration."

She explained her unhappiness at the transfer of "The Week in Westminster":

"This causes me very great concern. 'The Week in Westminster' is a long established programme with a fine reputation for providing both an insight into the workings of Parliament and an opportunity for backbenchers to be heard. It attracts a regular attendance of over 500,000. If it were to be relegated to Thursday evening, not only would the audience be more than halved, but the whole character of the programme would change since it could no longer provide an overview by a leading political journalist of the week's activities."

Sir Christopher's reply, on 24 July, made three points. First, he saw the BBC's plans as enhancing Radio 4's coverage of Parliament since they would give

"all year round coverage of the work of MPs in 'The Week in Westminster' and 'in Committee', which are currently broadcast only when Parliament is sitting. This move is intended better to reflect the constituency work of Members as well as their duties at Westminster".

That is an interesting proposal, although hardly reflected in the two programmes' titles and not of direct relevance to the BBC's charter obligation for a day-by-day account.

Madam Speaker was unimpressed by that line. She replied:

"It is difficult to see that the transfer of 'The Week in Westminster' and its replacement by 'The Food Programme' could be regarded as anything but a down-grading of Parliamentary Coverage."

Sir Christopher's second point was that

"the BBC's important obligation to report Parliament comprehensively"—

had to be reconciled—

"with its need to remain sympathetic to listeners needs".

He claimed that

"the Radio 4 audience drops by 350,000 when 'Yesterday in Parliament' begins and there is evidence of many listeners re-tuning to other stations at this point".

Madam Speaker, in her reply of 5 November, dismissed that argument as

"spurious. The drop appears to be part of a trend that for obvious reasons manifests itself during the early morning and is just as apparent when Parliament is in recess as when 'Yesterday in Parliament' is broadcast".

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North also made that point.

Sir Christopher appeared to accept Madam Speaker's dismissal of the BBC's claims of loss of audience when, in his reply of 21 November, he conceded that

"all radio networks lose some of their listeners as part of a national trend between 8.30 and 9, but . . . Radio 4 loses its audience share faster . . . in the 15 minutes from 8.30-8.45, audience share falls by 1.3 per cent. and falls by a further 0.9 per cent. by 8.45-9.00."

With regard to "The Week in Westminster", Sir Christopher accepted in his letter of 21 November that the audience on Thursday evening

"is likely to be significantly lower than on Saturday morning".

However, he pointed out that a new Thursday evening slot for "The Week in Westminster" would place it in an evening of strong factual programmes, including "The Moral Maze", "Analysis" and "In Business". He did not respond to Madam Speaker's observation that, in a mid-week slot,

"the whole character of the programme would change"—

from being an overview of the past week's activities.

Those, especially the assessment of existing and putative audiences, are complicated matters, but as the BBC's case for change rests on them, they need to be considered in some detail. Mr. Peter Hill, a former BBC parliamentary correspondent, wrote in *The House magazine* on 20 October that the radio audience

"rose sharply at 6 am to 8 am to a peak of around 4.3 per cent. of the UK population over 15 (around 2 million) and then drops sharply to about 1.5 per cent. (about 730,000) where it stays for most of the morning. So the audience is dropping just as sharply during the "Today" programme at 8.10 and 8.30, and the "Start The Week" type programmes at 9.05 as it is during "Yesterday in Parliament". What is more on Monday morning, when there is usually a book reading in the same slot, the decline in audience is exactly the same. So let's kill the myth that it is somehow politics that makes people turn away or retune".

The BBC's response is interesting. It accepts that the drop is, as Mr. Hill says, the same, but claims that its qualitative research shows that

"the typical listener found the Parliamentary reports far too demanding at that time in the morning".

Madam Speaker's response to the BBC's explanation was that it did

"little to allay my reservations about the changes you have in mind".

Sir Christopher's latest letter to Madam Speaker, dated 11 December, says that he understands her continued

reservations and believes a meeting between them would be "valuable" and

"an important part of the consultative process."

In her letter of 8 December, Madam Speaker welcomes such a meeting so long as it is held before the BBC's decisions are irrevocable.

Madam Speaker is an eminently reasonable person. Why is she, like so many other Members of the House, so exercised about this matter? It is because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North explained in correspondence with Mr. James Boyle, the controller of Radio 4:

"all our liberties depend on the maintenance of Parliamentary democracy",

and that can be achieved only if our debates in both Houses are available to the public on a daily basis as laid down in the BBC's charter.

In recent years, the national press has changed and diminished its coverage of Parliament, but that should not be claimed as a precedent for any downgrading of coverage by the BBC, as newspapers are commercial bodies with no public service obligations, while the BBC is our key public service broadcaster, financed with public money and operating within obligations set out in the charter.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not interesting that when the BBC says that it is observing the agreement it always cites "Today in Parliament" in justification? However although, as I said, that programme lasts half an hour, it is broadcast only on long wave. Indeed, on Fridays, when it usually goes out on both frequencies, it is to change to long wave only. Is it not disgraceful that people who previously listened will no longer be able to do so, simply because they cannot receive long wave? Does not that demonstrate again the fact that those who control the BBC have no real wish to carry out the agreement in practice, except to the bare minimum?

Mr. Fisher: I think that implicit in Madam Speaker's remarks about the difference between "Yesterday in Parliament" and "Today in Parliament" is her interpretation of the words, "the obligation to report". A report is a retrospective activity, and "Yesterday in Parliament" fulfils that spirit of retrospective reporting in the charter.

I know that the BBC chairman and governors take their charter obligations seriously. I am confident that they are well aware that their role is to ensure that the public interest in our democracy is properly served, and that they will listen carefully to the views expressed by Parliament and by Madam Speaker, not least in the meeting that Sir Christopher has offered her.

Thanks to my hon. Friend's choice of subject for the debate, this has been an interesting and useful exchange. I have welcomed the opportunity to discuss an important matter, and I thank my hon. Friend again for his initiative in securing the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 12 December 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mental Health (Amendment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In preparing for the debate, I thought long and hard about the best way to try to convey to hon. Members the gravity, the horror and the utter desperation of people who suffer mental breakdown. In the end, I decided that reference to medical books, case histories and academic studies would not convey what I wanted to put across, so I went back to literature and film.

Hon. Members who have read Orwell's futuristic nightmare novel "1984" will never forget the last two chapters. In the penultimate chapter, the central character, Winston Smith, is still unbroken. He has been tortured, imprisoned and abused, and has said anything, more or less, that his torturers wanted him to say. Finally, he is sent to room 101, where the torturer, O'Brien, tells him that the worst thing in the world awaits him. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Will the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) leave the Chamber please? Electrical devices are not supposed to be brought in unless they are under control.

Dr. Lewis: To be interrupted in that way is perhaps another form of psychological torture.

The worst thing in the world for Winston Smith is a fear of rats. In the end, he cracks, even though no physical damage is done to him; that has already been done without breaking apart his mental stability. Finally, something that he fears more than anything else causes him, though the words are never used in the novel, to have an acute mental breakdown. In the final chapter, he has come out of it, but nothing will ever be the same again.

Moving from the written word to the visual image, one thinks of Alfred Hitchcock and the psychological films that he produced, which often dealt with the inner mysteries of the mind. To give an idea of what people go through when they have acute catastrophic mental breakdowns, I refer hon. Members to the film "Vertigo", where the central character is played by James Stewart. He has a fear of heights which leads him wrongly to believe that he has failed to save the life of the woman he loves, who he thinks has thrown herself from the top of a high building. Again, despite his courageous record as a policeman, it is that psychological pressure which causes him to break down and collapse. That is significant in relation to clause 1 of the Bill, which I hope will get a Second Reading.

In the film, James Stewart recovers from his breakdown. Having become thinner and thinner, woken time and again in the night, and having collapsed mentally, he is taken into a quiet, solitary, therapeutic environment with proper care so that he can come out of the trauma. A safe, separate and therapeutic environment is what people need to have any chance of recovering from catastrophic mental breakdown.

For someone who belongs to another category of person who goes through this ordeal—someone who has extra vulnerabilities due to her gender—protection and security are even more important. I refer of course to the situation in which a woman finds herself when admitted to an acute psychiatric unit. It may come as a surprise to hon. Members to know that, in all too many cases, women are on mixed-sex wards against their will.

I should like to refer to the report of the Mental Health Act Commission, which relates to clause 2 and provisions that I believe to be essential, long overdue and bound to come sooner or later. We need single-sex ward areas, and special security devices on doors so that patients and staff can let themselves in and out at will, but predators and intruders cannot get into rooms and assault female patients.

During my researches on this subject, I visited a number of units, including a national health service unit in which an experienced ward sister was on duty. She said that her constant nightmare was that in the evening hours, when perhaps three members of staff were on duty, a male would get from his sleeping area into a woman's room and assault her. Yet there are security devices to prevent that. Such devices are already installed in something less than half the existing units.

The Mental Health Act Commission's seventh report touches on those matters. On page 63, it says:

"The Commission recommends as a measure to secure privacy and safety that, wherever practicable, patients' single rooms should be lockable from the inside, but with staff having a master key."

Sensible enough, one would have thought. On page 158, referring to women's issues, the report says:

"Only a minority of wards have policies dealing specifically with women's safety. Features of the physical environment of particular importance to women, such as lockable bedroom doors, self-contained washing and toilet facilities or a suitable place for visiting children, are too often lacking, although some units have made great efforts to improve."

On sexual abuse, I will, with the permission of the House, read a slightly longer extract which is very telling. It is on page 175 of the report:

"Safety for women on psychiatric wards is a major issue, especially where staffing levels are low and violence considerable, as in the London area. A patient mix including men with a history of violence and young women with a history of abuse occurs on some wards. It has been reported to the Commission that Approved Social Workers are having to take such risk factors into account when considering applying for an admission."

I break off from the quotation to refer to the question of beds in acute psychiatric units. This is not simply a debate about lack of beds. All too often, the problem is that beds are available in such units, but the mixture of patients is such that the general practitioner or consultant psychiatrist is reluctant to recommend that a patient suffering from a schizophrenic condition or mental breakdown be admitted.

[Dr. Lewis]

The principal author of the Bill, without whom I would never have been able to progress beyond the starting point, is Dr. Mike Harris, sub-dean of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He has allowed me to point out, in the spirit with which I hope we all approach the matter, that he is a lifelong supporter of the Labour party. He has told me that in 1982, when he started to work as a consultant psychiatrist on an acute psychiatric voluntary ward of 20 people, an average of four were seriously disturbed; now, perhaps 15 are seriously disturbed. The admitting medical officer now has to decide whether such a ward is a suitable or therapeutic environment for someone who is already in the depths of clinical acute suicidal depression.

I return to the quotation from the report:

"Women are particularly vulnerable in Regional Secure Units where there may be very few other female patients, and a lack of female staff.

Mother and baby units are sometimes unsuitably placed in a corner of an acute ward. Staff generally are not trained to care for babies and Health Visitors do not visit the wards.

The Patients' Charter standard, offering a choice of single sex accommodation, is rarely met. This is a particular need for women from ethnic minorities whose cultural and religious practice forbids contact with men.

Although many units have made considerable efforts to provide safe facilities for women and to preserve their privacy and dignity, there remains much room for improvement. The findings of the Commission's National Visit show that just over a third (35 per cent.) of women have access to women-only sleeping areas . . . a quarter (27 per cent.) have to pass male parts of the ward to reach women-only toilets, baths or showers; a third (32 per cent.) have access only to mixed sex toilets, bath or shower facilities. A small number (3 per cent.) use sleeping areas also used by men.

Only a minority of units in the National Visit reported having policies dealing specifically with women's safety, although, when questioned, 58 per cent. of nurses thought there were issues of sexual harassment of women patients by male patients on the ward. One nurse saw 'no problem', but recalled two sexual assaults the previous year! There is a need for staff to be continually alert to women's sexual vulnerability."

The aim of the Bill is to save the lives of potential suicides, aid the recovery of in-patients and protect them from assault, and, in short, to restore the role of the acute psychiatric unit to one of sanctuary, support, and asylum in the true sense of the word.

The Bill is designed on what might be called an à la carte basis. It has four provisions and is constructed in such a way that, if the Government felt that they could not in all conscience approve one of the provisions, there would be no need for them to knock out the entire Bill.

I have had a number of meetings with the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who has regaled me with his legendary charm and courtesy. I never knew that a brick wall could be so charming or courteous. I was fortunate enough to draw second place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. I have repeatedly offered to make my Bill available to the Government so that they can use it as a vehicle for any additional changes to the Mental Health Act 1983 that they might think beneficial, but unfortunately that offer has not been taken up.

I have started by trying to create as much consensus as possible. The Bill's principles, which I shall explain in a moment, have been endorsed by a number of organisations. SANE has stated:

"The Bill is designed to ensure that some of the most vulnerable members of our society are given care and treatment in safe and therapeutic environments, where their privacy, dignity and security is protected. . . . People with mental illness are being neglected and lives lost. Dr Lewis's proposals may well prevent many unnecessary tragedies."

Those are the words of Marjorie Wallace. I should make it clear that I am not a medical doctor; my doctorate relates to an entirely different subject.

The National Schizophrenia Federation has stated:

"NSF wholeheartedly supports the principles outlined in the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill and encourages all Members to support it."

The Manic Depressive Fellowship has said of the proposal for single-sex wards:

"there is significant evidence amongst our members that this is the provision women want . . . In order to ensure that a hospital admission will benefit rather than add to the trauma . . . it is vital that the NHS provide single sex ward accommodation, *particularly* in emergencies."

Although the mental health charity MIND has some reservations about clause 1, which refers to separate and therapeutic environments, and which I shall discuss later, it has said of the clause dealing with single-sex ward areas and security devices on doors:

"MIND welcomes Clause 2 of Dr. Lewis's Bill which imposes a duty on health authorities to provide single-sex ward areas in existing psychiatric units and to fit appropriate security devices to doors."

The mental health and disability sub-committee of the Law Society has stated that it has

"long been concerned about the needs and safety of vulnerable patients, particularly women patients, and would welcome a duty being placed on Health Authorities to provide single-sex ward areas and to make other security arrangements for the protection of patients."

Perhaps it is time for me to pay tribute to all those people who have helped me and whom I have consulted at various stages. I have already singled out for particular thanks Dr. Mike Harris, the sub-dean of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Dr. Adrian Yonace, who runs an NHS acute psychiatric unit at Poole, has also been fantastic in showing me at first hand the situation in such establishments. I have had many useful discussions with Dr. Charles Tannock and with Mr. Richard Jones, a specialist solicitor, who helped me with the technical details involved with drawing up key parts of the Bill. Mr. Steve Priestley, the Clerk in charge of private Members' Bills, and an employee of the House, was incredibly helpful in turning the ideas into the format necessary to bring it to the Floor of the House.

Others who have helped include Dr. Trevor Turner, Dr. Austin Tate, Dr. Pippa Brookes-White and all the parliamentary sponsors of the Bill—I hope that hon. Members have noticed that they come from both sides of the House. I have had useful meetings with Miss Marjorie Wallace and Miss Grainne McMorrow of SANE and Mrs. Margaret Pedler of MIND. As I have already said, I have also had a couple of useful meetings with the Minister.

Before I submit my reasons for pressing for a Second Reading, let us look at the Bill's clauses in more detail. Clause 1 states:

"Each Health Authority shall be under a duty to . . . prepare a strategy for the provision of in-patient"

care for people going through acute episodes of mental illness

"within separate and therapeutic environments."

Of course, that will be subject to the judgment of the medical officers in charge of the case. Where those officers are happy with the mix of people on a ward, there is no problem and no need for a separate environment.

I draw the House's attention to the introductory words of the clause, which state that a health authority should "prepare a strategy". The clause is written in those terms so that objections cannot be made on the ground that there are enormous financial implications behind it. To prepare a strategy does not cost a great deal of money. Indeed, it could be argued that it costs practically no money. I should have loved to lay a duty on local authorities to provide such separate therapeutic environments from the outset, but that would involve colossal expenditure.

The clause calls on each health authority to draw up a strategy so that, as and when resources become available, steps towards that ideal goal can be taken. If one does not plan ahead, one has no sense of direction, no target at which to aim and no goal to score in the battle to improve the conditions of people in such desperate circumstances.

I am not seeking to suggest in clause 1 that people suffering from certain types of schizophrenia or mental breakdown, which would result in their suicide if they were left out in society, should be treated separately because their conditions are more important and more deserving than, and superior to, those of disturbed violent patients. The latter are just as much in need of care and protection.

Those who support clause 2 may argue that they cannot support clause 1, because they do not recognise the special vulnerabilities of people who have suffered a breakdown or are at risk of committing suicide if they are treated as out-patients, and who will recover only if they are in a therapeutic and quiet environment. However, how can such people, in all conscience, support clause 2, which recognises that women are another group who have special vulnerabilities, which are just as serious in their own way? I believe that the principles underlying clauses 1 and 2 are identical.

Clause 2 calls on each health authority to provide single-sex ward areas. MIND and I would have liked the Bill to go further and refer to "single-sex wards", but the Bill could then have been shot down by the Government on grounds of unacceptable cost. Such areas can be provided at minimal cost. I am not talking about big open spaces with male patients at one end of the room and female patients at the other, but all wards should have an area reserved for women if they want that. It would be a refuge room not unlike the ladies waiting rooms provided at some railway stations for women who want to wait in a women-only environment. The difference between such areas and single-sex wards is that wards would require the duplication of all the necessary infrastructure and facilities.

New section 142B(b) in clause 2 refers to what are known in the trade as half-spindle locks, which are the devices fitted to the doors of rooms and wards. There is an ordinary handle on the inside, but one needs a key or a removable handle to operate the lock from the outside. Such devices are fitted in fewer than half the psychiatric units run by the NHS. Once again, I have tried to keep the cost implications to a minimum; but the Bill also refers to the need to plan for the future. Clause 3 lays a duty on health authorities to ensure

"that all future psychiatric units are, so far as is practicable, designed and constructed in a manner which fulfils the requirements"

of new sections 142A and 142B of the Mental Health Act 1983.

It has been suggested to me that I am going about this the wrong way and that a private Member's Bill may not be the appropriate vehicle to bring forward such proposals, but there is a long history of major measures that have reached the statute book through the medium of the private Member's Bill, not least the Abortion Act 1967.

It has also been suggested that the provisions of my Bill are a little too precise, pedantic and prescriptive to be included in the 1983 Act. I had a quick look at that Act and I wondered which of its quite prescriptive sections I should highlight. I wondered whether I should refer to sections 7 and 8, on appointing social workers or relatives as guardians; or sections 13, 14 and 15, about the duties and obligations of approved social workers; or section 117, about the duties of health authorities and social services to provide aftercare. In the end, I settled—for reasons that will soon become clear—for section 141:

"Members of Parliament suffering from mental illness."

The section states:

"Where a member of the House of Commons is authorised to be detained on the ground (however formulated) that he is suffering from mental illness, it shall be the duty of the . . . person in charge of the hospital or other place in which the member is authorised to be detained, to notify the Speaker of the House of Commons that the detention has been authorised . . . Where the Speaker receives a notification under subsection (1) above, the Speaker shall cause the member to whom the notification relates to be visited and examined by two registered medical practitioners . . . The registered medical practitioners shall be appointed by the . . . Royal College of Psychiatrists and . . . shall report to the Speaker whether the member is suffering from mental illness and is authorised to be detained as such."

And so on and so forth—*[Interruption.]*

I recognise from the sedentary comments that there are those on both sides of the House who feel that that provision will one day be applied to the speaker—not the Speaker of the House, but me.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Never.

Dr. Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend; I was hoping to attract a hostage to fortune.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It was tried once on Thatcher.

Dr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman was unsuccessful, to the great benefit of the whole country.

I have been drawing my remarks to a close—I hope on a lighter note, although a slightly more solemn note might be more appropriate. Unless one has either gone through the catastrophe of an acute mental breakdown or has seen it happen to someone close, one can have no concept of what it involves.

[Dr. Lewis]

Anecdotally, I can refer to a friend of mine from the opposite end of the political spectrum. That young lady had, in fairly rapid succession over two or three years, two bad accidents to her health. One was an acute breakdown from which, after a year or so, she eventually recovered; the other was a multiple fracture of her leg. She was crossing the road in the rain, laden with shopping, when her dog pulled on its leash and she slipped and fell. She was in hospital for months with that severe fracture. When we were discussing the Bill some months ago, she said, "Julian, if I had to choose between having another breakdown or another broken leg, break my leg again any time."

Breakdowns are so serious, so horrifying and so impossible to live with that it is no surprise that, if people cannot get a bed in a helpful, healthy and therapeutic environment, their will to live is extinguished.

I do not wish to be partisan, but I am disappointed that all the signs are that the Government intend to resist giving my Bill a Second Reading—even though it is drawn up in an infinitely flexible way, which would allow some measures to go through and others to be cast aside, and which could only benefit the cause of improving in-patient access and conditions by detailed scrutiny in Committee. It will be denied that if, as I fear, the Government have their way.

On Tuesday, the Government published the White Paper "The New NHS". Paragraph 1.5 on page 5 states:

"The Government has committed itself anew to the historic principle of the NHS: that if you are ill or injured there will be a national health service there to help; and access to it will be based on need and need alone".

If the Government's tactics are to talk out or vote down the Bill, that statement will, I am sorry to say, be no more than an empty boast.

10.5 am

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) has given the House a timely opportunity to debate a much-neglected area of health care. It is sad that, for many years, mental health services have been the Cinderella services of the national health service. To put it bluntly, as politicians, we know that there are no votes in mental health. We also know that public debate is often characterised by fear and ignorance. The users of the service have been discriminated against and had their views ignored for many years. They have had little choice in the services on offer to them. Those are the points that I want to deal with.

I was privileged to work for some time in mental health. I pay tribute not only to the professionals who have struggled to maintain and develop those services over many years, but to the users of the services, many of whom have shown immense courage not only in tackling their problems, but in speaking out to raise public awareness and to try to improve the services for others. Their patience and persistence are an example to all of us. It was a privilege to work with them.

Although it is right to be having this debate, I regret to say that I cannot support the Bill as it stands. I accept that the hon. Member for New Forest, East has brought it to the House with the best of intentions. I have no doubt about his commitment to improving mental health services. However, the Bill is fundamentally flawed.

The whole thrust of clause 1 is towards the provision of more hospital beds. From what the hon. Gentleman has said today and from articles that he has written, I know that he has spoken powerfully of the need to provide sanctuary for those in acute distress. No one would dissent from that, but I have seen some of the wards in our older mental hospitals and I have seen our acute hospitals. I have to say that, for many people suffering the sort of breakdown that he described, sanctuary is the last thing that those hospitals provide.

Of course, we know that for many people hospital is the right place—there is no doubt about that—but for others a hospital is a place where there is little privacy and an over-emphasis on treatment with drugs and electro-convulsive therapy. It can be a frightening place and it is the last place some of us would want to be in a crisis. Therefore, it is not necessarily what we should be providing for others.

Sanctuary does not have to provided in a hospital. Care and treatment can be given elsewhere. That does not mean that we care less; we care differently. To deal with the problems powerfully highlighted by the hon. Member for New Forest, East, we need not more hospital provision but a move towards community-based crisis services that can rapidly respond to people in distress and offer intensive support at their time of need, as well as linking into longer-term care and support as people need it.

As things stand, that service is often not available because 77 per cent. of the NHS mental health budget is spent on hospitals and medication. Acute psychiatric units are continuing to be built at vast expense without meeting the diversity of people's needs, and the pressure on hospital beds cannot be relieved because the alternative services are simply not there. If we want to break that vicious circle, we have to offer a range of services. That policy is morally right, because it allows people a choice of provision; it is economically right, because home treatment services are cost-effective—they are not cheap, at least not when done properly, but they are cost-effective.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): I acknowledge the hon. Lady's knowledge of mental health services, in which she has worked. However, before she goes further, I have to say that I am not sure that she has really grasped the full intention of the Bill. Clause 1 does not call for more institutions, beds, and so on; it calls on the authorities concerned to draw up a strategy, which may well include the care in the community for which the hon. Lady is making such an eloquent case.

Helen Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but to me the whole thrust of the Bill is clearly in favour of provision for treatment as in-patients, and I believe that that strategy is wrong.

Let us look at what has happened elsewhere. In Birmingham, the provision of community and home treatment services in one scheme has managed to reduce hospital admissions by up to 50 per cent. A similar scheme operated in London showed budget savings of 25 per cent. That is money that can be used to improve mental health services elsewhere, and it should be used for that purpose. The system that I am arguing for can and should provide a whole range of care, such as helplines, counselling services and a place to go for intensive

support when people are suffering extreme distress or an acute breakdown. It can also provide home treatment and crisis beds in the community, which is what we need more of.

Not only are such services extremely popular with users, but—despite being expensive because of high staff input and unit costs—they often result in people being helped much more quickly. In that connection, I draw the House's attention to a recent Audit Commission report, which said that high rates of readmission to psychiatric hospital often occurred where the hospital-based psychiatrists worked in isolation from community teams, and that £100 million could be saved for the development of services if hospital admissions were targeted at the most severely distressed, and hospital and community teams were better integrated. The Bill would not achieve that; it would further the cause of more hospital provision.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady, but I think that she is confusing two separate issues. More crisis provision in the community is not incompatible with more in-patient psychiatric beds. By definition, they are in-patient and they are beds, and I hope that they would be in the community. She must not pretend that they are different, when they could properly be the same.

Helen Jones: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. By spending most of our mental health budget on hospital beds, which the Bill would further, we are preventing the development of a range of care in the community. The Bill calls for a strategy of more hospital beds.

By building up our community services, we would tackle the problem the hon. Member for New Forest, East is trying to tackle with his Bill, by preventing more hospital admissions. We would give greater flexibility in the use of those hospital beds by preventing them from being gridlocked because of lack of provision elsewhere. The concentration of so many resources on the hospital model, which the Bill would further, prevents the development of more innovative and effective services.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Jones: No, I have given way twice and I do not intend to give way again.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Lady give way to me?

Helen Jones: No—I have said that I will not give way again. I intend to draw my remarks to a close.

The concentration on hospital beds denies users proper choice and leads to further institutionalisation. Community care has been given a bad press. I have been immensely saddened by some of the things I have read in the papers that imply that all people with mental health problems are dangerous. The community suffers as a result.

Dr. Julian Lewis *indicated dissent.*

Helen Jones: I know that the hon. Gentleman does not believe that, but that view is constantly being put forward. In fact, the figures from Birmingham and the experience in my own constituency show that community care can be successful. Warrington Community Health Care (NHS) trust has been excellent in providing care in the community and thereby reducing the provision of hospital beds. However, such a policy cannot be pursued on the cheap, which is what the Conservative Government tried to do—it is not a cheap option.

We have to ensure that that does not happen in future and that we provide a whole range of mental health care that gives real flexibility and choice to users of the service, but the Bill would not achieve that. It concentrates on greater hospital provision and would hinder the development of effective services. It does nothing to integrate people with mental health problems into the community, or to end the discrimination from which such people have suffered for far too long. That is why—regretfully, because I know that the Bill has been introduced with the best of intentions—I have to urge the House to reject it.

10.15 am

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on his good fortune in the ballot in his first Parliament and, in particular, on his choice of Bill. I also congratulate him on the eloquent and imaginative way in which he presented it to the House.

As my hon. Friend rightly stresses, mental health is no less important than physical health. Our mentally ill patients are entitled to the same help and treatment as other patients. The fact that our mental health service remains inadequate is demonstrated by the unacceptable rate of suicide among patients—10 per cent., compared with 1 per cent. among the general population—and by the appalling statistic that, over the past five years, an average of two people a month have been killed by mental patients or by people with schizophrenia who have been discharged from hospital under the care programme approach. I also suggest that demand for mental health services is growing and will continue to grow as a result of self-harm, stress and mental accidents.

I have taken a personal interest in mental health since before being elected to the House 20 years ago, shortly after a friend of mine, who I did not know was schizophrenic, committed suicide. I learned much about the issue as a member of the Standing Committee on what became the Mental Health Act 1983, which adopted the all too rarely used Special Standing Committee procedure so that we might benefit from expert opinion. More recently, I also benefited from being a member of the Standing Committee on what became the Mental Health (Patients in the Community) Act 1995. I have also experienced at first hand the agony of one sufferer, for whom I had arranged a month's work experience in my parliamentary office here; and I have monitored the experience of a constituent in Broadmoor hospital.

I readily acknowledge the achievements of the previous Government, who did more for mental health during their 18 years in office than had been done in the previous 180 years. I have always supported the principle of care in the community, but I have never been convinced that the provision of care kept pace with the closure of hospital beds, or that what was saved by the one was being spent on the other. Those fears have been borne out by the

[Mr. David Atkinson]

findings of successive inquiries into every homicide and tragedy involving the mentally ill. The fact is that the so-called safety net is not in place to support every patient, and there remains a failure to keep in contact with every discharge. That continues to lead to tragedy.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): In respect of my hon. Friend's comment about the pace of removal of hospital facilities for mental illness, does he accept that that reflects entirely the views of the Select Committee on Social Services in the 1984-85 Session? Summary recommendation No. 2 of that Committee's second report states:

"The pace of removal of hospital facilities for mental illness has far outrun the provision of services in the community to replace them."

That was the situation as seen by an all-party Committee chaired by a distinguished Labour Member, Mrs. Renée Short, and it remains the same today.

Mr. Atkinson: I believe that Mrs. Short succeeded my hon. Friend as the Chairman of the Committee.

Mr. Winterton: No; I succeeded her.

Mr. Atkinson: Well, the fact that my hon. Friend was a member of that Committee contributed to the warning that services were inadequate—were not keeping pace with changing needs. I pay tribute to him and the members of the Committee.

As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East said, obviously much more needs to be done for the mentally ill, and I very much welcome his modest but practical Bill, which complements the revolving-door concept of the Mental Health (Patients in the Community) Act 1995.

Mr. Colvin: Is not planning the main problem? The main difficulty with care in the community comes when planning applications are made for a change of use of domestic property. As the previous Government ignored the matter, is it not incumbent on the present Government to issue new planning policy guidance regarding care in the community homes for the mentally ill?

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend is right. Although I suggest that it is not the principal concern that the Bill seeks to address, there is a "not in my backyard" approach on the part of our constituents, which is detrimental to the needs of patients and must be tackled. It should be tackled much more positively by local authorities and in the way that my hon. Friend suggests.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Atkinson: I shall give way once more, but not again.

Dr. Whitehead: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a major component of the delay in implementing the care in the community provisions after the rundown of old-style mental hospitals resulted from the fact that many health authorities planned the provision of community care services on the proceeds of land sales of the hospitals that they were supposed to replace? It does not take a genius to realise that one must close and sell the hospital before one can realise the money to be spent on community services.

The previous Government presided over that mess, which sometimes led to a gap of four to six years between the closure or rundown of one of the old-style mental hospitals and the re-provision of effective services in the community.

Mr. Atkinson: Although I have applauded what the previous Conservative Government did for the mentally ill and in expanding the provision of mental health services, I have remained critical of the fact that there was no strategy to ensure that the proceeds of the closure of the old mental hospitals were transferred to the provision of care in the community.

I imagine that, like me, my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East and many hon. Members have heard horror stories from constituents of mentally ill patients causing problems for other patients in general wards. The Bill responds by enabling mental patients to be treated in the same compassionate and practical way as we treat other patients in hospital. The Bill provides for health authorities to meet the demand for in-patient beds now and in future, and for such a strategy to be monitored and reported on annually. It provides for single-sex wards in all psychiatric units—I welcome that—and for better security in those units.

I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that the proposals in his Bill have the support of all those involved in mental health in my constituency whom I have consulted: Bournemouth social services, the East Dorset National Schizophrenia Fellowship Support Group, Dorset Healthcare NHS trust, the Dorset Association of Sheltered Homes, Bournemouth and Poole and District MIND and the local Richmond Fellowship.

As part of the consultation, I have also been asked to draw the attention of my hon. Friend, of the House and of the Government to what the Bill does not provide, in the hope that it might be amended, if allowed to go into Committee, to make more help available to the mentally ill, which would keep them out of hospital.

Liaison is needed between professionals and the carers of long-term sufferers who live at home. There remains widespread evidence that the needs and rights of long-term carers, as provided for under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, are not yet being acknowledged.

More support is needed for the enduring mentally ill in the community, including services that are widely available for the elderly, such as warden-controlled housing, home helps and meals on wheels, which do much to keep patients out of hospital. More support is also needed for those who provide specialist sheltered housing in the community; they have been hit hard by the recent housing benefit changes.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Atkinson: No. I have given way three times, and that is enough.

More provision is needed in the community for those known in the United States as "mentally ill chemical abusers"—usually young people with personality disorders, and drug, alcohol and substance problems who take up places in psychiatric hospitals meant for the mentally ill. Indeed, more places are needed in psychiatric hospitals, such as St. Ann's, which services my constituency and operates at about 90 per cent.—sometimes more than 100 per cent.—capacity.

I pay tribute to the Dorset Healthcare NHS trust, which, according to the president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, provides the best mental health services in the country. The trust also serves the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East.

The Bill seeks to lessen the variation that exists in such services throughout the country. For example, those arrested in our area under sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1983 are taken to St. Ann's. In Hampshire, the same people would have to spend a night in a police cell and, in Devon, hospital staff would hold up their hands and say, "There is no room."

Mr. Spring: By highlighting mental health issues and the need for health authorities to devise a proper mental health strategy, the Bill will help to avoid the position that arises in some parts of the country, whereby individuals land up in the criminal justice system, where they should not be.

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise that point, which supports the need for the Bill. I hope that the Minister will endorse that later.

I conclude with a warning and an appeal to the Government. Like all previous legislation to provide better services for the mentally ill, the Bill will not be effective without sufficient staff—psychiatrists and nurses. Their numbers more than trebled under the previous Government, to whom I again pay tribute, but many of those people are retiring early or moving into the private sector, and health authorities are looking abroad to fill vacancies.

If one asks an overworked psychiatrist what needs to be done, he will urge the simplification of the bureaucracy of the care programme approach to enable him to spend more time with patients. Therefore, I hope that the new Government are including mental health services among their many reviews. I also hope that they will accept that, after 15 years, a review of the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1983 is overdue.

10.27 am

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to a debate that is unquestionably much needed and of great importance.

I have every reason to keep friends with the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). We have every reason to keep friends because, next year, we shall be together on the parliamentary armed forces scheme in the Royal Air Force, and when we are venturing off in our Tornadoes, we may remember what we said to each other in the Chamber this morning.

Dr. Lewis: You bet.

Ann Keen: The Bill has provided us with an opportunity to review activity and service in mental health provision. The Bill gives us an opportunity to share experiences and concerns, and may enable us to offer some solutions to the many problems faced by users, families, mental health professionals and support staff.

When we talk about solutions, we have to start with prevention; the new Government have started to do just that. When we think of mental health, we tend to think of social exclusion. This week's launch by the Prime Minister of the social exclusion unit is welcome news for all who care about mental illness. The purposes, aims and outcomes of the unit will inevitably address some of the causes of mental illness.

I am particularly impressed by the fact that the unit will report directly to the Prime Minister and the No. 10 policy unit. It will operate across Government Departments and will have a multi-agency approach, bringing public, private and voluntary sectors together. Most importantly, it will hear the views of the socially excluded themselves.

What is social exclusion? How does it relate to mental health? I ask the House to picture the following scene. Someone may be at a party or other social gathering, talking to friends and neighbours, at a bus stop or somewhere else in the company of people. After pleasantries have been exchanged about names, the weather and where people live, the conversation usually turns to asking people what work they do. Our picture of what kind of person someone is usually depends on the answer.

Before I was elected to the House, when I was asked what I did, I could say, "I am a nurse." People would usually smile, and say how marvellous they thought I was and what a wonderful contribution I was making to society. They always added that they could not possibly do my job, and that I definitely was not paid enough. All that was true.

Now, when I am asked what I do, and I reply, "I am a Member of Parliament", the response is very different. I am viewed with immediate suspicion. The kindest way in which to interpret the rest of the comments is that people are saying that I do not contribute very much to society. The situation is, however, quickly rectified when I inform people that I am a Labour Member of Parliament. Their trust is obvious and they are very reassured.

The position is very different when people say that they are unemployed or on the dole, and have no active place in society; they are then seen as being of no worth. Many people in that position whom I have met or nursed feel worthless. Many constituents tell me how they felt when they were made redundant. In the medical and nursing profession, we refer to the feeling as the psychology of loss.

Unemployment seriously affects mental health. The sudden loss of work causes deep shock, disbelief, anger, blame and jealousy—all very powerful emotions. The camera caught the look of hopelessness on men's and women's faces in the 1920s and 1930s, as they stood on street corners with nothing to do.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Like the hon. Lady, I am a new Member. I have heard about hon. Members talking out a Bill by introducing total irrelevancies. It is interesting to see that happening for the first time today.

Ann Keen: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. I am describing mental illness, which I thought the hon. Gentleman was interested in.

[Ann Keen]

Sadly, cameras can take similar pictures of the mentally ill today, whether young or old—in doorways, on estates or on our streets. Many long-term unemployed have received medication, when all they require is a home, a job and decent pay.

Young people suffer greatly from unemployment. They study at school and may go on to higher education, but then find that, instead of an exciting life ahead of them, their ambitions and dreams are shattered because they have no hope of a job. They aspire to be somebody, but start adult life being no one. That has a serious effect on health. Depression and social exclusion seem to be relieved by prescribed medication, alcohol abuse, drugs and other substances.

Young people can also feel excluded when they discover their sexuality. Society's desire to limit sex education to a small amount of advice on heterosexuality still causes great harm to many of our young people. We must consider the fact that suicide is the biggest cause of death for young men.

It is the duty of every hon. Member to work for the success of the social exclusion unit, and to support and develop existing legislation that will help to bring all into inclusion. That is one of the biggest contributions we can make to the prevention of mental illness.

Mr. Bercow: I am listening to the hon. Lady's speech with rapt attention. Would she, however, address herself to the provisions of the Bill? Specifically, does she support clause 2, which seeks to protect women through single-sex ward areas? If she does not support the clause, will she tell the House why?

Ann Keen: If the hon. Gentleman has patience and listens to my speech, he will find that I am coming to that point.

We must not be narrow-minded in our vision of dramatically improving mental health services. I am worried about clause 1. I have discussed the Bill with users, statutory and voluntary organisations, and, in particular, with Valerie Howell, the director of mental health services for the Hounslow and Spelthorne trust which covers my constituency. She advises me that many trusts would welcome a strategy for in-patient services, but that all agree that the strategy must be broader, and must cover the acute and community sectors.

I share the view of many others, including MIND—the National Association for Mental Health—that the proposed duty of preparing a strategy for the provision of in-patient care is neither a necessary nor an effective way in which to ensure that all patients are treated in an environment appropriate to their needs.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I, too, have been in contact with MIND; I dare say that we have received a similar briefing. Will the hon. Lady place on record the fact that, although MIND has reservations about clause 1, it is in favour of clauses 2 and 3? MIND hopes that the Bill will go into Committee, so that its concerns can be addressed.

Ann Keen: I have never experienced such eagerness to anticipate what I am about to say. If the hon. Gentleman is patient, he will find that I am coming to that point.

MIND is also concerned that the proposal may divert more resources into one area of the service, and create unnecessary bureaucracy. The key phrase to keep in our minds during this debate is that patients should be treated in an environment appropriate to their needs. Community services are many and varied; sadly, support depends mainly on where one lives.

In my constituency, we have many hard-working and effective organisations; I should like to mention one in particular this morning. I recently had the pleasure of visiting a barge on the Thames at Isleworth which acts as an innovative workshop, providing support for people living in the community. The charity is called PSAW—the Psychiatric Support After-care Workshop.

PSAW was established in 1989 by its experienced director, Bob Cornell. The charity runs a variety of workshops and co-operative employment schemes, and will soon sail its renovated barge up the Thames to Westminster to meet me and the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who is a long-time supporter of the charity. The workers will demonstrate their skills to hon. Members, and, I hope, enjoy a good day out.

The director, Bob Cornell, has explained how medical intervention only partly solves the problem of mental health. Care in the community means being part of the community rather than being isolated in hospital units. Being distanced from the community only increases social exclusion. If people feel isolated, depressed, lonely, jobless and skill-less, they will feel worse in hospital. We need to develop more schemes and more means of intervention to create and develop dependency on a normal rather than a medical model. Users of PSAW have proved to have dramatically decreased the need for a medical model. Bob Cornell and his team should be congratulated on their work.

Clause 2 deals with single-sex accommodation, which can be a complex matter because different patients have different needs. All accommodation should be flexible. Single-sex rooms, particularly for women, provide privacy and dignity. Patients need to feel safe and secure, and security of their personal property is of high priority. Sadly, too many incidents of assault, abuse, sexual abuse and rape are reported. That culture must end, for we cannot tolerate such abuse in a care environment. Patients must have the right to security, which may mean the right to lock the door. I am aware that that can create safety dilemmas for carers, but the matter could be viewed individually, with sensible outcomes.

We must also be aware of the practice of locking patients into rooms. Only a small number of patients are detained under the Mental Health Act 1983; more than 70 per cent. are detained voluntarily. We must ensure that we provide patients with privacy and dignity, while having regard for the safety of patients, staff and society.

To do all that, we need highly trained staff across the spectrum of the mental health service and a supported voluntary sector. I hope that Minister will address the serious recruitment and retention problems when he replies to the debate. It is generally recognised that recruitment of staff in all parts of the mental health service is difficult. There is a recognised shortage of psychiatrists, and many choose to retire early and leave the service. Much of that is to do with the complexity and stress of dealing with many mentally ill patients, and with the "blame culture" that operates in society towards mental health staff.

Nurse recruitment is difficult in all branches of care, but in mental health it is worse. Other more general branches of nursing have a high profile and a more popular image. Nurse educationists need to review the curriculum and training preparation. We must ensure that we prepare students adequately and have well developed support mechanisms in a practical setting. Leaders of nursing and medicine must continually retrain and be developed to be respected in their chosen field, and have an approachable open management style.

Will the Minister look at means of encouraging more mature students to train, and of providing part-time flexible courses so that they can contribute much needed life skills to the service? We must also expand and recognise the role of support workers, who often have positive outcomes with users.

Finally, will the Minister consider innovative ways of employing past users of the service, many of whom have much to offer present patients and their families? Could the welfare-to-work programme be an innovative way of ensuring that people who truly understand others' needs can contribute, while maintaining positive results for themselves as well?

We are nearing the end of the century. Let us all work to rid society of the stigma of mental illness. We must get rid of the institutions—I used to show my nursing students the film, "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest"—and we must stop looking at mental health in that way. The infamous Nurse Ratchett's days are over, and her team has no place in our modern mental health service. This Government will ensure that people suffering from mental illness are cared for adequately, but our main aim will be to prevent mental illness.

10.43 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I welcome this debate. It is a paradox of this place that, two weeks ago, we had a packed Chamber on a Friday for a debate on whether to abolish fox hunting, which affects at most 60,000 people—that was the figure quoted by those opposed to the Bill. Today's Bill affects far more than 60,000 people—those who work in the service or who are affected currently or prospectively by mental illness—and we have a relatively small attendance.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No, not for a second.

Mr. Winterton: But the hon. Gentleman has quoted an inaccurate statistic.

Mr. Hughes: I shall not give way just yet.

I hope that this is the last time that we have to produce a private Member's Bill in order to have a debate on mental health. I hope that one of several undertakings which the Minister will give us is that we shall have an annual debate, in Government time, on mental health services. If we believe that, traditionally, mental health services are the Cinderella of the health service, we must recognise that in our procedures. I hope that that will be the spirit in which we proceed in today's debate, irrespective of the outcome of the Bill.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): If Government business managers were to find time for such a debate, could the hon. Gentleman guarantee that more than one Liberal Democrat Member would attend?

Mr. Hughes: I do not know whether I could guarantee that, but I expect I could. I hope that the Minister will concentrate on the substance of today's debate rather than on attendance. I shall not lecture him about the seriousness of his actions, and I would respect it if he did not lecture others.

The last legislation on this subject was in 1983, in the middle of a period in which there was a dramatic loss of psychiatric beds. Two issues are at stake: first, whether we shall do something about the lack of inpatient provision; and secondly, whether the Government will allow the Bill to proceed further.

I say from the outset that I support the proposal that the Bill should have a Second Reading—there is no good reason why it should not. I hope that points of detail on the clauses can be dealt with in Committee, which is the right way to proceed with private Members' business. Given that the Government allowed a free vote on fox hunting, they should ensure that they do not prevent this Bill's passage into Committee.

The Bill makes three simple proposals, all of which place duties on health authorities to do, in principle, sensible things, although we may argue about some of the detailed wording. The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) and the Minister misunderstand the Bill. I support all that the hon. Lady said about the need for community provision. I understand it well, from friends and constituents of mine. I understand absolutely the need for crisis response, and the need for people to go somewhere in the evening and at weekends, and when they need treatment; but that issue is separate from when people need to be admitted to hospital beds.

To explain to the hon. Lady why she failed to address the issue, I pray in aid the experience I had on Monday this week. I spent that morning discussing with the Barking and Havering health authority the community mental health provision. The Minister was due to go there on Tuesday but could not do so, probably because of the publication of the White Paper on the health service that day. I went there partly because my brother works as a psychologist for that health authority.

I talked to managers and professionals who run the community health care trust. They also run Warley hospital, a big old mental hospital that still has the most in-patient beds of any mental hospital in England. It was absolutely clear from our discussions that there was a significant need for in-patient facilities in a suitable and therapeutic setting.

Although those old hospitals are inappropriate in this day and age, they have not yet been replaced by equivalent places where people can be admitted as in-patients, in the way that the Bill identifies, when they are defined by registered medical practitioners as requiring admission to psychiatric units. Guaranteed places for those people are not available.

Warley hospital, for example, is due to be closed, but it is not being closed, because there is nowhere for the patients to be transferred. There are no in-patient facilities. No other trust wants to provide them. That is

[Mr. Hughes]

what the Bill is about. I share the views of the hon. Member for Warrington, North: it is not about crisis centres for the evening.

I was talking the other day to my constituents at what is called the Hearing Voices group in Rotherhithe. They are desperately in need of out-of-hours services, helplines and centres to go to. The treatment offered is poor, but that is a separate issue. It is not the issue addressed by the Bill.

Helen Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a need for the provision not only of crisis treatment and helplines, but of crisis beds in the community? If so, does he further accept that the spending of more and more money on increased hospital provision will not facilitate the development of those alternative services?

Mr. Hughes: There are two answers to that question, and the hon. Lady is still getting it wrong. One is that the Bill does not require the spending of money.

Mr. Boateng: What is the point of having a strategy?

Mr. Hughes: The Minister, who is a solicitor—as are the hon. Gentleman on the Conservative Front Bench, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), and the hon. Member for Warrington, North—should know that the Bill does not require a great expenditure of money. That is the great joy of it. The Bill effectively requires the spending of no money. *[Interruption.]* No, the Bill states that three duties should be inserted in the Mental Health Act 1983, one of which is to prepare a strategy for the provision of facilities.

Once the strategy has been prepared, of course the Government must provide the money if the facilities do not exist. Let us get it right. Last year, an Energy Conservation Bill went through the House which set duties on local authorities to draw up strategies for warm homes. This Bill is comparable; it is not a money-spending Bill.

Let me quote a paragraph from the extremely well written brief for the Bill produced by Katherine Wright of the House of Commons Library. I hope that that will help the hon. Member for Warrington, North to get out of her head the idea that her argument is an answer to the proposal in the Bill. The brief states on page 15:

"One basic question posed when discussing the success or otherwise of the policy of care in the community is: are there enough in-patient beds left for those who need them? Two quite separate groups of patients needing access to beds can be identified: those who still need 24 hour care or supervision on a long-term basis; and those who are able to cope living in the community most of the time but who may periodically need 'acute' or 'respite' hospital care for a short period, for example if they are aware that they are in danger of suffering a relapse in their condition."

The following sentence explicitly deals with the hon. Lady's point:

"It is worth highlighting that the distinctions between 'care in the community' and 'in-patient' care are not absolute: long-term 24-hour nursing care may be provided 'in the community' in non-institutional surroundings and different commentators may refer to these as community services or as in-patient services respectively."

Just because those services are in the community, it does not mean that they are not in-patient services. By definition, if a person must stay overnight, it is an in-patient service.

Helen Jones *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: I anticipate the hon. Lady's point. Let me deal with it. According to the Bill, those must be hospital services. We may want to consider that in Committee.

I visited High Wood hospital in Brentwood on Monday. It is a community hospital based in small buildings around the site in the middle of Brentwood. Just because those are hospital facilities, it does not mean that they are not in the community.

Our argument is that there should be hospital facilities in the community. There can perfectly well be in the community in-patient hospital facilities for psychiatric patients who are certified by doctors as needing them. Those could be of exactly the sort that the hon. Lady has argued for. They are not incompatible with other facilities that are not hospital facilities or are not specifically for continuing in-patients.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. Would not such facilities provide the flexibility that Labour Members have called for? For example, some hospitals in my constituency provide meals for people in their own homes under the meals on wheels service. Technically, one could say that those people are having hospital meals. Such integration and management from the hospital centre represent precisely the flexibility and the options that the strategy would embrace.

Mr. Hughes: I agree with the hon. Lady. For two decades, we thought that care in the community was almost always the answer for people with mental illness. The reality is that there is a range of needs, just as there are for people with physical illness.

Some people are severely mentally ill on a long-term basis. They must be in-patients, and hopefully may be able to be released. Some people are mentally ill varyingly. Some of the people who were at the lobby on behalf of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship the other day are sometimes perfectly well and want to do jobs, but have a relapse, which may be severe. A friend and constituent of mine, Pete Shaughnessy, is often very well and a great campaigner for mental illness services, but sometimes he is extremely ill and is admitted to hospital, possibly for three weeks at a time. When he gets better, he comes out.

A range of facilities must be available to meet the needs of all those people. That is why I appeal to the Minister to allow us to make some progress in getting a strategy in the health service. That is not incompatible with anything that he has said as a Minister, with Government policy or with the White Paper. Let us make sure that there is a duty on health authorities to think not just about care in the community and other health services, but about the provision of in-patient services for people with mental health needs.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): If that is what is needed, why does not the Bill say so? It states that the purpose is to

"prepare a strategy for the provision of in-patient facilities".

It says nothing about the wider range of services that the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Hughes: I specifically referred to in-patient facilities. The Bill would ensure that health authorities have a duty not only to provide care in the community, but to draw up a strategy for in-patient services.

Let me give an example. I represent Guy's hospital. In my constituency just over the bridge, there is a mental health trust, Lewisham and Guy's. We have mental health beds in Guy's hospital and in an old clinic, the Monro clinic. They are grim, and do not offer a therapeutic environment. There will be new beds in the new building, the new Guy's House, which will be mentioned in the Adjournment debate today.

Those beds will be less grim, by definition, because they will be in a more pleasant building, but it would be far better if some of the beds for mental health in-patients were on one of the more open sites elsewhere in my local health authority area. I want my local health authority to have a strategy for providing, somewhere in Lewisham, Southwark and Lambeth, appropriate in-patient beds in an appropriate therapeutic setting, but at present there is none. I want my local health authority to have a duty to provide one. That is as relevant in the inner city in the south of England as it is in rural areas or elsewhere.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman argues admirably that the health authority should have a strategy for provision, but he tells the House that the Bill will not cost any money. Clause 1(a) states that the health authority must

"prepare a strategy for the provision of in-patient facilities",

and clause 2(b) states that the health authority is under a duty to provide for

"the fitting if appropriate security devices to all room and ward doors in all existing psychiatric units".

We have already redefined what a hospital is, and we are now redefining expenditure. I do not see how one can propose a strategy for provision without providing; nor can an authority have a duty to provide locks without paying for them. The two notions are incompatible.

Hon. Members: That is rubbish.

Mr. Hughes: No, the hon. Gentleman asks a proper question. I was dealing with the cost implications of the strategy under clause 1—there is none.

The hon. Gentleman is right; clauses 2 and 3 impose duties to do certain things and, inasmuch as those things are not done already, some costs will be involved. I have visited Broadmoor and other mental health hospitals, although Broadmoor is different because it is a special hospital for offenders, and I know that the provision of security devices such as locks does not represent megabucks in terms of Government spend.

I accept that clauses 2 and 3 will have some spending implications. As has been said, clauses 2 and 3 appear to have universal support from those who work in this sphere. They want the Bill to progress, so I hope that, if there are any costs as a result of the Bill, we will sign up to them.

Mr. Colvin *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: No, I will not give way. I am not trying to exclude the hon. Gentleman, who is a senior Member of the House, but I do not want it said that some of us spoke for so long that the Bill could not receive a Second Reading today.

When the Minister took office, he announced the establishment of an independent reference group to consider some of the matters before us. Before the election, shadow Health Ministers said that there would be a moratorium on the closure of psychiatric beds, and a locality-by-locality audit of gaps in provision. I would like him to tell us whether that is still the case. Will there be a moratorium on the closure of psychiatric beds until there has been an audit and we know that we have the provision suggested in the Bill?

It is important that the Bill goes into Committee and is debated properly. I agree with the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), who has long had an interest in mental health issues, that this is just the sort of Bill that should go to a Special Standing Committee, where we can take evidence and not just debate among ourselves. It would enhance the Government's credibility if they adopted that procedure.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) has valuable nursing experience, and she and others will know that there is a catalogue of violence and abuse of patients in psychiatric hospitals, often by other patients. I will not elaborate, but the Library brief to which I have already referred quotes a report entitled "London's Mental Health" by the eminent King's Fund.

The fund states that the Royal College of Psychiatrists' survey on conditions in London's psychiatric units showed that, over a fortnight in January 1995, 131 assaults were committed by patients, four of which resulted in major physical injuries. The survey in May 1997 showed that there had been 126 assaults in a fortnight in psychiatric units London alone, of which 13 caused major physical injuries.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth knows as well as anyone that, if people who are mentally disordered, permanently or temporarily, are put together, there will be assaults by men on men and by women on women, but the main risk is of serious and further psychologically damaging assaults by men on women. When I visited Broadmoor earlier this year, it was clear that one of the biggest concerns of staff there was to protect patients from injury by other patients.

Ann Keen: That is why I said that I support the concept of single-sex rooms, and that accommodation must be flexible and secure. We must bear in mind the fact that only a small percentage of mental health patients are detained under the Mental Health Act, and that many are in hospital voluntarily. We need to take a wide view of how we accommodate in-patients.

Mr. Hughes: There is a debate to be had about that, which is why I want the Bill to go into Committee. The hon. Lady and I agree on the need to provide single-sex

[Mr. Hughes]

accommodation. Under the patients charter, everyone has a right to it if they want it, but hundreds of people are still in mixed-sex wards against their will. Some people might not want single-sex accommodation, but it should be available, and it might be a therapeutic and safer setting for some.

I went to the United States a couple of years ago to investigate health provision on the east coast. Very few hospitals there have wards, and most have separate rooms for all patients. Our thinking is out-dated, in that we are still discussing wards—the NHS is miles behind best practice elsewhere. *[Interruption.]* We could say, "Let's blame the Tories," or "Isn't Labour wonderful?", but I do not want to have that debate. We must recognise that the previous Government did some very good things for mental health provision, and that the present Government have some good intentions, but we can use the Bill as a starting point.

Clause 3 is a simple provision to make sure that a safety element is built into units. We can debate the practicalities, but let us at least deal with the proposal in Committee, as it is widely supported by people who work in mental health.

We have today had the opportunity to begin a debate on mental health provision. No other opportunity is generally available to hon. Members in this Session. The Select Committee may discuss the matter, and the Government are doing some, but not all, of the work internally, but that will take a long time. For heaven's sake, let the House be seen to be taking mental health and mental illness seriously. Let us bring in people who know what they are talking about, and show that we are serious about dealing with even a small part of the agenda that matters more than anything to many people outside.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I must draw the House's attention to the fact that it has been necessary to reissue today's Order Paper, The House will wish to know that the Order Paper as originally printed omitted in error the Public House Names Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). The Order Paper has therefore been reissued and now includes the Bill as item No. 9. Copies of the revised Order Paper are now available in the Vote Office.

11.7 am

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): As a new Member of Parliament, I might have some things to say to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and to Ministers which are distinctive because of experience outside the House. Lawyers believe that the world needs more law, and parliamentarians believe that the world needs more legislation. The hurdle that the hon. Member for New Forest, East needs to overcome is to convince me that legislation is required.

One of the great faults of those who would put the world to rights is that they believe we should do so by law. To put it bluntly, the House needs to produce less but better legislation and to spend more time ensuring that Ministers do their job more effectively. For Ministers, that means using existing legislation to good effect and using their powers of secondary legislation and of circular. It also means that they should encourage the spreading of best practice. That involves getting the professionals together and ensuring that their work is evaluated and known.

I do not know whether the Bill is required, and I will want to hear from the Minister a clear expression of the Government's attitude to what lies behind it.

The Bill deals with an important subject, but in some ways it was slightly unfortunately introduced. No doubt with the best of intentions—to add some colour to the debate—the hon. Member for New Forest, East referred to the horror that is associated with mental illness. He reminded us of the use in drama, including films, of the images of mental illness.

Over my lifetime in politics, including my early days as a party activist, I have visited some of the old mental health institutions. On re-reading a research paper, I recalled the horror of those visits. I was reminded of the horror of what happened in the 1950s and 1960s. I am talking of our attitude to and treatment of those suffering from mental illness.

Today, an employer is not likely to mutter to other members of an interview panel that a candidate had a broken leg four years ago. However, we still live in an environment where society is likely to remind itself that someone had a mental illness four years ago if the individual is applying for a job.

There is a fear of mental illness. In the public mind there is a fear of dangers that do not exist posed by those who are mentally ill. There is a stigma associated with mental illness. Most of us would far rather have a broken leg than be labelled as having a mental illness.

Dr. Julian Lewis: The hon. Gentleman completely misunderstood the point when he referred to a preference for a broken leg rather than mental illness. The person involved did not go into any institution during the mental illness, and stigma had nothing to do with it. The point is that the horror of the mental illness was far worse than the pain of the broken leg—no more and no less.

Dr. Turner: I said that it was probably with the best of intentions that the example was used to add colour to the debate. I believe that those outside the House will recognise the validity of my remarks in terms of society's attitude to mental illness.

Early in my new job I had the pleasure of visiting the Pamela North centre in Kings Lynn. It is an institution that deals with those who have had mental illness and occasionally suffer acute mental illness. The centre supports them in their normal life within the community. It is a million miles away from the treatment of mental illness that I saw in the 1960s. It was interesting when I sat down to lunch there. I was fascinated to find that I was unsure about who was being helped and who was helping.

It was an interesting visit and it brought to my mind the real need during my time in Parliament to do everything possible to change the public's image of mental illness. I believe that we should regard it in much the same way as we regard physical illness. We should recognise the real need to ensure that there is a broad range of provision, and encourage it.

It may be that we need to legislate, legislate, legislate. Or it may be that we need to educate, educate, educate, to use the mantra of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

My concern about the legislative solution is that in so proceeding we may well be doing something that should instead be achieved by proper management. Are we seeking to manage by legislation when instead we should manage by good government? The House needs to think about things before it rushes to law.

I agree that the House needs to debate the subject that is before us and we need to have a Committee that can quiz Ministers and experts with a view to ensuring that there is a spread of good practice and good management techniques. To be blunt, it would usually be far better to finish there and to tell the managers to manage than to proceed to legislate.

Why should we not legislate? The answer is that legislation, especially primary legislation, is inflexible. We have a rapidly changing technological society and the House can barely keep up with the changes that it needs to make, whether they concern broadcasting or health, for example. The pace of change that is taking place with the advance of science and engineering is faster than that which legislators can understand in detail.

When my hon. Friend the Minister responds to the debate, I hope that he will make clear his attitude towards best practice. I thought that we had already recognised that within the national health service there must be security for the patient—whether he or she is suffering from physical or mental problems—and the employee. I thought that that was at the forefront of Ministers' minds. I thought that it had been recognised by the previous Government and the new Government that people should be allowed privacy and that, if they wish, they can sleep and live in a single-sex environment.

What is needed from the Minister, if I may say so, is not legislation and not good will but, to put it bluntly, cash. That is where the previous Government let us down. The need for good practice was recognised, but one of the prime responsibilities of this place is to ensure that we fund what we believe is necessary.

Mr. Bercow: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has misread the terms of the Bill. If my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) is suggesting the provision of single-sex wards, there would be cost implications. Instead, my hon. Friend is suggesting the provision of single-sex ward areas, which does not carry anything like the same cost implications. Has the hon. Gentleman taken account of that and does he support clause 2—yes or no?

Dr. Turner: I am not arguing that the Bill has or does not have cash implications. I am asking whether we need to legislate or whether we need to ensure instead that Ministers are doing their job. If the Minister tells me later in the debate that he does not have sympathy with my views and that it is not the responsibility of his Department to ensure that such views are put into practice, possibly I can be persuaded to agree to legislate and to be rebellious for the first time since I joined new Labour. The Minister has yet to speak, of course.

I can tell the House that we have made a good start in providing cash in my constituency. I have been monitoring funding carefully because I have a responsibility to my constituents to ensure that we get a fair share of the extra money that is being made available. My hon. Friend can record my pleasure that health funding in my area will be twice what it would have been if I had not been elected on 1 May. I have noted also that almost £1 million will become available this winter.

However, if my hon. Friend is not to provide the means to make it possible for health authorities to deliver, I shall be critical and I shall perhaps have to consider joining ranks with the hon. Member for New Forest, East and insisting that proper provision is made. At least my hon. Friend should be given the opportunity to say where he stands.

I was elected on a platform of reducing bureaucracy. That is why I strongly support the view that we need less legislation but legislation that is properly delivered. Perhaps my hon. Friend will make it clear whether I have correctly identified the danger of duplicating bureaucracy. If area health authorities are not making strategic plans, for what reason do they exist? I would be upset if there were no revision of boundaries in my area so that we have less bureaucracy.

My part of the country, in which my hon. Friend, in his ministerial capacity, has a particular concern, could do with a bit less administration. If he can tell me that he will reduce the number of health authorities in my region, he will have my strong support. If he can ensure less bureaucracy through greater co-ordination of boundaries with social services in Norfolk, he will be applauded, and he will be ensuring that the people who are supposed to deliver health care are not simply party politicos doing a job. I recognise that area health authorities contain people from all parties who are genuinely interested in delivering health care. If we can let them get on with the job and give them the resources to do so, we will improve things far better than we could by legislating.

I referred earlier to what I saw at the beginning of my career in politics, as an amateur, and the changes that I have seen. It looks as though the world has come full circle. I left out one thing about my visit to that institution near Cambridge all those years ago: for goodness' sake, can we stop locking up the mentally ill? It is an interesting reflection on the way in which society has changed that we are thinking—probably correctly—of putting locks back in institutions after spending so many years arguing that we had to open them. Is it not good that we are putting them back because patients, not society, want them?

Please let us recognise that we need to spend more time talking to those with ministerial authority. We need to spend more time ensuring that best practice is achieved, and less time legislating. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the objectives in the Bill, which I hope will not be necessary.

11.21 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I congratulate my hon. Friend hon. the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) not only on drawing second place in the ballot but on the way in which he presented his Bill, which I am pleased to endorse.

It is apparent from the speeches of hon. Members on the Government Benches that, certainly on clauses 2 and 3, Labour Members support the principles of the Bill, particularly the need to provide areas within wards where women can feel safe and—as the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) said—the need for an appropriate lock, not on the basis of the old concept of locking people in, but to provide privacy and protection

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

for the patient. We all recognise the delicacies of the need for staff to have access, particularly when dealing with the most vulnerable patients who may be suicidal or prone to damaging themselves.

Given the comments so far about clauses 2 and 3, and with just a little questioning about clause 1, and given the consensus across the Floor of the House, it would be a great shame if the Bill did not go into Committee. Much could be done to overcome problems at the margins of a Bill whose substance clearly has support not only across the Floor of the House but outside it—particularly from the many charitable bodies that represent people with mental health problems.

Although we have heard support for the Bill, if it is the Government's intention to damage it in some way so that it does not have the oxygen of discussion in Committee, that would be an extremely backward move in terms of people's mental health needs. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk said about the need to reduce the amount of legislation. We all appreciate that, but we have legislation, and it is quite right that, when old legislation is revisited, as it has to be, we should amend it in a way appropriate to the times.

As we have already heard—in terms of the public's perception of mental health; the need to educate people about some of the myths that surround mental health issues; the changing views about locks on doors, and the need to protect female patients in particular—things have moved on. Therefore it is quite appropriate that the legislation should be amended, as my hon. Friend suggests in his Bill. I know that he would be receptive in Committee to suggestions about the issues that have been discussed this morning—particularly those surrounding clause 1. It would be a great shame if the Bill, which has the support of a great many charitable bodies, were lost because we were not prepared to discuss specifics.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said, except to flag up a point that runs right through the Bill. As hon. Members have pointed out, there are different categories of mental illness. We know that some people suffer from lifelong mental illness. They cross a whole spectrum—from people who are a danger to themselves or who may be a danger to other people, to people who suffer—one hopes only once in their life—from a severe mental breakdown.

We know that someone with no previous history of mental illness suffering from a mental breakdown may require more than treatment at home—either medication from the GP or out-patient appointments at the local hospital. My hon. Friend mentioned a specific case of which he knows. We all know of such cases among our families, friends and constituents.

The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) talked about giving patients a choice. Sadly, for mentally ill patients—especially those living on their own, as many do—deprived of the sanctuary that my hon. Friend's Bill seeks for them, one very real choice is suicide, a choice that many of them take, becoming statistics on the coroner's register. In my personal life I know of someone who is just one of those statistics.

Some people—not just people involved in high-profile, dramatic instances of mentally disturbed behaviour but people in the privacy of their own home—do make a choice, and that choice is death. It is to prevent such cases that my hon. Friend seeks to help, through clause 1, to ensure that those with acute episodes of mental illness are treated

"within separate and therapeutic environments."

That particular need is not met at the moment, because GPs and other health officials consider that a bed in such a ward would not be appropriate for people with a severe mental breakdown, but there is nowhere else for them to go. If there is no strategy—whether, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned, it is to provide a hospital bed per se or whether provision is made on an outreach basis within the community—people will continue to fall through the net. They will continue to become statistics on the coroner's record. For that reason alone, clause 1 deserves more consideration than we have time to give it on Second Reading. Some Labour Members have expressed concerns. I would welcome the opportunity to explore a little more in Committee how the Bill will assist the people to whom I have referred.

Mr. Spring: I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that, tragically, people who are suddenly overcome by some mental difficulty or tragic shock are not in a position to make judgments about the seriousness of their condition. Very often, the overwhelming and sudden impact of what has hit them causes their whole world to implode. That is precisely why there must be a strategy to cope with such people and provide the appropriate treatment in appropriate surroundings.

Mrs. Browning: Indeed, I agree. It is very hard to try to second-guess what is in the mind of somebody who is undergoing a severe mental breakdown. It is correct that medical professionals and people who are close to the person concerned—if there are such people—judge what is appropriate.

I would not dream of saying what a doctor should do in a given set of circumstances. The decision must rest with the doctor. From evidence that has arisen as a result of publicity for the Bill, doctors are clearly indicating that, when they have to make the choice for people with severe mental breakdowns, they do not choose a bed—even if it is available—because they do not believe that sending a person into such an environment is appropriate to the person's medical circumstances. The Bill seeks to resolve that problem, and address the needs of that group

Mr. Clive Efford (Eltham): The hon. Lady is falling into the trap into which some of her hon. Friends have fallen, of believing that the Bill is the only way to deal with the problem. Does she agree that there is no difference of opinion across the Floor of the House on the need to consider the appropriate provision for people with mental health needs, and the dignity with which they need to be treated in overnight institutions? The point is whether that can be dealt with by a Government commitment.

I suggest that the lack of commitment over the past 18 years is the reason why we are debating the issue today. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that that is true; it is an undeniable fact. Do we need a cumbersome piece of legislation to implement provisions that could be

implemented immediately? The White Paper that was published this week makes provision for transparency in the health service, and addresses the demands in the Bill.

Mrs. Browning: I am not under any illusion about the Bill; I am one of its sponsors. I see that it does not even fill two sides of an A4 sheet, so in nobody's estimation can it be called cumbersome. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Minister will say that there is no need for legislation because the Government will ensure that what is in the Bill is implemented, by directive, secondary legislation or whatever is required, I am sure that my hon. Friends and I would welcome that.

Mr. Efford *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I am answering the hon. Gentleman's first intervention before he makes his second.

I am nervous of the fact that, although Labour Members seem to recognise the need for such a Bill, they do not want to do anything about it. Unless the Minister can give us the categorical assurances that we seek, we ask very simply that the Bill be allowed go into Committee so that issues can be properly debated. Any reservations that hon. Members on either side of the House may have can then be properly discussed in a democratic way.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East) *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. He is new to the House. He should read *Hansard* and discover my track record in this area. It is no good his shaking his head. I have a track record on subjects such as this that will bear investigation.

Mr. Efford: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I will, as long as the hon. Gentleman keeps his intervention short and does not make a speech.

Mr. Efford: The point is whether the Bill addresses the needs of people with mental health problems, not whether we debate clause 1. I think that there is a commitment on the Government Front Bench to accept and enact the provisions of clauses 2 and 3 without the need for the Bill to go into Committee and for us to talk among ourselves.

Mrs. Browning: If the hon. Gentleman is foreseeing what the Minister will say, we would certainly welcome such support for clauses 2 and 3. But I reiterate— *[Interruption.]* I am trying to reply to the hon. Gentleman. I was courteous enough to let him intervene twice. I hope that he is courteous enough to listen to the reply.

Clause 1 would help to deal with the problem of those who fall through the net. I have described who they are. Does the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Efford) not want that group, who are prone to suicide and who do not have access to appropriate therapy conditions, to have the treatment that their GPs and medical advisers would prescribe and which they are currently being denied? My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East has identified the problem and has proposals to overcome it. I ask the hon. Gentleman very politely to allow the clause that addresses the needs of those people to be debated further. I happen to think that the people whom I have described merit further discussion.

11.36 am

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I share the view of some of my hon. Friends that the Bill is well meaning. I am sure that it is the intention of the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) to try to improve provision for people who are mentally ill. However, the Bill's provisions are either unnecessary or, in the worst scenario, could make the situation for mentally ill people even worse.

I say that because it seems that we are wanting to step back to what we had before 1975. We almost seem to be putting the emphasis on in-patient care, when we should be moving in the opposite direction. We all lived through the period in which hospitals were closed. Almost half the hospitals that existed in 1970 have closed—and more hospitals will close. During those closures, many hon. Members protested—and rightly so. The sensible protests were not about about the closure of hospitals or the loss of beds but about the fact that, although the hospitals were closing, resources were not being put into the community to deal with the patients who were coming out of hospital. That is what has given care in the community such a bad name. That is why we have such a legacy.

Let us not forget the situation before 1975, before the previous Labour Government—it is going quite a long way back—introduced better services for mentally ill people. Let us remember what it was like when people were locked away from the rest of society, when many mentally ill people were treated as criminals, when mental health remained a low priority, when the prevalent thinking was, "out of sight, out of mind", when people were put away in institutions so that they would not be a nuisance to the rest of society. We have moved on since then, and we should not return to those times.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) spoke of amending the Bill, which in itself would amend an Act. He listed all the things that the Bill would not do. That proves the point. We cannot consider the issue in isolation. We must consider mental health across the board and not only in terms of provision for in-patients.

The Bill accepts a number of things that should not be accepted. It accepts, or almost accepts, that entitlement to a hospital bed is the answer. It accepts the fact that beds are gridlocked, but, instead of figuring out why they are gridlocked—instead of considering the interface between the health service and social services, why people are not being shifted through the system more quickly, why people are in hospital beds when they should not be and how the system could be run more effectively—it simply proposes an increase in the number of beds. That is not the answer.

The Bill seems to assume that people will relapse when they are back in the community—that it is almost a foregone conclusion that they will get worse and worse until their problems become acute. That is not the way I see it. When I was a councillor, one of the first problems that I encountered involved a local man who rapidly became acutely ill and a problem to his neighbours. He removed fuses from a communal lighting system in a block of flats, and turned off the gas supply. He appeared to pose a danger.

That man would be taken into hospital for a fortnight, following which everything would be great for three or four weeks; then the incidents, and the complaints,

[Mr. John Heppell]

would start again. The difficulty for me was not that it was impossible to find a bed for the man when the problem became acute, but the lack of support services. What was needed was intervention at the outset, rather than when the man had already started doing strange things, frightening people and making them feel that he was a threat to their lives. The problem continued not for a couple of weeks or a couple of months, but for many years. Every six weeks or so, it would recur and the man would be returned to hospital.

The Bill is not necessary, for all sorts of reasons. For one thing, the position relating to hospitals has changed. In September, the Government announced new plans for the closure of psychiatric hospitals. An independent reference group has been set up, which will not allow such hospitals to close unless the necessary resources and support are already available in the community.

Clause 2 is not necessary. The idea of single-sex wards, or areas in wards, is not just accepted by the Labour party; the Mental Health Act Commission published a report on it in November 1996, and the last Government—your Government—accepted it, saying that they were doing what they could to change things. The present Government have restated that policy, and Lady Jay, the Minister of State at the Department of Health, wants a report on progress to be published by Christmas. We have been in office for only seven months, and we have had fewer than 200 days—not 6,500—to act; but action is already being taken. That is the difference. You recognised the problem but did nothing about it, while the new Government also recognise it and are doing something about it.

The Bill asks for a

"strategy for the provision of in-patient facilities".

Health authorities are already required to have a strategy for the provision of appropriate facilities for mentally ill people, and that includes in-patient facilities. In-patient facilities are a part of the whole. If we concentrate on that narrow area of policy, we shall return to where we were 20-odd years ago.

The Under–Secretary of State for Health made the point very well in a speech earlier this year. He said, "We must start to deal not just with the acute problems of mental illness, but with why people become mentally ill in the first place. We must prevent them from becoming ill."

Mr. Spring: I entirely accept that health authorities are required to have a mental health strategy, but strategies have to be updated. They must accord with what actually goes on in psychiatric wards. The point about the Bill is that it strengthens the strategy and puts flesh on its bones, so that the concerns about single-sex wards and the safety and security of those in them—concerns that have clearly arisen in the past few years—can be addressed.

Mr. Heppell: I will come to that point shortly. First, let me continue my quotation from the speech of my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Health, because it is so brilliant. He gave an analogy: he said that we should stop pulling people out of the river, when we should be ensuring that they did not jump into the river in the first place. That is what is wrong with the Bill. It deals only with the end result. My hon. Friends and I do not want to have to deal with acute mental health problems; we want to stop them from developing in the first place by ensuring that intervention in the community takes place much earlier.

The Bill is not necessary, because our care programme already accepts that what care is given, rather than where it is given, is important. You ask for monitoring of the strategy, but that is already done by the national health service executive's performance management framework. The Government are in the process of saving £1 billion by getting rid of bureaucracy in the NHS, and you want to put it back, and start duplicating. You ask for an annual report to the Secretary of State—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman keeps using the word "you". The Chair is not responsible for the matters to which he refers. Will the hon. Gentleman try to use the correct parliamentary language?

Mr. Heppell: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Bill asks for an annual report to the Secretary of State, but such a report has been produced for the past three years, and the Secretary of State can always ask for a report when necessary. Again, there is duplication. What is the point?

In regard to single-sex wards, one of the components of the monitoring system that we have introduced is an audit checklist to evaluate the process for delivering acceptable single-sex accommodation. As for the security and design of psychiatric units, the NHS executive estate agency has already issued advice about such matters as locking bedroom doors, safeguarding personal property and en suite toilet facilities. We should be given a little time to see whether the action that we are taking works. You had 18 years of it; let us have 18 months.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. He argues that we should give the Government a little more time. Does he acknowledge that the Bill should be given more time so that the issues can be explored in more detail in Standing Committee?

Mr. Heppell: I have no great objections to that, although I consider it a bit of a waste of the time of hon. Members. Conservative Members such as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East have argued that the Bill is not adequate and mentioned what needed to be discussed. To treat in-patient beds as a separate issue is to do a great disservice to our current mental health services, which I hope will be improved.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will not the hon. Gentleman go along with the suggestion of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that the matter should ideally be sent to a Special Standing Committee for further evidence to be taken before the Bill came back for further consideration? It is an important matter.

Mr. Heppell: I do not think that that is necessary, because the independent reference group will do exactly that. It will advise the Government not only on hospital closures but on other issues such as long-term hospital stays, reducing the stigma of mental illness, ensuring that

mentally ill people are cared for in safety in the community, and black and ethnic minority mental health issues.

I listened to the start of the speech of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and realised early on that he did not understand the issue. He seemed to think that the real problem was the closure of the old bleak and horrible mental institutions and that we had not replaced them with new mental hospital beds. That is not my view of what it is all about. We all support the closure of old institutions, but we could not support the previous Government's no-bed strategy. In some cases, they reduced the number of beds to well below what was needed.

Mr. Bercow: If, as he claims, what the Bill seeks to do is already happening, why does the hon. Member think that two expert charities in the field, MIND and SANE, support the Bill?

Mr. Heppell: Before the hon. Gentleman asks me to comment, I would like to see what MIND said. Something was quoted earlier, but when I read on, I realised that MIND had said a bit more. It is easy to quote selectively from letters. I could pick out the comments of the Mental After Care Association against clause 1 and then say that it was for clause 2. MACA states:

"We fully support Dr. Lewis' aims in Clause 2 to protect vulnerable patients while they are in hospital, though believe these could be achieved without recourse to primary legislation."

It is not total support.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Let me set this clearly on the record. I have been categorical in stating what clauses different organisations support. The National Schizophrenia Fellowship and SANE support the whole Bill. MIND supports clauses 2 and 3. The Mental After Care Association is the only organisation that has said that it does not think that primary legislation is necessary. All the other organisations have said that they wish the Bill, wholly or in part, to be passed. That is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. McNulty: That is not what your silly little friend just said.

Mr. Heppell: I shall not repeat my hon. Friend's sedentary remark. He makes the point that some colleagues of the hon. Member for New Forest, East have said things that were in some respects out of context.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have shown considerable patience, as have my hon. Friends. For the past 20 minutes, the hon. Gentleman, whose name, I confess, I do not know, has been mouthing things and calling hon. Members silly little people. This debate has been in fairly good humour so far. It is about time that he picked up a feeling for the manners of this place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This debate has been conducted in a good mood so far and has been very constructive. I would be grateful if we could finish it in the same way.

Mr. Heppell: I want to make it clear for the record that the remarks of the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) were not aimed at me.

There are other reasons why we should be a bit happier about what is happening. The Government recognise the need to improve mental health services. An extra £5 million has been put into mental health services, specifically to reduce pressure on acute psychiatric services by helping with extra residential or 24-hour nurse staff places, and, more importantly, to develop more effective approaches to crises that will reduce the need for in-patient admissions. I welcome the extra money from the Government.

I welcome the £6 million increase in the mental illness specific grant from £67.3 million to £73.3 million in 1998–99. That is an increase of 9 per cent. That shows how serious the Government are about mental health. I welcome the fact that there will be an independent reference group. I also welcome the fact that my area will have more than £2.25 million extra to deal with problems this winter. The cash increase for 1998–99 will be more than £14 million, an increase of 5.2 per cent. We would not have got a comparable increase without a change of Government. Those figures show a cash increase above what the Tories were planning to spend of more than £6 million. That shows how the Government are trying to tackle mental health issues.

It is easy to cite the views of those who think something is a good idea. I got in touch with my local trust, Nottingham Healthcare NHS trust, to find what it thought about the proposals. It has been innovative about mental health. It did not reduce the number of in-patient beds when it closed the old Saxondale and Mapperley mental hospitals. People talk about stigma. No one can imagine any worse stigma than having been to Mapperley hospital. It was a form of insult. People used to tell each other, "Get to Mapperley." It was almost like referring to Bedlam.

So I welcome the closure of the old mental hospitals. I visited the empty premises of Mapperley last year. The trust wants to pull it down, but some people want it to be preserved as a listed building. My view is that it is an abomination and it should be pulled down. The trust has talked about changing it into student accommodation. But when one walks through the building and sees what amount to cells in which people were locked up in the old hospitals, one knows that people who think that there was a glorious age of mental health provision are wrong. I do not want to return to that.

Mr. Spring: Happily, there are fewer students as a result of Labour's policies.

Mr. Heppell: I shall not respond to that comment. I have quite a few students in my constituency, and I would not want to upset them.

The chief executive of Nottingham Healthcare NHS trust says:

"there has been growing pressure on acute psychiatric beds . . . To help address these pressure it is important for the Government to reform the Mental Health Act to support treatment in the community even when a patient is reluctant to receive it"—

I know that there are difficulties with that, but that is his solution—

"and secondly to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of medical students being trained as well as nurses to ensure that there are sufficient clinical staff available to work in community mental health services."

[Mr. Heppell]

He does not see extra beds as the solution. Nor do I.

We need to recognise that the debate is not simply about beds and in-patient care. It is about the whole mental health service. Unfortunately, the Bill does not deal with the issues across the board. For that reason, I am against it.

I want to see provision made for people with mental health problems, but I want to see some work done on altering the stigma of mental illness. I want to see work done not on how we exclude people by locking them away but on how we can include them. I want to see more 24-hour care not in hospitals but out in the community—in housing projects, for example. Let us use some imagination. Let us make sure that health authorities work with local authorities and other agencies so that we can meet the needs of all people with mental illness, not the needs of a few, who, I agree, require beds in hospitals. The way forward is not to increase the number of beds but to reduce the number of people who need care in hospital.

12.1 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this short but important debate. The Minister knows that I have taken a great interest in this sector of health provision for many years. For 18 years, I was a member of the Social Services Select Committee and its predecessor, the sub-committee of the Expenditure Committee. Latterly, I chaired the Health Select Committee.

I have already quoted from the Social Services Select Committee report, "Community Care", which was produced in the 1984–85 Session. It referred specifically to the adult mentally ill and the mentally handicapped. Before I quote from the report again—it is extremely relevant to the matter that we are debating—I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on his success in the ballot for private Members' Bills and on the most detailed, reasoned and considered way in which he made his case.

The Bill is limited. I know that the Minister realises that. Clauses 2 and 3 are virtually unanimously supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House, who have admitted that the work that needs to be done is urgent and that the Bill fulfils those requirements very well. There is little or no controversy about it. There is controversy, or difference of view, about clause 1.

As someone who has taken a great deal of interest in mental health, I am worried about the rapid closure of in-patient care facilities for those suffering from mental illness. The wonderful Parkside hospital in Macclesfield did wonderful work over many decades. When I was first elected as the Member for the constituency, there were 1,500 patients in that hospital; today there are none. Under the previous Conservative Government, an acute mental illness unit was constructed on the district general hospital site. I regret that, because, as the Select Committee report stated more than once, an acute mental illness unit or hospital should be built separately from district general hospitals. As the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) has said, the environment of a district general hospital is not conducive to assisting the recovery, treatment and care of mental health patients.

I therefore deeply regret that the wonderful site of Parkside hospital in Macclesfield is likely in due course to be covered by houses rather than providing therapeutic facilities for those suffering from certain categories of mental illness, not least schizophrenia, where tranquillity, quiet and calm are required for their treatment.

I have worked with the National Schizophrenia Fellowship, which has made a great study of that still relatively unknown disease, its causes and how it can be cured. People still do not know the answers. I only hope that, in due course, we can find a cure or a treatment for its sufferers.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East made many references to the work of SANE. I have the greatest affection, love, regard and respect for its director, Miss Marjorie Wallace, because she is such a sensitive and gentle person. Her outstanding role in trying to assist the mentally ill will go down in the history of mental health.

Dr. Whitehead: I have a great deal of sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's comments about the closure of long-stay hospitals, but it is necessary to be absolutely clear about the circumstances in which the majority of people in those hospitals were discharged. They were not acute cases, but, by and large, people who, these days, might not be admitted—most of us would say that they should never have been admitted.

The problem with the patients in many of those hospitals was that, because of the way they were treated, they became institutionalised, long-stay patients. They became inhabitants of the type of hospital that the hon. Gentleman has described. We need to be clear about the difference between acute intervention and long-stay hospital care. I would assume that we would support one option, but, these days, would be wary of the other.

Mr. Winterton: I entirely share the view expressed in so reasonable a manner by the hon. Gentleman. Of course, in the old days, a simple young man from a village outside Macclesfield might have been caught scrumping. Perhaps in those latter Victorian days he was taken to court and sent to the hospital on the hill, the asylum, the psychiatric institution—in Macclesfield, it might have been Parkside hospital. Perhaps a simple young girl got herself into trouble, and people wanted to put her pregnancy out of sight. She might have been sent to a psychiatric hospital—in Macclesfield, that would have been Parkside.

I agree with the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) that in years gone by many people were sent to the asylum or the psychiatric hospital—I repeat that, in Macclesfield it would have been Parkside—whereas today they would be treated within the community and in a more enlightened manner.

I return to my intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), when I quoted from the Select Committee report. It said:

> "The pace of removal of hospital facilities for mental illness has far outrun the provision of services in the community to replace them."

It also said:

> "The Minister must ensure that mental illness or mental handicap provision is not reduced without demonstrably adequate alternative services being provided beforehand both for those discharged from hospital and for those who would otherwise seek admission."

That was a very sensible recommendation, which summed up the evidence taken by the Select Committee.

The second paragraph of a press release by SANE on the Bill states:

"The loss of psychiatric beds (50,000 since 1980) has led to seriously ill people being denied access to in-patient care when they need it. In our rush to close down institutions, we have replaced them with overcrowded wards where people with very different conditions have been thrown together. Hot-bedding is rife—14 people for every ten beds in inner cities—doctors are faced with impossible decisions to discharge someone who is still desperately ill to admit another at equal risk, making treatment at best ineffective and at worst damaging."

While some people may not agree with everything that SANE says, I regard the organisation, and its director in particular, very highly.

The press release continues:

"This Bill recognises that in-patient care should be tailored to the individual needs, giving real choice to those currently denied 'asylum'. Because of this crisis in in-patient care people with mental illness are being neglected and lives lost."

I recall, with great sadness, three deaths in my constituency, two of them suicides. One was a young man and the other a young woman. I say to the Minister and Labour Members who oppose in-patient care for the mentally ill, that that young lady—whose name I will not mention as it may cause her family distress—craved and begged to be admitted to hospital for care, security and treatment. She was turned away.

Dr. Julian Lewis: My hon. Friend has said—with articulateness and passion which, sadly, I could not muster—exactly what I was trying to explain. He has identified the exact category of person and exactly the circumstance that first led me to take an interest in this matter, which is so far outside my usual areas of expertise.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. I am doing my best to support him. Although some may disagree with certain provisions in his limited Bill, there is no reason why it should not go into Committee for further consideration. If the Government do not like clause 1, it would be simple to amend it in Committee. I understand that the Government fully support the other proposals, which could be enshrined in legislation.

I want to refer to the Select Committee report again. I do not think that very much has changed since 1984–85, when the report was produced by an all-party group of Members of Parliament, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Renée Short, a very distinguished Labour Member who served the House well for many years. Among our conclusions and recommendations, No. 31 under the title "Asylum" states:

"We recommend that at least an equivalent proportion of those resources, services and amenities presently devoted to the most severely mentally disabled continue to be so devoted in the future."

As one or two Labour Members have said, the money that has resulted from the sale of the sites of mental illness hospitals—some of which were very suitably located for redevelopment—has clearly not followed the mental health channel and been devoted to providing additional resources, facilities and amenities for the mentally ill.

Recommendation No. 32 states:

"The simple facts are that there is little prospect of major change for the better for many mentally disabled people. We must face the fact that some people need asylum."

That is the view, not of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship, but of an all-party group of Members who carried out a year-long in-depth inquiry into community care, with special reference to adult mentally ill and mentally handicapped people. The Committee added:

"We recommend that the Department draw on the experience of the existing hospital hostels with a view to producing practical guidance to authorities on the lessons to be drawn for future provision of asylum care."

It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Warrington, North talking about what an acute mental illness unit should be—how it should be designed and where it should be built. Under the heading "Mental Illness", recommendation No. 47 states:

"We recommend that hospital planning guidance from the DHSS"—

as the Department then was—

"should emphasise the advantage of DGH"—

district general hospital—

"psychiatric units being planned as physically separate entities, with space around them, with more attention being paid to off-ward facilities; and that it should also draw attention to the drawbacks of the standard design of medical wards."

That is extremely revealing, because during our inquiry, we visited mental health hospitals throughout the country. We also went to local authorities whose social services departments were organising care in the community in a caring and positive way—but, as we all know, there are always resource implications of such policies.

It is worth noting that the Committee also recommended that

"under-provided areas should give urgent priority to creating adequate day care facilities for those recovering from mental illness."

Those matters have frequently been raised by Labour Members during the debate. We recommended that

"service providers take the variety of needs into consideration when planning mental illness day care facilities and that encouragement be given to voluntary effort in the provision of informal day care."

Finally, the report stated:

"We recommend that the DHSS and local agencies encourage schemes for voluntary work by those recovering from mental illness."

All those recommendations are extremely pertinent to the Bill. However, under the heading "Admission policies", the Committee said:

"Great difficulties are being experienced in procuring emergency psychiatric care, putting a strain on the individuals concerned and their families. That is the present reality of community care as seen by many families. We recommend that catchment area boundaries for admission to mental illness hospitals should not be applied so inflexibly as to inhibit reasonable choice, and that admission policies should be established to reflect an individual's need for treatment or care rather than his prognosis."

One of my deep worries is that people throughout the country, in pursuing policies to deal with mental illness, have sought always to be politically correct. It was thought at one time that all people, except perhaps a tiny hard core, could be dealt with in the community. In the light of experience—

Mr. Boateng *indicated assent.*

Mr. Winterton: Even the Minister is nodding modestly.

[Mr. Winterton]

We have learnt that a number of people, especially those suffering from schizophrenia, need in-hospital care. I am not suggesting that such care should be provided in the huge wards typical of the Victorian institutions—the "hospitals on the hill" that I spoke about. However, many of the sites of such hospitals—such as Claybury hospital, Friern Barnet hospital, and Parkside hospital in my constituency—would have lent themselves to redevelopment, providing up-to-date facilities in cluster groups of bungalows and other forms of accommodation. It would not have cost the Government or local government a great deal, because the national health service already owned the sites.

I presume that the Minister will know what I mean when I refer to the village concept of dealing with mental illness and, in some cases, mental handicap. In Sweden, Denmark and Holland, I have seen some of these wonderful developments, which make it possible to deal with the worst cases of mental illness in a civilised and up-to-date way.

I make a heartfelt plea to the Minister to give some encouragement to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East, whose speech was well reasoned and sensitive. I hope that, even at this stage, the Government will find a way of allowing the Bill to go into Committee. Unlike the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell), I do not believe that it would be a waste of time. His remark was unfortunate, because any discussion between hon. Members, in any forum, about those who suffer from mental illness—how we might help them, what facilities they need, what treatment we can give them and how we can give them the most meaningful of lives—is worth while, and appreciated by those who are mentally ill and by the dedicated, professional people who care for them.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) used to be a nurse. I respected much of what she said. She knows as well as I do that her understanding of such people has improved because she has treated them when they really needed care and treatment.

We should give the Bill the opportunity to make progress. Even if clause 1—on strategies for the provision of in-patient facilities in psychiatric units—which causes controversy, is substantially amended or changed, I want the House to have a chance to discuss this subject further, for the benefit of the people who are doing a wonderful job, such as those who work for MIND and Mencap, and Lord Rix, who was just Mr. Brian Rix when he gave evidence to the Select Committee. He became Sir Brian Rix and continues, as Lord Rix, to play a major role. I agree that that is to do with mental handicap, but, as the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth knows, mental handicap and mental illness often overlap.

My impression of a visit to a mental handicap hospital in Northern Ireland has stayed with me to this day. I know the commitment that is required from those who deal with people, young and old, who suffer from mental illness or mental handicap. They deserve the understanding and support of the House. I believe that they will misunderstand us if we do not allow the Bill to proceed to Committee.

I make a plea to the Minister. He and I occasionally have rather more in common on the health service than I have with some of my hon. Friends. He knows what happened to me in 1992. I had the honour of being Chairman of what I consider to be the most influential of all the Select Committees on Health that the House has ever had; it had members from the Labour, Conservative and Ulster Unionist parties. Because we were so influential, because we had the respect of people outside the House, because we tackled subjects and produced reports based on the evidence given to us, which meant that they were objective reports, and because we did the job that the House gives Select Committees to do—holding the Government of the day to account on behalf of the House—I was not reappointed as Chairman at the beginning of the 1992 Parliament.

Ann Keen: The hon. Gentleman has been kind enough to comment on my professional life. On behalf of health professionals, I should like to say that we praised the hon. Gentleman and believed that it was an absolute disgrace that he was removed from the Select Committee. We thank him for his work with the Committee.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comment. Such remarks do not often come across the Chamber. It is very rewarding for me that a Labour Member is prepared to speak in those terms.

It is because of the position I held that I make a special plea to the Minister. I want him to understand what my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East seeks to do in his modest Bill, which I fully support and which, as the Minister knows, also has support from Labour Members. Sadly, the Labour Members who sponsored the Bill cannot be here today. The Bill has also received support from the Liberal Democrats. Mental health is an important subject. Let us allow further discussion.

12.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on securing second place in the ballot. His Bill deals with an interesting subject. I apologise to him and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for not being able to remain for the whole debate, and I thank you for calling me at this stage.

I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) said about the need to debate in the House the important issue of mental health. I also agree with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that it is important that we debate the issue on the Floor of the House. I am sorry that he is no longer in his place. I was also sorry to see so few Liberal Democrat Members earlier. When the hon. Gentleman made his speech, he was the only Liberal Democrat in the Chamber, although he has now been replaced by two colleagues. I hope that we shall hear from them later.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) mentioned the stigma attached to mental health. Anyone who has been involved in public life, either in this House or, as in my own case previously, as a councillor, knows that there is a problem when we face the issue. I recall several such occasions when I was a councillor. When planning applications or licensing applications that related to mental health were made, there was vociferous opposition from residents which was born out of ignorance and fear.

I find it difficult to comprehend the attitude of such people, who often have no real idea what they are talking about. Whenever a planning application came up for

discussion, fears were expressed that a mad axe man would run down the road dripping with blood. Few people with mental health problems fall into that category. We must recognise the stigma and the ignorance and fear that give rise to it, and we must do all we can to break down that ignorance. Part of the problem is that that ignorance is fostered by some of our institutions, which have developed in a certain way over the centuries.

Before I was elected to the House, I was a solicitor working in private practice. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen), when people at the bus stop asked me what I did, I said that I was a solicitor, and was met with as much approbation as if I had said that I were a Member of Parliament.

I pointed out that I was not an ordinary solicitor dealing with the buying and selling of houses or divorces, but that I specialised in personal injury law, acting for victims of accidents. I took on the big battalions of insurance companies and tried to secure compensation for those victims. On that basis, people still thought that I was overpaid, but were prepared to give me the benefit of the doubt.

My experience as a personal injury lawyer for almost 20 years revealed to me the prejudice that we see towards mental health issues within the law and in certain parts of the medical profession. I instructed doctors to prepare reports on my clients, some of whom had severe physical injuries from which mental problems had developed, and I often heard patients referred to as suffering from "compensation neurosis", "functional overlay", or, worst of all, "compensationitis", as though he or she were faking it all.

I regret to say that the same problems also arose within the psychiatric profession. The prejudice was not confined to those dealing with orthopaedics and similar conditions; it permeated throughout.

For example, 10 years ago, almost to the month, there was a serious fire at King's Cross underground station, and I had to represent a number of firefighters and railway workers who were injured in the course of that incident. They were suffering not just from burns or broken bones but from severe injuries to their minds.

I was horrified to see the extent to which London Underground would go to try to discredit the conditions from which those people were suffering. I spent hours with the victims, taking statements and listening to their account of events, and I have little doubt that they were wholly underestimated. The public simply do not realise how disabling some of those conditions can be.

One case went all the way to court. A firefighter called Mr. Hale was described by the judge at the end of the case as the bravest man he had ever met, and I agree. Mr. Hale had had a career in the fire service and had worked for many years effectively and efficiently. He was then called to the King's Cross fire. What he saw seriously affected him, to the extent that he could no longer work as a firefighter. He lost his self-confidence and bravery; indeed, he lost everything as a consequence of the mental illness that he suffered after that incident.

Mr. Hale thought that he might be able to cope with the job of postman. He had been a physically active man whose job required the full use of all his resources, but he now felt that he could only do a job with no great responsibilities. That brought home to me and to the judge—Mr. Hale won record damages—the extent to which the legal system underestimates the impact of psychiatric injury. That, however, was not the end of the story. Although we won record damages, they did not compare to the compensation that would have been awarded had it been physical injury that had to be compensated.

I am pleased to say that the Law Commission is looking generally at that aspect of the law, and not before time. It is a question not just of the amount of compensation but of the hurdles that people must jump in trying to claim compensation, which are much higher for people with a mental condition than they are for people suffering from a physical injury.

Mr. Spring: Is the hon. Gentleman planning in his discourse to give us the telephone number of the excellent firm of solicitors to which he is attached?

Mr. Dismore: As I no longer work for the firm, I have no intention of giving the telephone number, but if the hon. Gentleman would like the details, I can give them to him afterwards. I am even prepared to give him the telephone number of the law firm of which I remain a partner, although I am not taking cases, so he would not be able to rely on my services.

I was pleased to hear the statement made by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, earlier in the week, in which he dealt with issues of mental incapacity within the law, and proposed improvements in that regard.

We have heard from several hon. Members the responses of various charities to the Bill. I shall not repeat them, as they have been debated across the Chamber. In preparation for the debate, I consulted the senior management of Barnet health authority, which is responsible for health services in my constituency. I was told that senior management did not see the point of the Bill or how it would advance matters. The senior manager to whom I spoke also told me that at a meeting of the NHS confederation meeting last week, people were less than impressed with the thrust of the Bill.

The Bill represents a narrow approach to the issue of mental health. It does not address the wider and more fundamental concerns. By focusing on one narrow area, we run the risk of diverting resources, attention and effort from a broader strategy.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I appreciate that clause 1 refers to a relatively narrow issue, as does clause 2, which deals with women who are vulnerable to sexual attack. If, as I expect, the Minister will say something favourable to the principles of clause 2 for one narrow situation, I see nothing wrong with advancing the case of people who are at risk of suicide, whether they are suffering from acute breakdown or schizophrenia, as so eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). That is no more narrow a case than that of the women at risk. If the Government accept that something should be done for one group, they should accept that something should be done for the other.

Mr. Dismore: That does not answer my point. We must consider mental health services as a whole. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point that there is a series

[Mr. Dismore]

of different issues. My answer is that the way to address them is not through legislation in the form of his Bill, but by the approach adopted in my local area.

The joint mental health strategy for Barnet report, which was prepared in October 1997, sets out the current position. The report was prepared jointly by the London borough of Barnet and Barnet health authority, adopting the partnership approach to the health service.

Through the partnership approach, we can begin to address not only the issues highlighted by the Bill, but the more general issues affecting mental health, and take the debate forward. The report illustrates the work that the Government are doing through the health authority and the Labour-controlled London borough of Barnet working in partnership.

We have set up a mental health strategy steering group, with task group strategies examining various aspects. That involves representatives of the major stakeholders in the area. There has been full participation by the voluntary sector, the community health council and, most important, people who use the mental health services. Eight implementation task groups have been set up, commissioned through the mental health strategy steering group, to work towards implementing the strategy.

That cross-agency membership involving the users has produced some successful ideas to take the provision of mental health services in my constituency further forward. I am pleased to say that the group has also identified weaknesses in the structure, and is considering how we can reconfigure around those weaknesses. The partnership approach, which is what is happening in my area and also in the general thrust of the White Paper published earlier in the week, is the way forward. I shall give some examples.

Let us examine out-patient provision through community mental health teams for the under-65s. We are setting up locally based multi-disciplinary teams which are being implemented progressively. They are operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and are working closely with GPs and their teams to improve services across the borough.

Boundary issues will need to be resolved, but the White Paper on the overall health strategy will get to grips with what has been one of the main problems in the health service over the years—the peculiar boundaries that do not reflect people's needs or where people live. I may say a word or two about Edgware hospital in that context. Had there been a proper configuration of health service boundaries, some of the problems brought about by the previous Government might not have occurred.

The facility for the community mental health teams for the under-65s based in the west of the borough has been agreed, and is to be sited within the area of the Edgware community hospital. It is a new facility that we are creating out of the wreckage left us by the previous Government. The time scale for the permanent site is being determined as part of the Edgware hospital review, which we promised and which we have delivered, to sort out what community facilities we can now provide on that site.

The strategy for the under-65s out-patient treatment has been agreed, and will work with the provision of GP link workers. That will enable communication between primary and secondary care. It will not act as a referral pathway for GPs, but it will provide a necessary service.

Another aspect of out-patient care covers the over-65s and the development of community health teams for them. Before the election and shortly afterwards, very little planning work had been carried out.

Mr. Spring: On the question of mental health facilities, is there a psychiatric ward at Edgware hospital? I should be very interested to know the answer to that question.

Mr. Dismore: I am coming to the provision of psychiatric facilities; it is a couple of pages further on. All will be revealed in time.

Mr. Bercow: I am especially pleased to listen to the hon. Gentleman's speech, because my mother is one of his constituents—although, sadly for him, not one of his supporters. In view of the importance of the findings of the Mental Health Act commissioners, following their visit to facilities in psychiatric units in November 1996, would the hon. Gentleman care to remind the House exactly what those findings were? Does he believe that they are valid, and might they cause him to support the Bill?

Mr. Dismore: I thank the hon. Gentleman for contributing,, and for doing so at such length. I am pleased that his mother is one of my constituents. I hope that, by the end of my speech, I might have persuaded her to my way of thinking, and might have her vote at the next election. I shall come in a moment or two to the issue of in-patient treatment in the area, but I now return to what I was saying before I was interrupted.

I was talking about the community mental health teams for the over-65s, and saying that, before the election and, indeed, shortly afterwards, very little planning work had been done. However, I am pleased that a great deal more has been achieved in the past few months. The multi-disciplinary planning group meets regularly in that context. We are looking at one of the models based on local facilities and expect that the community-focused CMHT will be sited with other aspects of mental health care—in-patient care, day hospital services and others—on the Finchley Memorial hospital site.

I deal now with in-patient services, and I was glad to receive a prompt in this connection. There has been a substantial and vigorous debate in the local community about how and where such facilities should be provided. One particular issue was whether they should be concentrated on one site at Edgware community hospital or whether there should be provision both at Edgware, in the west of Barnet, with a spread of facilities in the east of the borough.

As I have said, there has been a vigorous debate within the local community. I am pleased to say that it has resulted in a sensible suggestion by the local health authority, which originally wanted to concentrate facilities at Edgware community hospital, in the west of the borough. It has now decided to ensure that we have provision on both sides of the borough. There will be facilities at Barnet hospital for those who need services from the east of the borough.

The facilities that are being developed at Edgware community hospital will be second to none. This provision meets some of the points that stem from the second part of the Bill. At Edgware community hospital and at the rebuilt psychiatric unit at Barnet, on the Barnet general hospital site, patients will not have to worry about the issues which have been raised through the Bill. In the main, they will have individual rooms. There will be women-only areas. The design of the facilities will ensure that that happens.

There will be gardens that will reflect the multicultural nature of the Barnet community. That is the way forward. There are arguments about whether there is enough space left at Edgware community hospital to provide what is needed in the open area, but these are matters of detail that we are working through in the Edgware community hospital review process.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I know of a specific case involving someone who suffered an acute mental breakdown in recent times in the area covered by the acute psychiatric unit in Barnet. The person concerned was told by the general practitioner that, although a bed was available in the acute psychiatric unit at Barnet, she would not advise him to take it up, because he would be surrounded there by seriously disturbed people. It is that very case that first interested me in this issue.

Mr. Dismore: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. That is precisely why, in my area, we are reviewing facilities with a view to improving them. Day hospital services are being investigated so as to achieve the most effective way of meeting the needs of people with acute mental health problems who might otherwise need in-patient care, but who do not need the long-term support of day services. These are of a drop-in, therapeutic, community or employment-focused variety.

The Barnet day services are comprehensive, and include, for example, a work scheme. It is important, as we know from the Government's welfare-to-work programme, that we do not write off people who are disabled, whether their disabilities are physical or mental. We must try to ensure that these people are integrated by being brought back into society. They should be enabled to fulfil their full potential. One of the main failings of the previous Government was that they wrote them off. They left them on the scrap heap on benefit.

We must try to find ways of helping disabled people, both physically and mentally, and the welfare-to-work strategy will achieve that. We are helping with that process in Barnet through the work scheme and the job search service, which is run on a partnership basis with the Richmond fellowship.

I return to my point: that the way forward in mental health services is through partnership and not by placing the entire burden, as the Bill would do, on local health authorities. That is not the way forward for the provision of mental health services.

I take up the point made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield and others about the problems posed by the old Victorian hospitals. An issue that has been troubling those concerned in my constituency for some time is the re-provision from the Napsbury hospital, which is scheduled to close. Napsbury is an example of the large Victorian institutions. The facilities there are provided in huge wards. That is not the way to go into the next century caring for people who are especially in need of long-stay residential care. The assessment, planning, re-provision and support of people at Napsbury is much to the fore within the thinking of the health authority.

There was a real problem earlier in the year, before the election, when transfers began of people from Napsbury hospital to the alternative facility at Elmstead nursing home. The transfers were handled extremely badly when the previous Government were in office. Eight elderly people died because the transfer was extremely badly handled by the health authority and other agencies working under the previous Government.

It might be helpful if I lay before the House some of the conclusions of the very full review that was undertaken as a result of that very serious tragedy. We have to learn from the review, which concluded:

"The responsibility for ensuring the safe transfer of frail, elderly patients suffering from dementia . . . remains shared"

between the health authority, the local health care trust and the private provider of the nursing home—again, the partnership approach. That is the way forward.

The report accepted that the patients who died were elderly, extremely frail and had severe dementia, and that their transfer

"did not adequately take into account all the risks associated with transfer."

Although there was no evidence of malpractice at the home, there were serious shortcomings. The report says:

"The planning, implementation and monitoring of the transfer was not carried out to the level of detail necessary to protect individual frail, elderly patients suffering with dementia.

The planning of primary care provision was not sufficiently addressed.

Insufficient consideration was given to the specific risks involved in this transfer and how these could be reduced or managed.

Inadequate time was given for new staff to become familiar with the frail, elderly patients who would be transferring from Napsbury . . . to Elmstead . . . and with their individual needs and care plans.

Mrs. Browning: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would clarify something. Is he saying that he believes that the elderly frail are also mentally ill?

Mr. Dismore: I am referring to the elderly frail who are suffering from severe dementia, and who require mental health support. I said that. The detailed report, which I am sure the hon. Lady would like to read when she has time, gives examples of the problems.

I do not want to be accused of taking up too much time in the debate, because many of my hon. Friends wish to speak, and I want to ensure that they have time to say what they wish to say.

The review also concluded that the

"appointment of the GP to provide primary care service on 1 April 1997"—

only a week or two before the transfer—

"gave insufficient time to allow"

the GP service to be adequately involved in the planning process.

"Communications across the organisations did not fully address individual responsibilities, programming, monitoring of progress

Communications between clinicians was inadequate.

The decision to alter at short notice the planned transfer timetable to Elmstead House was insupportable.

The knowledge of the general risk of mortality following transfer had not been adequately disseminated to those involved in the resettlement of patients from Napsbury Hospital";

and—this is where central Government have a role to play—

"There was a need for detailed central guidance from the Department of Health on the resettlement of patients from long stay settings."

I am pleased to say that, when this extremely critical report was published, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary agreed to meet me the day after. I had a very full and long discussion with him about the conclusions—

Mr. Nicholls: Did he get a word in edgeways?

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman asks from a sedentary position whether I got a word in edgeways—[HON. MEMBERS: "Did he get a word in edgeways?"] Well, I certainly did a lot of talking at that meeting, because I wanted to get home to the Minister the seriousness with which my constituents view the tragedy that happened in the local community.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his considerable courtesy in giving way yet again. Could the fact that the Minister has now left the Chamber have something to do with his experience in that earlier meeting with the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has read the report and considered its recommendations extremely thoroughly, so, obviously, there is no need for him to hear me read them out again.

My hon. Friend the Minister was extremely concerned about what had happened. He expressed his view that there had been

"insupportable and unacceptable management failures. Decisions were taken in the course of the transfer that were driven by bureaucracy and the market rather than the requirements of patient care. The result was a completely inadequate response to the needs of elderly, frail people."

In responding to the report on Elmstead nursing home, I am pleased to say that he gave the assurance:

"This new Labour Government is absolutely determined that lessons are learned across health and social services. We have already begun work on new guidance"—

which, he promised me, will be published later in the year. The guidance will spell out safeguards for the transfer of elderly people from hospital—not only in my local area but nationally, for which the report called. I hope that he will be able to give me a progress report today on how far the guidance on national standards has developed.

We know from the experiences that we gained in that process the importance of ensuring that, yes, we consider closing down Victorian institutions, but that we do so in a properly co-ordinated way that recognises the need for national guidelines and continues to follow the partnership approach, which has been the theme of my speech.

Turning to other aspects of the re-provision from Napsbury, the Richmond Fellowship, in conjunction with MIND [illegible] working with the borough, successfully tendered for the provision of services for younger functionally mentally ill people resident in Barnet. The arrangement is that Warden housing association provides the accommodation, Richmond Fellowship provides the care services and MIND in Barnet provides the day services and other associated support, including advocacy. The scheme will be constructed from the start of the new year.

I return to the partnership approach, which is simply not recognised in the Bill. At the same time as the needs of the group of people who I have just identified have increased and the original service configuration has had to be re-examined, it is now agreed that very few of the group will be able to cope in any independent living arrangements. That is why such services are so important.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the views expressed a few years ago by Mrs. Major—not the wife of the previous Prime Minister—of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship? She said:

"As a magistrate, I am distressed to have to send somebody to prison from time to time because there is no secure accommodation elsewhere."

Such situations persist today. In talking about partnership, how would the hon. Gentleman respond?

Mr. Dismore: There is more than the one remedy of locking people up in psychiatric institutions. In fact, I was about to make a point on the way in which we are looking at the problem of mentally disordered offenders in my health authority area.

Since the beginning of this year, we have had a fully functioning mentally disordered offenders team. Its operational policies have been accepted by all agencies. As is to be expected, the team is frequently expected to interpret guidelines in respect of referrals and so forth, because we still have the boundary problem which I identified earlier and which I am sure this week's White Paper will address in due course.

The team for mentally disordered offenders has an ambitious programme of development, including a new court diversion service, improved liaison and communications structures, and the development of effective performance indicators and evaluation methods. It is expected that those will include self-reports by service users.

I am pleased to say that the team is working on a partnership basis with the police and the local probation service. It is located with the probation service and is working closely with the police as a consequence. That is the way forward—or one of them—in dealing with the problem which the hon. Member for Macclesfield identified. I shall return to what I was saying about Napsbury re-provision, having diverted myself to answer the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

The MIND development at Bunns Lane in the west of the borough—the part in my constituency—has been agreed, and the service will, to a large extent, complement that provided in Finchley. That represents a net gain in day services for the borough, as well as providing support for people resettled from Napsbury. It will result in a more balanced day service across the borough for those who need drop-in support, as the number of places [illegible] fully taken up by the

resettled population. The development is due to open in October 1998, in new buildings that will be purpose-built. That takes us back to the Government's investment in mental health services. We must get rid of Victorian institutions, and provide the best possible buildings, as well as the best possible services, to ensure that people are looked after properly.

Communication is also important. As I said earlier, Members of Parliament and those outside need to bring home the problems of mental illness, and to try to improve public knowledge and understanding. We need to break down the hostility and fear. We are working hard locally to do that. At an early stage, the group recognised the need for a comprehensive and accessible guide to mental health services in Barnet, and subsequently supported a joint finance bid to enable MIND in Barnet to carry out research and publish such a guide.

I am pleased to say that the bid was successful: a guide was published recently, and has been praised as a clear and reasonable document making clear what facilities are available. That is a far more constructive approach than the Bill's narrow focusing on a small part of the whole. A further joint finance bid has been submitted for the employment of a short-term communications officer, whose post will be managed by the local trust. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us some encouragement about that bid.

The trust is employing a training development manager to work in the context of the joint mental health strategy. A commissioning programme has been set up; trainees join the commission when that is appropriate and practical, and there is potential for inter-agency cross-fertilisation in the course of seminars.

Three areas have been highlighted for next year: team development for community mental health trusts, working with people with dual diagnosis—the need for a co-ordinated approach to the problem of alcohol and drug addiction in conjunction with mental illness, which an Opposition Member mentioned—and the mental health needs of members of Barnet's Jewish community and ethnic minorities. It is important that we recognise the special needs of certain groups.

Dr. Whitehead: Are the examples of good practice that my hon. Friend has given being disseminated on more widely? Are other health authorities taking stock of what is being done in his constituency, and will they be taking some of those ideas up?

Mr. Dismore: That is an important theme in the White Paper, which was also highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health when he presented the White Paper, and in subsequent press coverage. It is important for examples of good practice to be spread throughout the health service. I hope that, as the White Paper's policies develop, the examples that I have given will be disseminated more widely. The training programme in my local health authority involves a partnership approach, and a recognition of special needs in the community.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for New Forest, East for giving me the opportunity to raise the issues that I have raised, and to explain what the new Labour Government are doing, certainly in my area. I am glad to have been able to flag up the problems that can arise, and to tell the House how our Government are addressing them, vigorously, by producing new guidelines. I think that the partnership approach adopted by the Government, and a rounder view of mental health, represent the way forward; but they are not the way forward suggested in the Bill.

1.3 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): We have been treated to a tour d'horizon longer than the introductory speech of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). The kindest thing I can say—I say it as one solicitor to another—is to remind the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that Dr. Johnson said on a similar occasion that he would not speak ill of any man but he believed the gentleman was an attorney.

I shall curtail my remarks as much as I can to give the Minister the opportunity to say either that this Bill, like any private Member's Bill or any Government Bill, is not perfect but that it should go to Standing Committee to be improved, or to give Labour Members the opportunity to talk it out, which appears to be their intention.

Less contentiously, I echo Government and Opposition Members in complimenting my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East on the way in which he introduced the Bill. Introducing a Bill, whether as a Minister or private Member, is daunting. Those of us with experience of government, who have had help in assembling the material necessary for these occasions, can only marvel at what it must be like to do so without such assistance. The manner and style of his performance were remarkable.

One thing that has come across from the debate is that the people who get the worst deal as regards mental health treatment are often those whose background or propensities would give them no cause to think that they could ever get into such circumstances. Several instances have been cited of how the ordinary man in the street—the Minister or myself—could undergo an event so shattering that, perhaps for the first and only time in our lives, we need assistance.

The devastating effect that redundancy or job loss can have has already rightly been mentioned. I did matrimonial law almost exclusively when I was in private practice. Seeing the devastation that matrimonial breakdown can wreak on people who one would have thought were absolutely stable and capable of taking it makes one realise that we must ensure that such people, and everyone who needs the system, get appropriate treatment. The tragedy is that some 20 per cent. of those who suffer from acute reactive depression—I think that is the correct expression—take their own lives. The cruellest thing of all is that the statistics also show that such people, if they receive the right help, have the best prognosis.

Incredibly, one criticism of the Bill was that it is not ambitious enough. It is extraordinary for a legislature to say that, unless we can cure all the ills to which society is heir, we must not make any attempt at all. The point is at best naive and at worst bogus. If my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East had brought in a more ambitious Bill, he would have been criticised for trying to do things inappropriate for a private Member's Bill. We would have been told that it was far too difficult for a private Member to embark on such a radical piece of legislation, and that, if only he had come up with just one

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

or two ideas that were capable of being handled, things would have been different. We can treat that idea with the contempt that it deserves.

We have already heard several times about the Bill's contents, so I shall be brief. The purpose of clause 1—the idea that a health authority should have a strategy and be required to report on it to the Secretary of State—strikes me as unexceptionable. The fact that the best may do it already is no argument for objecting to the requirement appearing in the Bill.

However, I freely concede that if, in due course, the House takes the view that that argument is not sustainable, the answer is simple: we either amend the provision in an acceptable way in Committee or delete it. It is the skill of my hon. Friend's Bill, as he said in a phrase that I felt I recognised, that the Bill enables the Government to dine à la carte. They can take the bits that they want and discard the ones that they do not want. Without making free with my hon. Friend's Bill, I think that it is possible to remove clause 1 and still have something eminently worth while.

I make it plain for the record that the Opposition believe that the Bill should be accepted and go into Committee, where it can be improved, as can any Bill. It is inconceivable that anyone could seriously argue that clauses 2 and 3 should not pass into law. The idea that there should be single-sex ward areas—not wards but areas—in all existing psychiatric units has to be right. The idea that there should be security devices to prevent unauthorised intrusion also strikes me as entirely right. To refer to the speech of the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones), I find incredible the idea that, because one favours less hospitalisation, women should not be entitled to the protection that they need from indecent assault and rape in those hospitals that have to exist.

Some two weeks ago, of the 101 female Labour Members of Parliament—I compliment the Labour party on having so many female Members—92 turned up to vote against the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill, yet today, of the tiny number of female Labour Members who have come to the House, none can bring herself enthusiastically to stand by her sisters and say that the two anti-rape provisions in the Bill deserve to be passed into the law of the country. I find that shameful.

Mr. Boateng: There is a touch of nauseating hypocrisy about the hon. Gentleman's approach. If the Bill is such as to commend itself with such obvious force and vehemence to Her Majesty's Opposition, why did they not introduce a similar measure when they were in government?

Mr. Nicholls: One always knows when the hon. Gentleman is on a losing wicket, because he leaves behind his usual genial persona. As brick walls go, one has never seen better. Outside the House and sometimes inside the House, he is most genial. But it is my experience that when he knows that he has no case, he resorts to gratuitous abuse. Let me remind him of the point that has clearly escaped him so far. He is now in government.

I will tell the House in a moment the steps that the previous Conservative Administration took, of which Conservatives can rightly be proud. For the time being, the hon. Gentleman should accept that he is now in government. He has the good grace to smile. What he should be doing, in ways that I shall explain in a moment, is building on the good steps that the previous Administration took.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East indicated the level of support that he had received. He has received the support of a consultant psychiatrist, Dr. Harris, the sub-dean of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He referred to two other distinguished psychiatrists, Dr. Yonace and Dr. Tannock. Organisations up and down the land have said that they support the legislation.

It is worth quoting MIND. I do so not just because its views, of all views, ought to be taken seriously, but to make the point, as my hon. Friend was fair enough to do, that the organisation does not support every provision in the Bill. It says of the proposals in clauses 2 and 3:

"Mind's Stress on Women campaign which ran between 1992 and 1994 heard from women all over the country that they did not feel safe in services. Some talked of constant fear. Others chose not to use services because of the abuse that they, or women they knew, had experienced."

MIND gives two examples. A woman who wishes to remain anonymous—one can see why—said:

"I and a number of other women I know have had very bad experiences on mixed wards. A friend of mine was raped and I was harassed to death by men and the staff never intervened . . . The situation in the hospital was so awful I'd never go back there—you can't be ill in peace."

Another woman, whom MIND called "Carol"

"was raped while in a psychiatric hospital. The man had simply walked through the adjoining mixed ward into Carol's unattended dormitory and into her cubicle."

The Mental Health Act commissioners' national visit in 1996 has already been referred to, so I will not go into it at great length. It found that

"sexual harassment of female patients in psychiatric hospitals is rife. In just over half the wards visited it was discovered that women patients were being harassed by male patients. Problems included"

indecent exposure,

"physical assaults and verbal harassment."

As the seventh biennial report of the Mental Health Act Commission identified:

"Safety for women on psychiatric wards is a major issue."

During the course of its visit it found that

"just over . . . (35 per cent.) of women have access to women-only sleeping areas . . . a quarter (27 per cent.) have to pass male parts of the ward to reach women-only toilets, baths or showers . . . a third (32 per cent.) have access only to mixed sex toilets, bath or shower facilities. A small number (3 per cent.) use sleeping areas also used by men."

As a result of those findings, in January 1997—the date will be significant because it was before the election—the NHS chief executive, Alan Langlands, set health authorities in England the objective of providing safe facilities for mentally ill patients in hospital that preserved their privacy and dignity. As I understand it—doubtless the Minister will say something about it in due course—the report that he produced in August 1997 showed that that objective had been met by less than half the health authorities—some 43 per cent.

The answer to the Minister's intervention about what the previous Government did is that we drew attention to the problems in the patients charter. It was that charter

that told the public out there, not those of us who know about such things because of our particular interests, what was going on. It was drawn up in January 1995 and the progress made since then has meant that the agenda has been taken forward to protect some of the most frail and vulnerable women in society. The idea that we did nothing is absolutely wrong. Today, we are entitled to tell the Minister that the previous Government followed a creditable agenda, and we are asking him to build on it.

It would be accepted by those hon. Members who have heard me before that I never indulge unnecessarily in party political exchanges—*[Interruption.]* That only goes to show that not everyone knows me. I did not expect or intend to point out the track record of the previous Conservative Government. On matters such as this the public expect us to be able to debate without bringing in such political points. I was provoked into referring to our record by the Minister, who felt, unwisely, that he should draw attention to it. Our record was wholly creditable and the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East modestly invites the Government to draw upon it.

Before I was provoked by the Minister, I mentioned the organisations that support the purposes of the Bill. As has already been said, SANE supports it, as does the National Schizophrenia Fellowship, which has stated that it

"agrees with the principle of providing security within psychiatric units but would again encourage active consultation with those using the facility . . . to ensure a therapeutic environment which might be lessened by over-zealous security measures."

As I have said, SANE welcomes the Bill in similar terms and the British Medical Association generally supports it.

MIND has its reservations about clause 1. Yesterday, I had a long session with Margaret Pedler, the policy director of MIND, and I am extremely grateful to her for the time that she spent talking me through the implications of the Bill. She believes that the drawback with clause 1 is that it might have the effect in due course of distracting attention from other people—if I may use shorthand, less fashionable people—who might need to be cared for. She is concerned that the clause might be interpreted in such a way that resources are taken from one group of patients and concentrated on another.

If I thought that that was likely to happen, I would agree with Margaret Pedler's fears about the clause posing a great risk, but I do not believe that that would be a consequence of it, as drafted. I have discussed it with my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East, and it is not his intention that the clause should be seen to operate in that way. If Labour Members are seriously concerned that the problem identified by Margaret Pedler might arise, let them discuss it in Standing Committee. They could get rid of that clause if they wanted, because it is not essential to the Bill.

As for the contributions from Labour Members, I will not go through the litany of shame because I am sure that the press will be capable of doing so, but I was saddened when I listened to the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen), who used to be a nurse. In the past, she has been able to say what she does when asked by someone at the bus stop and—unlike the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and me—get a reasonable hearing. When I said to her that, whatever her other reservations, surely as a nurse she would want at least the sexual harassment provision to go forward, she replied, "I will deal with that later in my speech." I listened carefully to her speech, but she did not do so.

We are all busy on Fridays. No hon. Member should be criticised for not showing up for a Friday debate. However, when a Member does turn up and when the Whips say, "We don't want the Minister to have to talk out the Bill: we want you to earn your spurs by doing it for him," that Member puts himself on record. I would not want to be a former nurse who had played a part in talking out this Bill—although perhaps that will not be what happens to it.

I was minded to speak for longer, but I shall not do so. The Minister and I have been in politics long enough to know that gratuitous abuse across the Dispatch Box will not deal with the concerns of people who back the Bill. He should remember that the person who has most helped my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East in framing the provisions is a long-standing member of the Labour party. That should be sufficient to make him realise that his response should not be to indulge in the sort of language and tactics he tried a few moments ago. There is a time for that sort of behaviour, but not on this sort of Bill.

The issues are as plain as they could possibly be—this Bill would protect some of the most frail and vulnerable people in society. It does not involve massive expenditure. Labour Members presumably feel that expenditure is all right sometimes, but they actually draw the line at putting locks on areas in wards to make sure that people cannot be raped and abused.

This is a modest Bill with modest proposals, which could go forward to Committee. If, ultimately, the Government were not satisfied in Committee, they could kill the Bill. We want to hear from the Minister today that either he will let the Bill go to Standing Committee, while reserving the right to kill it off in due course, or he will come up today with specific measures to implement clauses 2 and 3. If he does not do that, it will be a disgrace.

1.22 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to take part in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on bringing the subject to the House for debate. I agree with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) that it is almost forgotten in parliamentary debate and, indeed, in public debate.

Whatever we may think about the detail of the Bill, this is an invaluable opportunity to talk about the various issues surrounding mental illness and how we have historically provided and currently provide for people who are mentally ill—those who deserve our support either in recovering or through their illness. This debate is worth while in its own right, whether or not the Bill proceeds.

At first sight, the Bill is tantalisingly laudable. It enshrines a number of principles and aspirations which no one in the Chamber would seriously dispute. The difficulty to which Labour Members have drawn attention is not the principle of how to provide for the treatment and recovery of those suffering from mental illness, but whether the Bill makes a good job of doing that.

In my short time as a Member of Parliament, my approach to legislation has been to consider whether a measure improves what was there before; whether it is possible to achieve the aims of the legislation by other means, because we do not want to overburden those who

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

provide services in this country with new legislation every other day; and, finally, whether—however well-intentioned the legislation—the net consequence of what is to be enacted will cause side effects that will eventually do more harm than the good that was intended. My view of this Bill is that it falls foul of at least two of those criteria. That is I why I am unable to support the Second Reading. Although its underlying principles may be laudable, I cannot support it in detail; I cannot support what the Bill would end up as, or the consequences that would arise were it to be enacted.

I shall make a case for my stance by looking at where we have come from and where we now stand in respect of the provision of services for people with mental illness. We have heard a lot this morning about the so-called water-tower mental hospitals. That phrase entered public parlance in 1959, when Enoch Powell MP, making a speech to the National Association for Mental Health, described the Victorian-style asylums as

"isolated, majestic, imperious, brooded over by the gigantic water-tower and chimney combined,- rising unmistakable and daunting out of the countryside—the asylums which our forefathers built with such immense solidity."

As one who, at an earlier stage of his life, spent a long time advising health authorities and other agencies on how to provide and reprovide work rehabilitation, both within long-stay mental hospitals and in the community, when those hospitals had closed down, I can vouch for the accuracy of Enoch Powell's description. I have visited long-stay hospitals throughout the country and can tell the House that, when visiting one for the first time, if someone has been given confusing directions, they can soon orientate themselves by scanning the countryside looking for the water tower. By so doing, they find their way to the hospital, and also see the relative isolation it suffers from the rest of the town.

I want to correct one misconception, voiced by hon. Members on both sides of the House, about the background to those long-stay hospitals. It is relevant to our debate because, interestingly enough, the purpose of our Victorian forefathers in building those asylums was to provide the sanctuary described by the hon. Member for New Forest, East. Some of the foremost social reformers of the day were behind the move to build what we now call the water-tower hospitals. They did so because of the appalling conditions of treatment for people with mental illness that existed before those hospitals were built.

Those of us with an historical bent will know the history of the original Bedlam and what certain members of the upper classes regarded as the sport of going to Bedlam at the weekend to look at the lunatics raving there. The idea motivating the reformers of the Victorian age was that that was not the way in which we should treat people in a civilised society. They therefore developed hospitals in leafy surroundings and with clean air and nice grounds—indeed, several had hospital farms. They provided a secure environment—a therapeutic environment, I dare say—and sanctuary for those who, the reformers realised, needed such treatment in order to recover from their illnesses.

Sadly, that movement effectively came to an end toward the end of the Victorian era, and a substantial change in attitude came over the people who were subsequently responsible for provision. They regarded those hospitals not as sanctuaries, but as places of containment. They believed that those people should be placed away from society's view, away from towns; that they should be shuffled away into those hospitals, which became not sanctuaries, but prisons for very many people.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) said succinctly that many people who had committed no other crime than to be slightly on the wrong end of what society believed to be the right thing to do found themselves incarcerated in long-stay mental hospitals as a result of having a baby out of wedlock or acting oddly in a public place. Eventually, they became institutionalised.

The main criticism to be made of those facilities as they were envisaged in Edwardian times and at other times early in the 20th century is that, by placing a person in such an institution, one often condemned them to life imprisonment because they found it impossible to get out of the system once they were in it. To a large extent, people became institutionalised after 20, 30 or 40 years in such an institution and were incapable of making a new life in the outside world if they were discharged—which often they were not.

The change came with the discovery and introduction of psychotropic drugs in the 1960s. It became possible to use medication and newly developed rehabilitative facilities to rehabilitate many people who had been placed in a back ward, away from public view. Some of the Victorian pioneers' original ideas concerning sanctuary were reintroduced. In a secure environment, work rehabilitation facilities, occupational therapy, community farms and art therapy were developed, with a view to re-establishing long-stay patients in the community.

The origin of the change in thinking about the reprovision of facilities in the community was the move to close the long-stay asylums—the water-tower hospitals. It was thought that people should not be incarcerated, that even people who had been in a mental hospital for a long time had a future, like anyone else, and that that future should be in society if possible.

I shall quote briefly the words of a consultant psychiatrist at the then Herrison hospital in Dorchester, who rejoices in the name of Dr. Donald Dick. He gives an apt description of the thinking behind such reprovision.

Mr. Spring: This is a fascinating insight into the history of mental institutions and the development of drugs. However, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman now focuses on the serious issues of current importance in the Bill, affecting the security of women patients especially, and that he addresses clause 2. If he does not, he will demean the whole process of our serious consideration of mental health in this country.

Dr. Whitehead: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his suggestion. However, in order to comment seriously on the issues that we are discussing, it is necessary to lay the groundwork so that people can understand what lies behind them. The hon. Gentleman mentioned security for women in hospital. That relates to the whole history of people being locked up in psychiatric institutions, as I have described.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Whitehead: If hon. Members will stop intervening, I shall explain. However, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, albeit reluctantly. I do not see how the history of people being locked up in establishments has anything to do with the proposal that people who go into establishments, usually voluntarily, should be able to lock out people who intend to attack them.

Dr. Whitehead: I am happy to explain my views. I would have come to clause 2 later, but I will explain my views now. Important points have been raised. I share the hon. Gentleman's view that, if people are taken out of the community, either voluntarily or involuntarily—as the hon. Gentleman says, it is voluntarily in most cases—they must have a strong expectation that they are going to an environment that is safe and "therapeutic", as the Bill says—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is not listening to my reply.

My comments on clause 2 relate to the history of people's incarceration in long-stay mental hospitals. I accept that the clause is honourably framed and well intentioned, and is intended to deal with an issue that has been raised in the debate. I ask hon. Members, however, to look at the detailed wording of the clause.

Mr. Nicholls: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned only about the detailed wording, I can give him some assurance. The matter can be dealt with in Committee. The public will want to know whether the hon. Gentleman is or is not in favour of women being protected from indecent assault and rape by proper security devices being placed on doors. Even the hon. Gentleman should be able to get his mind around that prospect in the time available.

Dr. Whitehead: I regret the aggressive tone of that intervention. The answer to the question is, of course, yes—there's a surprise. It is facile to assume that, because I agree that women should be safe in the hospitals to which they have been committed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, I have nothing further to say on the subject. The care, including treatment and rehabilitation, of people who suffer from mental illness is complex nowadays.

Proposed section 142B(b) refers to

"the fitting of appropriate security devices to all room and ward doors in all existing psychiatric units to prevent unauthorised intrusion."

That wording is unambiguous. By law, health authorities will have to fit such devices in all institutions where people who suffer from mental illness are being looked after.

I speak now from direct experience of looking at the way in which people lived in long-stay mental hospitals in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I looked at their daily lives, at what hope they had of resettlement in the community and at what facilities they enjoyed, whether work rehabilitation, occupational therapy or other activities. A balance must be struck—I understand that it is a complex and difficult issue—between security and ensuring that people in those institutions feel that they are in a genuinely therapeutic environment and will benefit from their stay. That issue has properly been raised today.

The reason why I answered yes to the question put by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) is that of course I believe that security is important for women in long-stay mental hospitals, just as it is for everyone else. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked me a question, but I am afraid that he does not want to listen to my reasoned answer.

My concern—I hope that Opposition Members will accept it—arises from my knowledge and understanding of such environments: it is important to ensure that people within hospital grounds have the maximum opportunity to feel as free as possible within the hospital environment.

Dr. Julian Lewis: If the hon. Gentleman went to stay in a five-star hotel, there would be a lock on the bedroom door, which he could open from the inside but which no unauthorised person could open from the outside. That would not add to a sense of oppression or over-security. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that it would, I suggest that he take the lock off the front door of his home. I am sure that he has no intention of doing so.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the clause, which refers to

"the fitting of appropriate security devices to all room and ward doors"—

not just to bedroom doors. That requires local health authorities to fit a lock on every single door in long-stay mental institutions.

Dr. Lewis: The clause says "appropriate" security devices—appropriate, appropriate, appropriate.

Dr. Whitehead: With respect, the clause says that appropriate security devices should be fitted

"to all room and ward doors".

The hon. Gentleman will agree, because this is his Bill, that every single room and ward door must have an appropriate security device, which means, unless my command of English is seriously amiss, some form of lock or method of securing the door.

The result is that in areas of long-stay mental health hospitals where people undertake precisely the sort of therapeutic activity that the Bill advocates, the doors will have locks. In my extensive visits to many mental hospitals, the only place where I have seen that regime carried out is Rampton.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman puts himself at odds with every mental health organisation, so he needs to know what he is doing. If we are to take him at face value as a genuine and sincere person who is trying to ensure that good legislation gets on the statute book, why does he not tell the Minister that he wants the Bill to go to Standing Committee so that the wording can be considered?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend the Minister has already asked the NHS executive estates agency to issue advice, which I believe it has, on the security and design of psychiatric units. That advice concerns locking bedroom doors and safeguarding personal property, en suite toilet facilities and observation arrangements. The advice that has been issued does precisely what I have

[Dr. Whitehead]

suggested: it ensures that areas of long-stay psychiatric hospitals that require proper security, for the reasons that have been expressed in the debate, are given that security.

I am attempting to distinguish between the blanket provision contained in the Bill—it is not easily amendable because it is at the heart of the principle of the Bill—

Dr. Lewis: It is easily amendable—the hon. Gentleman could delete the word "all".

Dr. Whitehead: What I appear to be having difficulty in getting Opposition Members to accept is—

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman's sincerity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr. Whitehead: I recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, hearing the hon. Member for Teignbridge state that party animus or personal unpleasantness rarely enter such debates. I am sorry that that has occurred only a few minutes after he made that remark. It reflects poorly on how I understood the debate should be conducted and on how the hon. Gentleman said that it should be conducted.

I hope that the Opposition will carefully consider the wording, if the Bill proceeds. If we place a blanket requirement on a health authority to provide security everywhere, the health authority will be subject to legal action if, for any reason, it fails to do so. The side effect of ensuring such security could conceivably be immensely detrimental to the therapeutic environment that the health authority is attempting to provide.

My visits to numerous long-stay mental hospitals have taught me that the health authority and the hospital managers should be allowed some discretion to provide security in appropriate places, and to provide relative freedom and a therapeutic environment, also in appropriate places, subject to the security that the staff of the hospital can provide.

I accept that that is a difficult strategy, and that a careful interpretation of security is necessary. On various occasions in long-stay hospitals, I observed that tools were available in the therapeutic workshop. People who were severely mentally disturbed were encouraged to take on board the possibility that, if they were discharged, they might be able to go to work again—not necessarily waged work, but perhaps therapeutic work in the community.

While those people are in hospital, it is necessary for them to undertake such therapeutic work and to be trained to use a lathe, an adze or a hammer. However, if so many security devices are put in their way in, around, to and from the workshop that it bears no resemblance to anything that they might experience in the outside world, that will do little to promote the object of the exercise, which is to resettle people in the community, if that is possible.

The only place in which I saw provisions such as those that would be the logical outcome of the clause was in a high security mental hospital for the criminally insane, not in units that provide acute intervention and therapeutic recuperation prior to rehabilitation in the outside world. I hope that I have responded adequately to the question posed by Opposition Members.

As a result of the changes in attitude to mental health in Britain that I have outlined, we embarked on the care in the community programme, whereby we have reduced the number of people in long-stay mental hospitals from a population of 150,000 in the early 1950s to the 32,000 beds currently provided—an enormous and welcome decrease.

I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) in the context of the continued provision of places in such long-stay mental hospitals, because we must distinguish between people who in previous generations were incarcerated for no good reason, against their will, in contravention of their human rights and in contravention of everything that we now believe is right in mental health provision, and people who require a brief respite—brief sanctuary—and the possibility of rehabilitation and re-establishment in the community once that episode has passed. We need to distinguish between the core provision—the 32,000 places—and the numbers originally in long-stay hospitals.

What we do not need to do is ask health authorities to plan for a number of beds as if we were re-creating the old long-stay mental hospitals. I understand that the Government have already asked health authorities to plan a service that will ensure that acute beds are available and will deal properly with the range of problems that it faces. The range of problems has widened in recent years.

I have already mentioned a particular hospital consultant. I shall now quote what he said about work in the outside world and what problems he saw facing the people who had been long-stay patients in his psychiatric hospital:

"The patients that I see are not usually so bothered by the loss or lack of income that comes from unemployment as they are by other feelings. Shortage of money is a difficult enemy but at least it is visible and there are some choices to be made in the combat. The real pain comes from the sense of uselessness, of not contributing, of not being able to describe oneself as part of the common endeavour . . . Unemployment is a strong predisposing factor in attempted suicide, the modern epidemic. Fifty per cent. of men of working age who attempt suicide are unemployed. The number of men in the age range of 20-35 is rising, as is the incidence of alcohol and drug related disorders. Surveys of patients in psychiatric admission units during Health Advisory Service . . . visits in early 1983 showed that as few as 5 per cent. of patients of working age have a job. Absence of paid employment is therefore a frequent accompaniment of mental illness or psychological distress. It may not be the sole cause, but it certainly makes the situation and treatment much more difficult."

As I said in an intervention, the care in the community policy was skewed by five years. While the old long-stay mental hospitals were being closed and before new provision was made in the community, many people were simply dumped in the community and left bereft of any services. That happened under the previous Government—whether or not it was their intention, it is what happened.

People who suffered the sense of uselessness and hopelessness to which the consultant referred find that they could not engage. All too often, they experienced what is known as the revolving door syndrome. They were readmitted to hospital because they could not cope. The facilities were not available, and they had to return to hospital, despite their best endeavours to stay out.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) have spoken for more than an hour in total. Is it the hon. Gentleman who wants the Bill to be talked out, or the Government?

Dr. Whitehead: This hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he does not agree with the Bill. I believe that I need to make a case for not agreeing with it, which I hope I have done in some detail.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I confirm that the hon. Gentleman has made his case in some detail. Like the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), he has spoken for longer than I did when I introduced the Bill. He has served his purpose, and his Whips will have noticed; his duty has been discharged, if not honourably. Why does he not now draw his remarks to a conclusion so that my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) can make his speech and so that the Minister can talk out the Bill in person?

Dr. Whitehead: The reason why I wish to continue until the end of my speech is that it makes a coherent case. As far as I am aware, the House wishes to listen to coherent cases. If I sit down, halfway through making my case—

Dr. Lewis: Is it the hon. Gentleman's intention to favour the House with another half an hour of his ruminations?

Dr. Whitehead: One does not have to be halfway through a speech to make half a case. I am attempting to make an entire case that is based on a coherent train of logic, during which I shall attempt to introduce various facts relating to it. Those two approaches are not necessarily conterminous in time.

The result of the community care policy introduced by the previous Government and the sad dissonance between the emptying of long-stay hospitals and the reprovision of facilities have meant that people suffering from mental illness, often severe, have suffered a severe diaspora. They are found in many different manifestations, not only in the old long-stay hospitals.

For example, it is estimated that about 60 per cent. of those who are long-term rootless have mental health problems, some of them severe. It is estimated that thousands of people who are suffering from severe mental health problems, or potential problems, are on remand for crime. They need not punishment for crimes, but support and treatment to allow them to live a life that they want to live that does not involve committing crimes.

It is estimated that about 40 per cent. of acute admissions involve people who have multiple problems relating to mental health. They have the problems that stem from having a severe and debilitating mental illness. At the same time, they are suffering from related problems associated with drugs and alcohol, which also need to be appreciated.

Against that background, we should say to health authorities, "We shall expect you to ensure that your services for people with mental health problems are the best that you can achieve. You should provide acute beds, rehabilitative services and support for people living in the community. Overwhelmingly, if you possibly can as a health authority, you should ensure that people are not admitted to hospitals in the first place so that they remain in and are supported in the community, and can return fully to the community when their particular episode of mental illness has passed." We should say all those things to health authorities.

We should also say to health authorities, "We shall ensure that you do all these things by allowing you to take seriously the complexity of the problem with which you are faced." There is the nub of the problem that is presented by the Bill. The Bill prescribes certain actions as a trump on all other actions so that the health authority has to do certain things, possibly to the detriment of other things.

Let us take, for example, people who are suffering from mental illness and a multitude of other problems. There is a need for new teams that can deal with multiple problems. We tend to have mental health teams that understand mental health and alcohol, and drug abuse teams that understand alcoholism and drug abuse. The idea of having teams that understand all those problems and the often complex actions that need to be taken to rehabilitate and return life chances to someone who has a multiplicity of problems is often not taken on board.

If the Bill were to be given a Second Reading—I return to the criteria that I mentioned when I first rose—the criteria that we have to bear in mind, one of the criterion is, or one of the criteria is—I am sorry. A criterion that we should be concerned about—one of the criteria is—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members will make me continue for even longer.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I believe that, in a former life, the hon. Gentleman was a professor. May I take it for granted that he was not a professor of English grammar?

Dr. Whitehead: I cannot say that I was a professor in English grammar. Were I to be a professor of English grammar, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I would continue in a much more tortuous way than I have.

One of the criteria that were at the heart of my checklist of how we should judge any legislation is whether there are any other unintended consequences of the proposed legislation that would outweigh the benefits.

My conclusion is that, first, there will be an unintended consequence in requiring health authorities to take action that they often know in their hearts will not be the best combination to deal with the very real issues that they face. Secondly, they will be required to implement a regime in their long-stay acute admission hospitals which they know is not conducive to the outcome that they wish to achieve.

That is why I oppose the Bill. I applaud its sentiments, but I am afraid that I cannot support it. I trust that Opposition Members will accept my sincerity in so doing, and that they will also trust my sincerity in my hope that the Government will take the difficult and complex action that is necessary to deal with the real issues that I have raised.

2 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). Rarely has anybody introduced a debate about something

[Mr. Richard Spring]

of such importance with such clarity and sincerity. I know of the extraordinary amount of work that he has undertaken in consulting individuals and organisations to bring coherence to the Bill and to present it to the House this morning. I unreservedly support him, and congratulate him on what he has done.

I do not propose to speak for very long, because we are all anxious to hear the Minister's reaction to the Bill. I am pleased to say that, on many issues, there appears to have been something of a consensus across the Chamber today, although we had a rather wild walk in the woods from two hon. Members on the Government Benches. At one point I felt that, rather like in a 747, an oxygen mask might just appear in order to give the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) some sustenance, but that did not happen. From the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) we had an interesting long diversion into the history of psychiatric ailments and the incarceration of people in the past.

It is true that in the past 20 years there has been a huge change in people's understanding and perception of mental illness. I entirely welcome it. There is not a family in the land who has not directly or indirectly been impacted in different ways by mental illness. Anybody who has seen it at first hand, or, indeed, as a Member of Parliament, knows the anguish and agony that it can cause.

There is no doubt that there has been a rise in psychiatric disorders in the past generation—much of it appears to be stress-related—schizophrenia, phobias, anxieties, addictive ailments, chronic depression and compulsive eating disorders. Twenty years ago, nobody had ever heard of chronic bulimia—it was not even defined as a word. The whole point about the Bill is that, in essence, it is beginning to address the very different mental disorders that have arisen and that will undoubtedly continue to arise as the way of life changes in our country.

In providing separate therapeutic environments, the Bill addresses a real and sensitive need in the way in which people who, tragically, suffer from mental disabilities or mental illness can be treated in proper and appropriate surroundings. The Bill addresses widely different needs and widely different acute mental illnesses.

Although it is true that the Department of Health requires health authorities to prepare a strategy for the provision of a comprehensive range of mental health services, in practice we know that that does not happen adequately. The key area of in-patientcare facilities needs to be specifically addressed, and the Bill does precisely that.

I pay tribute to Suffolk Health and Mid Anglia community health trust, with which I have worked on mental health issues since becoming a Member of Parliament. I have frequently visited ward G8 of West Suffolk hospital in Bury St. Edmunds, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley), to see for myself the conditions there and discuss with psychiatrists mental illness and the treatment of those who tragically suffer from it. I have often brought such issues to the attention of the House.

I should like to mention one aspect of the problem, which I ask the Minister to think about. It is described in a letter sent to me by somebody with whom I have considerable contact, and for whom I have considerable professional respect. Dr. Webb, the consultant psychiatrist at West Suffolk hospital, wrote:

"In the past month for a period of two weeks ending just over a week ago it was virtually impossible to admit either male or female adults of working age . . . to an acute psychiatric bed within reasonable reach of West Suffolk.

Male and female admission beds on Ward G8 of West Suffolk Hospital were filled immediately they became available but it was necessary for ward staff to check on a daily basis where the next available bed was, in the event that admission was unavoidable. Over the weekend of 23rd/24th November we confirmed that there was no available bed in the counties of Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire or Essex. Female beds were located in Boston, South Lincolnshire and in Leicester . . . The situation reached its most extreme on 1st December when the nearest female bed we could locate was in Hereford, a full day's journey by emergency ambulance had we needed to take advantage of it."

I ask the Minister to listen carefully to such comments. Undoubtedly, there is considerable pressure on psychiatric wards, due to the rise in the incidence—it would appear—of people who are suffering from mental illness for one reason or another, whether temporary or not.

Making that point and urging that the provision of beds be kept firmly in mind does not detract from the importance of care in the community for those who have mental problems. From talking to professionals in Suffolk, the feeling is that, certainly in that county, care in the community has worked reasonably well. There are now only nine beds for medium and long-stay patients under the age of 65 in west Suffolk. It is important to realise that the spectrum of provision needs to be built on as we address the problem in years to come.

The important thing about the Bill is simply this: as our understanding of the needs of people who have suffered or suffer from mental illness changes and progresses—there have certainly been significant changes of attitude over the years—we have come to appreciate that issues of single-sex psychiatric accommodation and ward provision need to be properly addressed. Although, in practice, such accommodation is provided in some parts of the country, it is not universal. The Bill seeks best practice across the country.

A balance must be achieved. There must be areas in certain psychiatric wards—I have seen them in my local hospital—where both genders can mix freely in certain circumstances, but it is absolutely right, for all the reasons suggested by hon. Members, that there are also areas where women particularly can feel secure and safe if they feel threatened in any way. As the Mental Health Act Commission pointed out, and as a number of hon. Members have mentioned, it is absolutely unacceptable that, in this day and age, there is inadequate access for women to lavatories and areas where they can be private and isolated from men. The Bill seeks to address that problem, at least in part.

It is true that, over the past generation, there have been considerable improvements in the treatment of diseases or ailments such as schizophrenia and psychotic behaviour, and in our ability to prevent relapses; but individuals can deteriorate very quickly. It is important for us to take care of people, and to deal with their specific therapeutic needs in in-patient facilities, as long as it is done in an appropriate way. All that is part of a spectrum of provision that I believe to be crucial.

The Bill merely amends an existing Act. It is narrow and relatively costless, and I feel that every hon. Member should be able to support it. If hon. Members feel

uncomfortable with some aspects of it, that is no reason to reject it outright. Given the importance of the issue, it is only right for a Standing Committee—perhaps a Special Standing Committee—to be set up to examine it properly.

An Opposition Member described mental health as the Cinderella of the NHS. I agree with that description, but, as our understanding of mental illness continues to improve, we must try to deal with it in a way that is appropriate to the needs of the age in which we live.

The Bill addresses key aspects of the protection and security of, in particular, female patients, and demands that health authorities draw up an appropriate strategy to deal with some of the main problems of mental illness. It is a Bill whose time has come. If the Government damage it irreparably, they will do a disservice to all who take a genuine interest in mental illness, all the organisations that lobby for the mentally ill, and, indeed, our constituents and their families.

2.12 pm

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): Because of the time, I will be brief.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) took umbrage earlier, but I was attacking her Government's lack of activity rather than her own record, which is commendable. If she felt that I was attacking her, I humbly apologise.

On the whole, the debate has been productive, but I was less than happy about two key elements. The first is the arrogance of Conservative Members, who seem to assume that, if we do not take the route outlined in the Bill, nothing will happen. Things are already happening; Conservative Members should catch up with what is happening in this and other areas of the health service, and help us.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). I congratulate him both on his success in the ballot, and on his splendid speech. If I were being nasty—like the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who is rather intemperate this morning—I would welcome him in his new, more genteel manifestation: he is no longer the muck-raker that he was in the 1980s. But that is by the by.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for showing us that, while he seems on the face of it to be being polite, he is really reverting to the true style that lies beneath the surface of his gentility.

Mr. McNulty: Many thanks. To use the words of a stimulating intellectual sedentary intervention from the hon. Member for Teignbridge, "You started it."

I am mindful of the time. I took notice of what the hon. Member for New Forest, East said. I found the comparison between a broken leg and a breakdown useful. I have some personal knowledge of friends who have gone through such terrible periods. Anyone would take a broken leg over a breakdown. He was right to identify the problems and to focus on the vulnerable, but the Bill does not offer solutions. It does not offer the sanctuary and asylum that is sought. For us to dine a la carte, there needs to be something on the menu; in this case, there is nothing but what the Government are already doing.

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNulty: No, I have only a minute.

To those who argued that a Standing Committee should have the chance to improve the Bill, I say, let the independent review group discuss the matter. With the best will in the world, any Standing Committee that we can offer will be as nothing compared with the expertise of the group's membership or that of bodies such as the National Schizophrenia Fellowship, SANE and MIND.

Let them discuss the serious issues raised in the Bill. Let the group work with the Government to develop some of the points made by the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). If we are to make progress, hon. Members should work with what is finally, after 18 years, on the table. I again congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East on raising the matter. In that spirit, I hope that, after today, all hon. Members, if they are serious, will work with the Government on this.

It was disgraceful for the hon. Member for Teignbridge to suggest that the absence of female Labour Members meant that they do not care about the vulnerability of women in mental health institutions to rape and assault. Anyone, including jumped-up lawyers sitting on the Front Bench—*[Interruption.]* I meant the Conservative Front Bench, I hasten to add—can play the silly game of how many Members are sitting on each side of the House.

We could have said the same last week about the special educational needs debate. I do not suggest that the absence of the hon. Member for Teignbridge meant that he does not care about children with such needs. He should withdraw the remark and apologise, or at least give it serious thought in his taxi home.

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The House owes the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) a debt of gratitude for bringing this subject before the House. He did so with great feeling and intellectual force. Almost without exception, the other contributions were of the highest quality. Hon. Members brought to the debate experience of their constituencies, and of the concerns and problems of their constituents and friends. Their previous experience of the matter qualified them to speak.

The House's concern about mental health is rooted in the anxiety about community care that exists in the public we seek to serve. That is the concern which the hon. Gentleman, in introducing the Bill, seeks rightly to reflect.

One of the most powerful speeches today came, not surprisingly, from the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). He draws on an unparalleled experience in the House on Social Services and Health Select Committees. He draws on that experience in a way that always commands respect. It did today.

I have had the advantage of considering the report of the Social Services Select Committee to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I commend it to the House. The lessons it sought to teach the House and the then Government apply as much today as they did then. Most powerfully, the Committee of which the hon. Gentleman was a member said in the 1984–85 Session:

> "The stage has now been reached where the rhetoric of community care has to be matched by action, and where the public are understandably anxious about the consequences."

That was some 13 years ago. Today we might say exactly the same thing.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

It must be said—I do not say it in a spirit of party political acrimony, but nevertheless I say it—that not enough has been done in the past 13 years. It is as a result of inadequate action on the problem over the 18 years of Conservative government that we have reached the pass we are in today, when the hon. Member for New Forest, East finds it necessary to introduce this measure. I owe it to the House—I intend to discharge this function in full—to explain fully what action the Government intend to take.

We shall begin by making sure that the NHS is put on a sounder footing. That is why a number of my hon. Friends have made reference to the NHS White Paper. The internal market has not helped the situation. I do not put it any higher than that for the purposes of today's debate, because there are other matters that we must deal with, but the reform of the internal market is essential to create the context in which it will be possible to deliver a comprehensive mental health service. With the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in that regard, that process has begun.

However, we need to go on from there. The same Social Services Select Committee rightly made the point that it was necessary to understand that community care would never be resource-neutral. I owe it to the House to make it clear that we accept that community care is not resource-neutral. I only wish that, when the Conservative party was in government, it had backed community care with the resources which at that time were made available by the sale and disposal of the sites of the old watchtower hospitals. Nevertheless, it did not happen. So we have to begin where we are.

I want to announce today that we shall make available some £5 million to mental health services to ease the pressure on acute beds this winter by buying extra residential or 24-hour nursing home places. That is important because those places of security, whether within the context of a hospital or without, make a valuable contribution to the crisis we face.

I want to draw the House's attention to another part of the report by the Select Committee on Social Services, which urged the House then, some 13 years ago, to face the fact that some people need asylum. I accept that, and the Government accept it. I also accept, however, as it said:

> "Asylum can be provided in a physical and psychological sense in the middle of a normal residential community: traditionally indeed, in the midst of a busy church."

It is right to recognise that, when we talk about places of tranquillity, to which the hon. Member for New Forest, East rightly referred, we have a duty to ensure not only that such places of tranquillity exist within district hospital and other hospital provision, but that community provision offers places of tranquillity. That is why we need the flexibility which is at the core of the Government's approach. The Bill presents some difficulties for me, because I fear that it would reduce an element of flexibility that must be present.

I want to make it clear that we will underpin our strategy with resources. We will increase next year's mental illness specific grant by £6 million to £73.3 million, an increase of 9 per cent. That is occurring in circumstances according to which there was no intention on the part of the Conservative party to make any such increase. It is money that we are making available for that purpose.

We will use the grant in two ways. It is intended that £2 million will be spent to extend the grant for services for children and adolescents with mental health problems. Local authorities will be eligible to bid for that money. That is vital when one considers the increase in the number of young men who are taking their own lives in circumstances about which, quite frankly, we as a nation should be extremely concerned. I know that the hon. Member for New Forest, East believes that his Bill would address such circumstances.

We will also be making £4 million available to the local authority mental health partnership fund to promote partnership working with the NHS and other agencies. We must take on board the vital contribution that is made not only by local authorities but by voluntary and charitable organisations. Hon. Members have drawn on such organisations' expertise and commitment in their constituency work and in their previous contributions to debate in the House. We know how much good work is being done out there, and new money will back it up.

We have gone beyond that, because we are concerned to make sure that the NHS responds. Both the funds I have mentioned will be used to foster local innovative projects and to develop best practice. That is of key importance.

We will go beyond that, however, because we take the view that it is necessary to find additional moneys, and we will do so. Some £4 million will be available in 1998–99 for the development of NHS mental health services, matching the local authority partnership fund. That is what we have to do to make a reality of the improvement in provision that we are concerned to bring about.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I thank the Minister for his generosity in giving way, and for the money that he is making available. Will he tell us, however, whether any of that money will be used to address the specific concerns in my Bill: that people cannot get into acute beds; that locks need to be fitted on doors; and that single-sex ward areas should be provided?

Mr. Boateng: We certainly intend that the money should be applied in such a way as to do just that.

I should now like to consider the specific concerns highlighted in the Bill. We have made it clear to the NHS that we expect the policy that is already in place to be carried forward. As for the NHS approach to mixed-sex wards, we expect it to take seriously the commitment that the Government have made, and will implement, on safety and security on wards.

Let us be very clear about what we are doing. We have been told by a substantial number of health authorities that they will not be able to deliver the objectives that have been set until after April 1999. That is not acceptable. We expect them to ensure that appropriate operational arrangements are in place to secure good standards of privacy and dignity for hospital patients.

We expect them to meet the requirements of the patients charter. We expect them to provide safe facilities for patients who are mentally ill, in order to safeguard their privacy and dignity.

That is why we have set in place a review, with health authorities, of any target that has been set after April 1999, and to consider what scope there is to bring that forward. A central monitoring system is being developed which will provide further regular information on authorities' performance against those objectives—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 16 January.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (BEER AND CIDER) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

GENEVA CONVENTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 March.

REFORM OF QUARANTINE REGULATIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 January.

COMPANIES (MILLENNIUM COMPUTER COMPLIANCE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 January.

HARE COURSING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 January.

WASTE MINIMISATION BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

PUBLIC HOUSE NAMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 13 February.

HARMON (CFEM) FACADES (UK) LIMITED v THE CORPORATE OFFICER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Resolved,

That this House, notwithstanding its right to exclusive cognisance of its proceedings, gives leave, in the action of Harmon (CFEM) Facades (UK) Limited v The Corporate Officer of the House of Commons, for reference to be made to such papers of the Accommodation and Works and Finance and Services Committees in the last Parliament as relate to the fenestration contract for the New Parliamentary Building and which are in the possession of the Corporate Officer in accordance with the duties placed upon him by the Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Act 1992; and that leave be given for the proper Officers of the House to produce the said papers and to attend to give evidence in the trial of the action.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

FISHERIES

Ordered,

That the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th December 1997, relating to Fisheries: total allowable catches and quotas 1998, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 17th December, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Fisheries not later than Eight o'clock; and that the Order of 5th December be discharged.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

Guy's Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of Guy's hospital and the London health review, within a few days of the expected announcement of the results of the review.

In opposition, the Labour party made a number of welcome and ambitious promises about the national health service. For example, it made a general promise to save the NHS. It also made many particular promises. One, oft repeated, was to save Guy's hospital.

I have five different leaflets produced by the Labour party and circulated by my opponent during the general election. On each of them is a sentence or two similar to:

"Shadow Health Minister Chris Smith has already pledged . . . that he will stop the Guy's closure programme on Day One of a new Labour government . . . Remember—if the Tories get back into government, then Guy's will close."

Well, the Tories did not get back into government—there is a Labour Secretary of State for Health and Labour Ministers. Today, before the announcement of the outcome of the London health review, I seek to ensure that the Labour party remembers its pledge. Labour said things like, "Others will talk, but only we can deliver." Now comes the time of truth.

On 20 June, the Secretary of State announced the details of the Government's review of health care in London. He announced that the review would be carried out by an independent advisory panel and, at that time, I welcomed the extent and the nature of the review. We now know that the review panel's report has gone to Ministers, but it has not yet been published. Will the Minister tell us explicitly when we can expect the report to be published; and do the Government intend to allow an interval between publication of the report and publication of their response to the panel's recommendations?

Day one of a Labour Government has passed; indeed, it is 32 weeks today that Labour entered office—more than 201 days. It is now clear that the future of Guy's hospital does not lie with the review panel; it has moved on to Ministers' desks and is clearly in the Government's hands. Today's debate represents a final effort to persuade the Government not only of their responsibility, but of the appropriate decision that I hope they will soon announce.

For those who are not aware, Guy's hospital is the older and more academically prestigious of the two hospitals that now form the Guy's and St. Thomas's hospital trust. The background is that the previous Government endorsed a strategy to run down Guy's hospital—to reduce the number of beds from about 1,000 to about 100 and move large numbers of its internationally renowned services away from the London Bridge site. That was a political decision by the then Secretary of State, and Labour Ministers will have to make an equally political decision on whether they follow the recommendations of the independent advisory panel chaired by Sir Leslie Turnberg, either in part or in whole, or whether they reject them.

The public do not yet know what the recommendations are, but Ministers do. Labour will be forgiven for the fact that they did not save Guy's on day one of a Labour Government. However, by the people who use Guy's and work there and by the million and more people who sent to the House in the previous Parliament a petition in support of the retention of Guy's hospital—one of the largest petitions ever presented to Parliament—the Government will be forgiven only if they act to save Guy's when they make their announcement in the very near future. I hope that the Government understand that there is both huge public support and an extremely strong set of arguments for their reaching precisely that conclusion.

I notice that, coincidentally, there is large article in today's *Evening Standard* by the health correspondent Jo Revill, who interviewed the new chief executive of the King's Fund, Rabbi Julia Neuberger. The quote at the top of the article is:

"Labour must listen to the people on London hospital closures and health care."

I am sure that Rabbi Neuberger's strong views will also be heeded.

The Minister used to work within the shadow of Guy's hospital at B. M. Birnberg & Co., solicitors in my constituency. His old firm is one of the strongest advocates of the hospital's cause, for which I am grateful. He will know that Guy's is a three-phase hospital development. The original hospital, built in the 18th century, has given way to something that has effectively been rebuilt in its entirety since the last war.

New Guy's house was built in the 1950s. In the 1970s, to mark the hospital's 250th anniversary, a 30-storey tower was built, which is now one of the great—although perhaps not architecturally—landmarks south of the river. The third building, Thomas Guy house, has just been opened for public use. The Queen, who opened the second building in 1976, has agreed to open the third building on 18 March 1998.

It would be nonsense and a scandal if the Queen were to be invited to open the third phase of what was the flagship hospital in the national health service at a time when the Government had endorsed the trust's proposal to mothball one of the buildings, not to use as many as eight floors of the tower building and not to use much of the brand new Thomas Guy house for the purpose for which it was built. It would also be nonsense if, during the next year or so, public money were spent on building other NHS buildings to do what the Guy's hospital buildings were specifically designed to do.

In the few minutes available, I shall present to the House the most up-to-date evidence that Guy's is needed as an integral part of the network of health services in London and beyond, and I shall do so in the context of previous debates, but without replicating any of the arguments that were made in them.

This is our fifth debate on Guy's hospital in the past four years. This is the fourth consecutive year in which there has been such a debate. Not all the previous debates were initiated by me; one was initiated by Conservative

Back Bencher Sir Roger Sims when he represented Chislehurst, and the case for Guy's hospital has been widely supported from both sides of the House by hon. Members who are now Ministers and by members of the current Opposition. Uniquely, this fifth debate is probably the last chance to put the very strong case for Guy's hospital before a decision is taken.

The Tomlinson report, which all those involved in London health matters have studied, decided that there was no need for four accident and emergency departments in south-east London, and effectively deemed Guy's to be the most expendable, but the recommendation was acknowledged to be based on data that have since been shown to be flawed and inaccurate. Sir Bernard Tomlinson, who produced the report, said that himself. As long ago as 1995, in an interview with the *Evening Standard*, he

"admitted that he should have had more statistics in his possession before he made the recommendations that led to . . . the run-down of Guy's Hospital".

Those recommendations were based on the assumptions that demand for emergency services was falling and that resources would be transferred from the acute sector to the community sector, reducing the need for London or south London hospital care. National and local trends over the past five years have disproved those assumptions.

Attendances at A and E at both Guy's and St. Thomas's are rising rapidly. That trend in emergency admissions is mirrored throughout the United Kingdom, especially in inner-city areas. The statistics matter, so I shall give them to the House. At the moment, there are just under 75,000 attendances per year at Guy's and just over 90,000 attendances at St. Thomas's: 165,984 attendances in all.

Assuming a 9 per cent. growth in accident and emergency attendances during the next five years, matching the growth in the previous five years, attendances at the two hospitals will be more than 212,000 in five years' time. Attendances at Guy's alone are projected to increase to more than 111,000. The relevance is that that number of attendances rivals and exceeds the numbers at some of the biggest and busiest A and E departments in the UK, yet there is still a proposal, as of today—a legacy of the previous Government—to consolidate both A and E departments to give an accident and emergency department attendance well in excess that of any other hospital in the United Kingdom, and way above the recommended size of any casualty department and accident and emergency unit.

The biggest accident and emergency department in the whole of England is Nottingham, which handles 127,000 attendances a year. The biggest in Scotland handles 91,000 attendances a year, and the biggest in Wales handles 87,000 attendances a year. It is clear that one hospital—at the moment it is proposed that it be St. Thomas's—not only could not cope with 200,000 annual attendances but should not be asked to cope with them. Hospitals generally cannot cope with that many people.

That is not just my view. The Minister may remember the Audit Commission's recent report on accident and emergency services. It made it clear that the minimum number of attendances per year should be 50,000. The commission argued that, if there were fewer than 50,000 attendances, it was difficult to defend accident and emergency departments, but that, if there were more than 50,000, their existence was justified. Guy's is likely to cope with double those figures.

Even if some of the work load were taken elsewhere and even if the hospital could cope, we are looking at one hospital over the river taking almost double the number of attendances it has been designed to take, in its expanded form. It is obvious to anyone who has looked at the accurate and up-to-date figures that, if anybody were—I put this carefully—mad enough to follow through that proposal, there would be hugely longer waiting times, poorer outcomes and probably a total inability by the local trust to cope with demand.

I do not know what the recommendations are, but I ask Ministers to look at them in light of the latest figures I have given. They should accept that, on the basis of the figures and the academic support for them, there is a continuing need for the accident and emergency department at Guy's hospital.

The old plan skewed provision in a way that was almost impossible to justify. The current idea is that Guy's will be a planned care centre and that St. Thomas's will take the acute and emergency care. One might think that that implied that there would be an equal number of beds at each site, but, in fact, the proposal is for the opposite. Guy's has 400 beds, but the current proposals—which have varied hugely even during this year—are that there should be about 153 NHS local hospital trust beds at Guy's. One hundred of them will be for urology and orthopaedics, and 50 will have no very discernible use.

If the proposal goes ahead, apart from the illogicality of the odd 50 beds, we shall end up with the site that has all the out-patients, the site that has all the space, the site that has all the buildings and the site that has the medical and dental hospital having barely 100 patients. That is also mad. If we are to have a premier world teaching hospital, we need some patients with whom to teach students. We need to integrate planned care—elective care—for out-patients and in-patients. I accept that one can concentrate acute services on one site; that is perfectly logical. It is, however, illogical to say that we do not need all the specialist services for planned care to be in the same place as the specialist services for day admissions.

I give the Minister an example. We have just built, as part of Thomas Guy house, all the new wards for the ear, nose and throat specialty. A contract is waiting to be signed which would rip out the wards for that use and would transfer patients across to the other hospital site, although out-patients would still go to the Guy's hospital site. That is illogical and a huge waste of money, because it is likely to cost about £1 million just to remove the wards.

We would have a transfer of beds producing an absolutely illogical under-provision at Guy's under a plan that would not provide enough beds across both sites. I stress to Ministers—I think that they are sympathetic to this point—that all parts of the country need adequate beds. We need, of course, to have adequate services generally, but not having enough beds is the crisis that all Ministers have to face up to. I hope that they will be brave and strong enough to do that. If they are, we shall support them.

The United Medical and Dental School of Guy's and St. Thomas's, which, as a result of legislation passed in the previous Parliament, has just been merged with King's college in the Strand, is one of the most highly rated medical and dental schools not just in the UK but in the world, according to the latest medical school assessment. The dental school is the only one in England with a

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

five-star research rating, and the medical school is one of only a small number with a four-star rating. Guy's continues to offer unique opportunities for first-class teaching. If it is to sustain its worldwide reputation, we must ensure that the research and teaching—pre-clinical, clinical and medical sciences—are carried out on the same site as the beds and the out-patient department. That is because it is in a brilliant place in terms of medical facilities.

Sadly, Southwark continues to be one of the most deprived local authorities in England. We rank 364th out of 366 in the Jarman index; we are only two from the bottom in terms of deprivation, based on social, economic and demographic criteria. We therefore need the best services for the local community, as well as to maintain Guy's worldwide reputation.

The issue may come down to cost, although I hope that the case is made on other arguments. The current proposal is to build a women and children's hospital over the river from here, at a cost of some £56 million but with a total spend of between £115 million and £200 million. It will not all be public money; some will be special trustees' money. It would not be acceptable to the rest of the NHS, which is desperately crying out for money, that public or charitable money is spent on a building on one hospital site when the other hospital site in the same trust has the facilities needed to carry out the work. We could have the women and children's service at Guy's. Those facilities should be used and not transferred.

When the Secretary of State took office, he said that he did not wish to become notorious for closing Bart's hospital. He said that he did not want on the wall of Bart's two plaques, one saying "Opened by Rahere in 1123" and the other saying "Closed by Frank Dobson in 1997". Will Ministers ensure that Guy's does not suffer the same fate? No logic or argument requires there to be a plaque saying "Guy's hospital—founded by Thomas Guy in 1726, destroyed by Virginia Bottomley, Stephen Dorrell and Frank Dobson in 1995–98".

The people want Guy's hospital; the NHS needs Guy's hospital; the arguments support Guy's hospital. I hope that the Minister understands the importance of making a decision which, in the next few days, secures the future of Guy's as one of the pre-eminent flagships of the British national health service.

2.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is a stout and knowledgeable defender of Guy's hospital. He brings to the debate considerable experience and knowledge, and real commitment. He will understand that Ministers are currently considering the outcome of Sir Leslie Turnberg's deliberations on this and other matters.

We promised in opposition a review of London's health service, and we shall deliver it. We need to get health services in London right and to tackle the causes of concern about gaps and shortcomings in provision. Our vision for health care in London is about ensuring that all Londoners have accessible local services, GP practices and clinics, and are supported by specialist advice, care and treatment in hospital and community settings. Accident and emergency and ambulance services must be capable of meeting foreseeable needs.

London has a worldwide reputation as a leading light in medical teaching and research, and it is vital that we retain and build on that reputation. Over many years, Guy's has made a considerable contribution to that reputation. It is and will remain a first-class medical resource.

The problems that Guy's has experienced are largely the result of the actions of a discredited Tory Government, rejected at the polls, who were responsible for forcing the NHS to chase short-term commercialisation at the expense of planning sensibly for the longer term. Real constraints and obstacles were put in the way of the NHS when it came to deciding how best to invest for the future. The situation at Guy's is a perfect example of what happens when planning in what is supposed to be a national public service is reduced to tearing apart: competition takes the place of co-operation, and there is a lack of common aims.

We are in the business of reversing that process. The presentation by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of a White Paper on the future of the NHS was part of that. We are reinstating the partnership model, abolishing the internal market, and replacing the fragmentation that characterised it with partnership and co-operation. We are replacing self-interest with new arrangements to share best practice. We are working incrementally to that end, through a rolling programme of change.

We moved quickly after the general election to disentangle some of the worst problems that we inherited on 1 May. We appointed Sir Leslie Turnberg and an advisory panel chaired by him to assist in taking forward the agenda for health in London. The panel is independent and distant from government. It presents its report for the consideration of Ministers, who will reflect on it with the care and attention that the hon. Gentleman would expect.

The hon. Gentleman makes his contribution to the debate, which my ministerial colleagues and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take into account, alongside a range of other contributions from right across the political and community spectrum of the community that he represents. I have not worked in Southwark—in the shadow of Guy's, as the hon. Gentleman puts it—for a decade now, but I have happy memories of that time and of the distinguished contribution that Benedict Birnberg made to the campaign for Guy's.

The hon. Gentleman can be assured that we will take forward our strategy for health in London by investing cost-effectively in the future, to ensure that the people of London, and of Southwark and Bermondsey, get the health service that they deserve. He has my assurance that the scheme proposed by the Save Guy's campaign will be given the attention that it deserves, alongside the other proposals that he knows are on the table. The concerns that he raised in the debate will be taken into account.

No one who cares about Guy's and the future of the NHS in London can view with equanimity the impact of the uncertainty on staff and patients. We will move as expeditiously as appropriate to bring forward our proposals subsequent to the London review. We have begun the

process of rebuilding the NHS. It is a process that will be carried forward in a spirit of partnership and co-operation, respecting the needs, concerns and views—views strongly felt and well articulated—of the local communities, including that represented by the hon. Gentleman.

We will make sure that London gets the health service that is its due, one that is true to the spirit that has always shaped it, one of service, of caring and of community. That is the challenge. I believe that together we can meet that challenge and deliver to London, including the people of Bermondsey and Southwark, the health service that we all want—one based on excellence and patient care.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 1 December 1997

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Indemnity Undertakings

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many indemnity undertakings were given by departments under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980 for the six month period ended 30 September; and what was the value of *(a)* any contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time under that section which remain outstanding as at 30 September, *(b)* non-statutory government indemnities in respect of loans handled by the Government Art Collection which remain outstanding as at 30 September and *(c)* non-statutory undertakings to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection which remain outstanding at 30 September. [18872]

Mr. Chris Smith: The provision for the Government Indemnity Scheme is made by the National Heritage Act 1980. The scheme facilitates public access to loans of works of art and other objects for public display made to museums, galleries and other such institutions by private owners and non-national institutions. It does this by indemnifying lenders against loss or damage to their loan. Loans covered by the scheme must be for public benefit. The scheme also covers loans of such objects for study purposes within borrowing institutions where this would contribute materially to the public's understanding or appreciation of the loan. Examples of this are enhancing interpretation or explanation to the public of objects and bringing into the public domain the conclusions of any study.

In the six month period ended 30 September 1997, the following undertakings to indemnify were given under section 16 by the relevant Departments for objects on loan to national and non-national institutions:

	Numbers
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	579
Scottish Office Education and Industry Department	82
Welsh Office Education Department	75
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	22

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of undertakings given at any time under section 16 and which remained outstanding as at 30 September 1997 is:

	£
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1,504,907,510
Scottish Office Education and Industry Department	123,023,100
Welsh Office Education Department	69,000,000
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	5,460,674

The value of non-statutory Government indemnities to cover loans handled by the Government Art Collection and which remained outstanding as at 30 September 1997 is £9,000,000.

The value of non-statutory undertakings given to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection and which remained outstanding as at 30 September 1997 is £202,538,452.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his policy on *(a)* exemptions and *(b)* derogations from the national minimum wage for employees in (i) the tourist industry and (ii) leisure and related industries. [17614]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government's intention is to introduce a single national minimum rate. We will set the rate in the light of advice from the Independent Low Pay Commission appointed earlier this year, and taking account of prevailing economic circumstances. Many organisations representing the tourism, hospitality and leisure sectors are invited to submit written evidence to the Commission.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public appointments he has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16774]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have made 60 appointments and reappointments since 1 May. Of these 11 are remunerated (18 per cent.).

The information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all Departments in an aggregated form.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what steps he is taking to secure a lasting legacy from the Millennium Experience at Greenwich; and if he will make a statement. [18923]

Mr. Mandelson: When the Government announced in June its decision to go ahead with the Millennium Experience at Greenwich, it was on the basis of 5 clear commitments. One of these was that there would be a lasting legacy. The Government remains determined to secure long-term benefits for the nation from the Millennium Experience, and has sought outside advice on how to maximise these legacies. Earlier this year the Government invited Mr. Dennis Stevenson to assess the prospects. I am extremely grateful to Mr. Stevenson for the advice which he has now provided, and am pleased to place in the Library of both Houses a copy of a letter to me summarising his conclusions. His analysis, which the Government accepts, shows first that a number of valuable legacies can already be identified. Specifically,

the Millennium Experience is acting as the catalyst for English Partnerships' reclamation of derelict and polluted riverside land at Greenwich—a site of a size and potential unique in Western Europe; providing the platform for the pioneering Millennium Village launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in July; stimulating improvements in public transport, Thames river services, roads, and pedestrian walkways on the Peninsula; and using the Dome to promote national awareness and long-term taking-up of IT based learning, for example through the University for Industry and the National Grid for Learning.

There is a range of possible long term uses for the Millennium Experience Dome itself. These include developing the Dome as: a new arena for participation and spectator sports; a TV or film production studio and visitor centre; and using the site for a large scale international convention centre. These ideas serve to illustrate the Dome's future potential, and reflect the steps which have been taken to ensure the Dome can have a long life. Commercial interest in acquiring the Dome is, however, likely to be maximised in 2000, when it can be seen successfully in operation, and when commercial and popular awareness of the site is at its height. The Government will therefore decide on the Dome's long term future at that time. Meanwhile, I invite those with serious interest in the Dome's future use to register their ideas (which should not involve additional cost to the Exchequer) and to hold exploratory discussions with us. Proposals may either be for its use at Greenwich (where in 2000 it will occupy a 40 acre site) as a complement to English Partnerships' high quality and lasting development of the Peninsula, or for its transfer to another part of the United Kingdom.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contingency planning is being made in the event of failure of *(a)* Government services and *(b)* business arising from the year 2000 computer problem. [18025]

Mr. David Clark: (a) I have asked Ministerial colleagues to ensure that their Departments have contingency plans in place to cope with major systems failures, and that these are adequate to deal with any unforeseen Year 2000 processing problems.

(b) Mr. Don Cruickshank, Chairman of Action 2000, the new Government initiative set up to help business tackle the problem, will encourage businesses to undertake their own contingency planning.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Congo

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the total level of aid paid to the Congo in the current financial year *(a)* directly and *(b)* via other agencies; what amount is planned for 1998–99; and if she will make a statement. [18072]

Clare Short: All donors suspended development assistance to the Government of Zaire in 1992. Since then, substantial amounts of emergency and rehabilitation assistance have been provided. This year the UK has provided almost £1 million in bilateral emergency assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, our contribution to the EU programmes in health and democratisation is estimated at £9.6 million.

We shall continue to provide emergency assistance in 1998–99 if it is needed. Future development assistance will depend on the strength of the development partnership which can be established with the new Government; its commitment to poverty alleviation; and our capacity to deliver an effective programme.

PRIME MINISTER

Political Donations

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister if he advised the Cabinet Secretary of the fact that Mr. Ecclestone was a donor to the Labour party before his meeting with Mr. Ecclestone on 16 October. [18269]

The Prime Minister: No. I would not expect to do so.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Prime Minister if the terms of reference of the Social Exclusion Unit will include people aged over state retirement age. [17916]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The Social Exclusion Unit's work programme is currently being finalised and will be published very soon. A number of the issues the Unit is being asked to address will bear on the needs of people over state retirement age.

Mr. Ecclestone

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Prime Minister when Mr. Jonathan Powell was informed of the invitation to Mr. Ecclestone to visit the Prime Minister. [18374]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) on 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *269*.

Anglo-French Summit

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *270*, what factors led him to determine that the total cost of furnishing and decorating the Canary Wharf venue for the Anglo-French summit was below the EU tendering threshold. [18512]

The Prime Minister: The threshold for European Union tendering provisions is £108,000. As the cost to the Government for the furnishing and decoration of the Canary Wharf Tower will be approximately £15,000, it falls well below the threshold figure.

TREASURY

Inland Revenue Bailiffs (Totnes)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will advise the Inland Revenue to call off the bailiffs from Mrs. Joan Bridge-Taylor of Redhill, Jubilee Road, Totnes. [18052]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* It would not be appropriate for me to comment publicly on the tax affairs of an individual, but I shall write to the hon. Member about the matter he has raised.

Home Insulation

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the net cost of his proposal to cut the rate of VAT on energy-saving materials used in government-funded home insulation schemes. [18391]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs' recent review estimated that the annual cost would be £7.5 million.

National Asset Register

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to sell items on the National Asset Register. [17974]

Mr. Darling: It is for each individual department, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, to review its asset holdings as set out in the National Asset Register and decide whether they still meet the department's core aim and objectives. If they do not, then each department will need to decide the most appropriate response.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proposals he has for allowing United Kingdom citizens to pay taxes in euros before 2002; [15923]

(2) if his proposals to allow taxes to be paid in euros before 2002 will allow such payments to be free of exchange costs. [16696]

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what will be the cost of equipping *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* Customs and Excise to collect tax payments in euros after 1999; [15966]

(2) what will be the operation date for calculation of the exchange rate in force for payments of taxes in euros after 1999; and which government department will bear the exchange rate risk of such transactions; [15965]

(3) what assessment he has made of the need for additional computing and information technology resources for *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* Customs and Excise arising from their acceptance of payment in euros after 1999; [16179]

(4) what plans he has for the dissemination of information arrangements for tax payments in euros for 1999 to *(a)* professional tax advisers and *(b)* taxpayers. [16178]

Mrs. Liddell: The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are, like other organisations, reviewing their banking requirements and their systems to take account of the likely effects of the introduction of the Euro, including an increase in the demand for payment of taxes in foreign currencies. This review is being conducted in consultation with the Business Advisory Group established by the Chancellor to look at the practical and strategic implications of EMU which is, among other things, assessing legal, accounting and reporting issues arising from EMU and what information about EMU is needed by business. A report summarising the groups conclusions and recommendations will be published early in 1998. If the reviews lead to proposals to change the way the existing arrangements operate, the information will be disseminated promptly and in the appropriate way. Costs will be addressed once the full implications have been identified.

Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise already accept payment of tax in foreign currency, so there is no new principle involved in accepting the Euro from 1999. It is not expected that accepting payment in Euro on the same basis will require substantial additional resources.

Where tax payments to the Inland Revenue are made in foreign currency the net amount received conversion into sterling is the amount which the taxpayer is treated as having paid. So the exchange risk of a payment in euro will be borne by the taxpayer. Customs and Excise currently meet the costs arising from currency conversion on the relatively few payments received in foreign currencies. This policy may need to be reviewed if the introduction of the Euro increases demand.

Tax Services (Rural Areas)

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the provision of tax office services in remote rural areas. [17215]

Dawn Primarolo: Services may be provided from a local office or by other means such as mobile inquiry centres and, increasingly, by telephone. The Inland Revenue is reorganising its local office network but none of the plans currently approved for implementation includes closure of a remote, rural office. The best means of providing services to such areas in the future is being considered as part of the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review.

EU Unanimity Voting

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those treaty articles which provide for unanimity of voting in respect of matters contained in Article 99 of the Treaty of Rome. [17524]

Dawn Primarolo: Article 99 of the Treaty of Rome relates to the Council's powers to adopt provisions for the harmonisation of legislation concerning turnover taxes, excise duties and other forms of indirect taxation to the extend that such harmonisation is necessary to ensure that the establishment and functioning of internal market. The Article provides for unanimity of voting in relation to these matters. Other articles in the Treaty which specifically refer to fiscal matters maintain the unanimity requirement. In particular, Article 100a paragraph 2 explicitly excludes fiscal provisions from the internal market implementation measures that can be decided by qualified majority voting.

Similarly, in relation to environmental measures Article 130s paragraph 2 states that provisions primarily of a fiscal nature must be adopted on the basis of unanimity.

Income Tax

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue impact of raising the top rate of income tax to 50 per cent. on incomes over £50,000 per annum. [17039]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated full year yield at 1997–98 income levels of increasing the top rate of income tax to 50 per cent. on taxable incomes above £50,000 per year is £2.7 billion. The yield includes the consequential effects on the yield of capital gains tax after allowing for likely changes in the volume of disposals. It does not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the new rate.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many public appointments she has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16783]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 May 1997, 512 appointments have been made. Of these, 26 per cent. attract remuneration.

The information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all Departments in an aggregated form.

NHS Funding

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the additional funding allocated to the National Health Service in Northern Ireland has been allocated to *(a)* clinical care and *(b)* management support; and if she will make a statement. [16933]

Mr. Worthington: The £5 million for Northern Ireland which was announced on 14 October was allocated in full for clinical and social care, as was the additional £7 million I announced on 21 August and the further £7.5 million I announced on 28 November. The additional £19.5 million thus provided this year shows the priority this Government attaches to the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland and in particular now it has acted decisively to tackle key pressures over the coming winter by targeting resources on patients and clients.

Central Investment Fund for Charities

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those organisations which belong to the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities, the proportion of their investment in the fund and the current value of the fund's securities.[17303]

Mr. Worthington: The Department as trustee of the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities considers that it has a duty of confidentiality not to reveal the identity of investors in the fund. The fund is valued monthly and at 31 October 1997 its capital value was £15.6 million.

Civil Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what affirmative action measures she plans to adopt to increase the representation of Catholics and women in the *(a)* industrial craft and *(b)* higher non-industrial grades in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. [17705]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) aims to create a position where men and women, Protestants and Roman Catholics, are fairly represented at all levels in the organisation. It will continue to seek to identify lawful affirmative action measures which are effective in addressing the under-representation of women and Roman Catholics in the industrial craft and higher non-industrial grades.

NICS policy is that employment and advancement is based on ability, qualification and aptitude for the work. Subject to that overriding principle, the Service has initiated a range of measures in the context of its Action Plan for Women, designed to help improve female representation at senior levels. These include the use of flexible working, women only training, equal opportunity awareness programmes for senior staff, training for women returning to work, and the examination of organisational barriers to the promotion of women to the senior levels including specialist areas.

The Service also regularly reviews its promotion and recruitment practices and has taken a number of measures to promote a more balanced work force at all levels of the organisation. These include the use of positive action advertising in appropriate circumstances and the removal of various internal barriers to promotion to encourage a better flow of staff from lower to higher grades within and between Departments.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards the decentralisation of Civil Service jobs. [17707]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Some 280 posts were transferred from Belfast and Bangor to Londonderry in 1989. Subsequent options for dispersing jobs have been considered, but rejected for reasons of cost and feasibility. In view of this, a research study was commissioned to assess more accurately the costs and the social and economic benefits of dispersing Civil Service jobs from Belfast and North Down, to develop a methodology to measure costs and benefits and to inform decisions on future policy. The report of this study is under consideration.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the Sixth Report compiled by the Department of Finance and Personnel into Equal Opportunities in the Civil Service. [17706]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I was pleased to note the strong evidence contained in the Sixth Report of compositional change in the NICS work force and the fact that, at the macro level, Protestants and Roman Catholics are now fairly represented at most grade levels up to around Staff Officer and equivalent level. Service-wide female

representation has risen to 45.1 per cent. and Roman Catholic to 40.7 per cent. Overall in the Non-Industrial grades Female and Roman Catholic representation has increased in every grade level between Executive Officer level and the senior grades. However, I was naturally disappointed that the Service did not reach some of the goals and timetables previously set and, in particular, the progress made in terms of the composition of the most senior grades and the continuing under-representation of women in the Professional and Technical, and Industrial Grades. The Service has put in place a range of measures within the law to try to accelerate the rate of change whilst adhering strictly to the merit principle in both its recruitment and internal promotion practices. It will also continue to consult with the statutory agencies to examine and implement further practical affirmative action measures.

Road Safety

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what impact the application of 'R' plates for probationary drivers in Northern Ireland has had on injury and fatality levels among and relating to newly qualified drivers. [17634]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Specific information on the direct impact of the Registered Driver Scheme on road casualties is not available. Research in 1993–94 into the overall effectiveness of the scheme was unable to demonstrate conclusively a direct correlation between it and a reduction in the level of road accidents.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *76*, on the basis of what information she was able to indicate to the Minister of State at the Scottish Office the importance of the transfer of Jason Campbell to the wider peace process. [17460]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* I received representations from political parties and others regarding the importance of the transfer of loyalist prisoners. Throughout the current political process the Government has accepted the importance of prison issues of the participants.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Stress-related Illnesses

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many days during term time were lost through stress-related illness amongst *(a)* classroom teachers, *(b)* deputy heads and *(c)* heads in primary schools in each local education authority during the (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 school years. [18550]

Mr. Byers: The information is not collected centrally.

Schools (Internet)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools were connected to the Internet at the start of the current school year. [18551]

Dr. Howells: Estimates indicate that some 6,000 schools in the UK (primary and secondary) were connected to the Internet at the beginning of the 1997–98 academic year. A further statistical survey of ICT in schools will be undertaken in 1998.

Former Astra Staff

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he intends to take in respect of Astra pensioners. [18537]

Dr. Howells: Renewed investigations into the problems faced by former members of the Department over their pensions entitlements from the former Astra Training Services Ltd. following that organisation's collapse in 1993 have been going on in the Department for some time. The vast majority of Departmental staff who transferred to Astra had their previously accrued Civil Service pensions values and benefits preserved in the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme. Pensions values due for their time with Astra are primarily for the liquidators of the former Company to resolve. We will be pressing the liquidators and the pension fund trustees to resolve this long-outstanding issue.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the entitlement to interviews of ex-Astra staff. [18538]

Dr. Howells: Renewed investigations into the problems faced by former members of the Department who transferred to Astra Training Services Ltd. but were made redundant by the collapse of that organisation in 1993 have been going on in the Department for some time. Work continues to find ways of assisting former staff, and those currently seeking employment will be guaranteed interviews for any suitable vacancies which may arise in the Department.

University Tuition Fees

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if his Department will take steps to secure a derogation from EU law so that students from England can be charged a higher fee for a fourth year university course in Scotland than students from elsewhere in the EU. [18514]

Dr. Howells: No, we see no need for such a derogation. From autumn 1998, the maximum support for fees that we are proposing to make available for full-time undergraduate students will be £1,000: this maximum will apply to students from England, Scotland, and the rest of the UK and the European Union, depending on the level of their parents', spouses' or own income. We have made it clear that top-up fees play no part in our proposals for home and EU full-time undergraduates.

Full-time students resident in Scotland and studying in Scottish institutions on honours degree courses that are a year longer than equivalent courses elsewhere in the UK will, however, be eligible, irrespective of income, for the maximum support for fees in the final year of the course from the Scottish Student Awards Agency. The EC Treaty requires Member States not to discriminate on grounds of nationality against nationals of other Member States, on matters within the scope of the Treaty. However, EC law

does not intervene in internal matters and require each Member State to treat all its own nationals in exactly the same way.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of the costs for local authorities of administering the means-testing of university tuition fees. [18515]

Dr. Howells: Data on local authorities' costs of administering mandatory awards are not collected centrally. Local authorities already carry out means testing of student and parental income for awards purposes. In 1998–99, the results of this means test will be applied first to the university tuition fee and any balance to maintenance grants.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the annual budget of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. [18392]

Ms Estelle Morris: The first budget of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority will be agreed in consultation with the Authority in February 1998.

Supplementary Allowances

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students in 1999–2000 and beyond who would be eligible for supplementary allowances under the existing system will continue to receive these allowances as grants. [17858]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer given on 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *160*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Courts

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 11 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *501*, if he will seek agreement at the next European Council for the adoption of rules of procedure applicable to all its future meetings and for the adoption of those arrangements for other Heads of Government meetings. [17869]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The European Council is established by Article D of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), where there is no provision for rules of procedure. Other international organisations such as the G7, also operate without formal rules of procedure. It is for the Presidency, in consultation with other Member States, to structure discussions in the European Council.

European Council and the IGC

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates and times of *(a)* the meeting of the European Council and *(b)* the Inter-Governmental Conference held in Amsterdam in June; and what in each case was the smallest number of (i) Ministers and (ii) officials attending a session. [17915]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The European Council met in Amsterdam from 9.30 am on 16 June until approximately 4 am on the morning of 18 June. The majority of time was spent discussing the Intergovernmental Conference, although other European Council business was also addressed. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were present at all sessions. No UK officials attended the sessions, as is standard practice at European Councils.

India (Trade)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British firms have contacted diplomatic missions in *(a)* Bombay and *(b)* New Delhi concerning trade opportunities in 1997. [18310]

Mr. Fatchett: Precise figures relating to trade and investment inquiries from British companies are not recorded. However, from extrapolation of incoming fax inquiries during September 1997, the British Deputy High Commission in Bombay dealt with an estimated 860 written inquiries during January to October 1997 inclusive. In addition, Bombay received 272 British business visitors in the same period. The British High Commission in New Delhi received an estimated 2,000 written inquiries from British companies and briefed 304 British business visitors during the same period. Both offices also received many telephone inquiries from UK companies, but these are not automatically recorded. An even greater number of inquiries were received from Indian companies seeking trade and investment links with British companies. In addition, there were numerous contacts with members of the resident British business community.

Britain-Russia Centre

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual reports of *(a)* the Britain-Russia Centre and *(b)* the British East-West Centre will be published. [18276]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Copies of the Centres' Annual Report for 1996–97 have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The Centres received a grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £237,000 to support their activities in 1996–97. In addition the Centres secured funding in 1996–97 of £237,227 for direct expenditure on projects. Their priority areas for assistance have been Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The Centres continue to make a valuable contribution to the strengthening of bilateral relations. Activities have included seminars and workshops; administering the British observer mission to the Russian presidential elections; work with the media in the republics of the Caucasus and senior level visits from Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Museum of Europe

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals are presently being considered at European Union level for the establishment of a museum of Europe; what discussions he has held with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on *(a)* which United Kingdom museum and *(b)* which United Kingdom collections will be affected; and if he will make a statement. [18155]

Mr. Fatchett: At the Council of Culture and Audiovisual Ministers meeting held in Brussels on 30 June 1997, the Greek delegate proposed the foundation of a Museum of Europe. The proposal has not been considered since then and neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary have had discussions with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport about the matter.

Qualified Majority Voting

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies he has undertaken of the effect of the increase in the use of qualified majority voting procedures under the Treaty of Amsterdam on the use by the European Parliament of its powers in these areas; and if he will make a statement. [18299]

Mr. Doug Henderson: None. There is no direct link between the use of Qualified Majority Voting in the Council and the use by the European Parliament of its powers.

Bombay Deputy High Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to publicise the opening hours of the British Deputy High Commission in Bombay. [18312]

Mr. Fatchett: The opening times of our Deputy High Commission in Bombay (Mumbai) are readily available from the mission itself and from this Department. The Deputy High Commission is open from 0800 to 1300 and 1400 to 1600 local time.

Ministerial Visits (India)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British Ministers have visited India in 1997. [18313]

Mr. Fatchett: Nine Ministers have visited India in 1997 including five since 1 May. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), then Prime Minister, and Mr. Lang, then President of the Board of Trade, visited in January. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, visited in February. Mr. Nelson, then Minister of State for the Department of Trade and Industry visited in March. I also visited India in June. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister visited in September and November. My noble Friend, Baroness Symons, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, visited in September. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited in October. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade visited in November.

Iraq

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions. [16816]

Mr. Fatchett: Iraq is not yet in compliance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions (SCRs). Iraq must comply with all the relevant SCRs before the process of lifting of sanctions can begin.

Immigration (Nigeria)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the staffing establishment of the British High Commission Immigration Section in Lagos, Nigeria; and how many staff are in post. [18073]

Mr. Fatchett: In our High Commission in Lagos there are 68 members of staff (19 UK-based and 49 locally engaged staff) on the establishment of the Immigration Section which is currently fully staffed. The total number of staff working in the High Commission is 246 (48 UK-based and 198 locally engaged).

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the average wait for an interview for *(a)* visa and *(b)* entry clearance at Her Majesty's High Commission in Lagos for each of the last three years. [18100]

Mr. Fatchett: The average wait for an interview for entry clearance (or visa) at the High Commission in Lagos for each of the last three years was:

Interview type	*Average wait*
1997	
Visit	11 days
Settlement	5 months
1996	
Visit	6 days
Settlement	5 months
1995	
Visit	1 day
Settlement	1 month

Rockall

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British Ministers have visited Rockall in each of the last 10 years. [18076]

Mr. Fatchett: None.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the legal title to Rockall; and if he will make a statement. [18080]

Mr. Fatchett: We have no doubt about our sovereignty over the Island of Rockall. This was made clear in response to recent correspondence from Greenpeace purporting to declare the independence of Rockall.

Algeria

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press for an independent investigation of *(a)* massacres and *(b)* human rights violations in Algeria. [18536]

Mr. Fatchett: Without co-operation from the government in Algiers, any effort to investigate events in Algeria would be fruitless. We note that UN suggestions that the Commission on Human Rights has a role have been rebuffed by the Algerian Government. We welcome,

however, news that the Algerians have said that they will accept a visit by a UN Special Rapporteur. We encourage the Algerians to ensure this takes place soon.

Congo

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for Ministerial visits to the Congo. [18071]

Mr. Fatchett: There are currently no plans for Ministerial visits to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). However we are closely monitoring the situation in the DRC with our partners in the EU and at the UN.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and if he will make a statement. [18074]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), gave him on 3 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *167*. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has held no further discussions with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo since then.

Employment Pacts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the rapport d'information approved at the plenary session of the Economic and Social Committee on 29 and 30 October on territorial employment pacts; and if he will make a statement. [18154]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

I have placed a copy of the Economic and Social Committee's information report in the Library of the House.

As I announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston, (Mr. Hughes) of 31 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *635–36*, the UK nominated 10 territorial employment pacts to the Commission. The Commission agreed to support our nominations and has been discussing detailed proposals submitted by the applicants. When these are approved, the Commission will pay an initial tranche of grant to them to support the development of local action plans.

European Coal and Steel Community

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the provisions in the annual budget of the European Coal and Steel Community for *(a)* workers' housing, special reserve, and *(b)* staff loans, pension fund, apply to. [17264]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

The special reserve relating to workers' housing is used to grant loans from ECSC funds to finance subsidised housing for workers in the coal and steel industries.

The proportion assigned to the pension fund originally represented the ECSC's total pension obligations prior to 5 March 1968. Since that date, the Member States have assumed responsibility, via the general budget for the payment of staff pensions, and this fund has subsequently been available for a number of purposes, including the financing of housing loans for officials of the European Communities.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Property Portfolio

36. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the Commissioners' management of the property portfolio. [16833]

Mr. Bell: The Commissioners' property portfolio is actively managed by external firms of Chartered Surveyors, with the exception of the Octavia Hill Housing Estates which are managed by qualified Housing Managers, directly employed by the Church Commissioners. The Commissioners' own property staff are headed by the Chief Surveyor who is a fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The Commissioners' property portfolio has shown excellent returns in recent years, well ahead of the industry benchmark.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Poultry

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the Agenda 2000 proposals on the costs of poultry production. [18385]

Mr. Rooker: Agenda 2000 contains no proposals which relate directly to poultry production. Feed costs, however, form a significant proportion of total poultry production costs and Agenda 2000 contains proposals to reduce cereal support prices by 20 per cent. from current levels. To the extent that cereal market prices also fall, feed costs will be reduced.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of UK poultry meat production is sold *(a)* fresh in (i) oven ready and (ii) New York dressed form and *(b)* frozen. [18375]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many tonnes of chicken meat were produced by United Kingdom producers in 1996 from *(a)* broiler and *(b)* other systems; [18383]

(2) how many tonnes of turkey meat were produced by UK producers in 1996 from *(a)* intensive, *(b)* semi-intensive and *(c)* free range systems; [18384]

(3) what tonnage of poultry meat was produced by UK producers in 1996; and how much was imported from *(a)* EU countries and *(b)* non-EU countries. [18382]

Mr. Rooker: In 1996, 1,450 thousand tonnes of poultry meat were produced by UK producers, 244 thousand tonnes were imported from EC countries and 18 thousand tonnes were imported from non EC countries.

In 1996, 1,065 thousand tonnes of meat were produced from broilers and 54 thousand tonnes of meat were produced from other chickens.

In 1996, 293 thousand tonnes of turkey meat were produced by UK producers. No information is available on the systems by which turkeys are housed.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the UK per capita consumption of *(a)* eggs, *(b)* chicken meat and *(c)* turkey meat in the latest year for which figures are available; and what were the equivalent figures for (i) five and (ii) 10 years previously. [18386]

Mr. Rooker: Per capita consumption of eggs, chicken and turkey in Great Britain as measured by purchases for consumption at home is given in the following table.

Grams per person per week (except for eggs)

Purchases of:	*1986*	*1991*	*1996*
Eggs (number)	3.01	2.25	1.87
Chicken	174	183	191
Turkey	21	16	38
Pre-cooked poultry[1]	11	14	23

[1] Not in cans.

These estimates exclude consumption outside of the home and consumption in the form of processed products. To help complete the picture, the following table provides details of total usage, derived as total UK production plus imports less exports and adjusted for stock changes.

UK usage of:	*1986*	*1991*	*1996*
Eggs (million Dozen)	869	853	813
Total Poultrymeat (000 Tonnes)	986	1,256	1,539
Chicken meat (000 Tonnes)	n/a	n/a	1,220
Turkey meat (000 Tonnes)	n/a	n/a	286

n/a = not available.

It should be stated that poultry meat figures are carcase weight equivalent, whereas the per capita consumption estimates above relate to the actual weight purchased.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy regarding the *(a)* disposal and *(b)* usage of poultry offal. [18387]

Mr. Rooker: The Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 set out the requirements for the handling of poultry offal in licensed premises. Stringent hygiene requirements apply to all fresh meat, including offal, which is destined for human consumption.

The EC Poultrymeat Marketing Regulations (Council Regulation 1906/90 with detailed rules set out in Commission Regulation 1538/91) allow the sale of giblets in the carcase of a whole bird when sold provided that this is indicated on the label.

Enforcement officers carry out checks in licensed and unlicensed poultry premises under this legislation and also the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 to ensure that all food produced is fit for human consumption.

The Animal By-Products Order 1992, as amended, and the Diseases of Animals (Waste Food) Order 1973, as amended, set out the requirements for the processing and disposal of offals which are not intended for human consumption. This legislation is currently under review and any proposals will be the subject of consultation in the normal way.

Eggs

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what proportion of UK egg production is from *(a)* battery, *(b)* deep litter, *(c)* barn and *(d)* free range systems; and what were the figures 10 years ago; [18377]

(2) how many eggs were produced by UK producers in 1996; and how many were imported from *(a)* other EU countries and *(b)* non-EU countries; [18376]

(3) how many laying hens are currently housed in *(a)* battery, *(b)* deep litter, *(c)* barn and *(d)* free range systems. [18378]

Mr. Rooker: In 1996, 774 million dozen eggs were produced by UK producers for human consumption, 52 million dozen[1] were imported from EC countries and 1 million dozen[1] were imported from non EC countries.

In 1996, 86 per cent. of eggs were produced by intensive systems, 11 per cent. were produced by free range systems and 3 per cent. were produced by perchery and other systems. This level of detail was not collected 10 years ago, and therefore no equivalent comparison can be made.

No information is available on the number of hens split by production systems.

[1] Includes shell egg and shell egg equivalent of whole (dried, frozen and liquid) egg and egg yolk, but excludes albumen.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many eggs were imported from countries where mammalian meat and bone meal is incorporated in feedstuffs during 1996. [18379]

Mr. Rooker: During 1996, 52 million dozen[1] eggs were imported from EC countries and 1 million dozen[1] were imported from non-EC countries. We believe that most of these are destined for processing. We do not have detailed information on legislation on all feed controls in place elsewhere but are unaware of any measures in place in other countries, during 1996 or before, banning mammalian meat and bonemeal (MBM) from non-ruminant feed. The poultry feed may therefore have included MBM.

[1] Includes shell egg and shell egg equivalent of whole (dried, frozen and liquid) egg and egg yolk, but excludes albumen.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what proposals he intends to make to the EU Council of Ministers during the UK Presidency regarding battery systems of egg production; [18381]

(2) what steps he is taking regarding phasing out battery systems of egg production. [18380]

Mr. Rooker: We aim to phase out the conventional battery cage. This needs to be achieved at the European level, by developing measures in the Council of Ministers. That is why we are pressing the Commission to submit urgently for negotiation in the Council its proposals to update the EU rules on the welfare of laying hens.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that imported eggs and poultry meat meet the hygiene requirements for United Kingdom producers. [18388]

Mr. Rooker: The import conditions for trade in poultrymeat and eggs within the Community, and for imports from third countries, are governed by Community legislation. The EU shell egg marketing legislation and Council Decision 94/371 both provide for and apply a maximum "best-before" limit of 28 days after lay for the marketing of shell eggs. These provisions are enforced by the relevant enforcement authorities including the Egg Marketing Inspectorate.

Ritually Slaughtered Animals

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to ensure that all ritually slaughtered meat is clearly labelled as such. [17254]

Mr. Rooker: We shall cover this approach in our forthcoming discussions with the religious communities about all aspects of religious slaughter.

Technology Foresight

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what ways his Department's research priorities have been modified in response to Technology Foresight. [17426]

Mr. Rooker: An analysis of the Department's research programme has shown that some 90 per cent. of it currently aligns with the Foresight recommendations. Since the Foresight programme started, the Department has initiated new LINK programmes on Horticulture, Aquaculture and Sustainable Livestock Production and has established a Diet and Health Funders Group, all of which reflect Foresight recommendations.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what Technology Foresight priorities are being taken into account in the forward planning of the Department's scientific research programme. [17425]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has played an active role in the Foresight panels dealing with Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry, Food and Drink, and the Marine. Our planned R and D already closely aligns with Foresight recommendations and we shall continue to be guided by the recommendations of panels in planning our future programmes.

Organic Farming

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what help and access he has given the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards to ensure it can regulate organic farms effectively with particular reference to the origin of cattle bought by organic farmers; and if he will make a statement on the current constraints of commercial confidentiality affecting access to information in this area. [17748]

Mr. Rooker: Under the rules of the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) organic farmers may buy in only cattle from herds which have not had any case of BSE in the previous 6 years. It is the responsibility of the organic farmer to demonstrate compliance with this rule.

The Government have given an undertaking to make information on the BSE history of herds available to organic purchasers of animals provided that the consent of the owner of the herd to which the information relates can be obtained. However, the legal constraints are considerable and it has taken time to make sure that the procedures we propose are legally defensible. Administrative instructions are now being finalised and the Department will write to interested parties to inform them of the new arrangements next week.

Chocolate

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the United Kingdom Government's position will be at the meeting of the Council of Ministers when they discuss the labelling of chocolate with regard to *(a)* vegetable fat and *(b)* milk content; and if he will make a statement [17747]

Mr. Rooker: In the Council of Ministers, the Government will press for a new chocolate Directive which allows the full range of different European chocolate-making traditions to co-exist within a single, harmonised market and which increases consumer choice throughout the EU. It will oppose any measures which would discriminate against UK products or change the names under which those products have been sold for many years and which are familiar to UK consumers.

BSE (Headboning Businesses)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many headboning businesses closed as a result of the tightening of BSE controls; and what was the impact on employment. [17722]

Mr. Rooker: I regret that no record is held centrally of the information requested.

Vitamin B6 Supplements

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultation he undertook with international experts on nutrition prior to making his decision to introduce restrictions on the retail sale of higher dose vitamin B6 supplements. [17819]

Mr. Rooker: The Government's decision to restrict the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements sold under food law was based in part on advice from the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT). Members of the COT include internationally recognised experts in a range of disciplines including nutrition.

In considering the safety of vitamin B6, the COT took account of the nutritional requirements for this vitamin that had been established by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) as part of its review of food energy and nutrient requirements of groups of people in the United Kingdom. Those carrying out this review included a number of nutritionists of international standing. International experts representing the EU Scientific Committee for Food and other experts from the European Community acted as observers.

Green Pound

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the average impact on individual producers of his Department claiming in full the compensation available from the EU resulting from each significant revaluation of the Green Pound during 1997. [18098]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* No. The compensation which HMG could pay under the EU rules to offset the income effects of green rate revaluations this year stands at around £980 million, of which up to half may be reclaimed from the EU budget. It would be for Ministers to decide the mechanisms for distributing any such aid to the four sectors eligible for assistance under the EU rules.

Offal Rendering

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his policy that the production of tallow and other products from the rendering of pig offal and fallen stock should be disposed of in the same way as that from bovine animals. [18067]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The BSE (No. 2) Order 1996 requires that all mammalian protein is excluded from ruminant feed and all mammalian meat and bone meal is excluded from all farmed livestock feed. The Fertilisers (Mammalian Meat and Bone Meal) Regulations 1996 also require that mammalian meat and bone meal is not used as a fertiliser on agricultural land. The Orders do not distinguish between pig and bovine material or material from fallen stock. Under the Bovines and Bovine Products (Despatch Prohibition and Production Restriction) Regulations 1997, plants wishing to produce bovine tallow for feed use must be registered and comply with the provisions laid down in that Order.

Hemp

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the Home Office regarding the level of fee for the licence required for growing hemp and its impact on small producers. [18063]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The Department's officials have written to, and met with, officials in the Home Office and have relayed the concerns of the hemp industry about the proposed level of the licence fee for 1998.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Deterrent

4. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the total cost of the British nuclear deterrent over the next four years. [16797]

Mr. George Robertson: The total procurement cost for Trident is estimated to be £12.6 billion. Average running costs have been estimated at £200 million a year over the 30 year lifetime of the system. We are examining the basis upon which cost estimates have been calculated in the light of operating experience as part of the wider Strategic Defence Review.

Medals

16. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will instigate a review of the policy relating to the distribution and striking of medals and the protocols relating to their display. [16811]

Mr. Spellar: The present policy relating to the distribution and striking of medals and the protocols for the wearing of medals is well proven. There are no plans to change it at the present time.

Army Officers

17. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance he has given to the Chief of the General Staff on the selection and commissioning of Army officers. [16812]

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Chief of the General Staff routinely discuss all major aspects of Army policy, including recruitment. They are both committed to ensuring that access to the modern British Army, and promotion thereafter, is based firmly on merit alone.

Future Large Aircraft

18. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends publishing the RAF's operational requirement for the future large aircraft. [16813]

Mr. Spellar: I have no plans to publish the Staff Requirement (SR(A)435) for the Hercules Rolling Replacement Programme (for which the Future Large Aircraft is a possible contender for the second tranche).

Territorial Army

19. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve. [16814]

Dr. Reid: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Territorial Army, whose future role and structure are being considered in the Strategic Defence Review as part of our work on the Armed Forces as a whole. It would be premature to assess the likely outcome of the Review before the process is complete.

Defence Medical Service

20. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the review of the Defence Medical Services. [16815]

Dr. Reid: The stewardship of the previous Administration, whatever its intentions, has left the Defence Medical Services in a parlous state. In addition to the work of the Strategic Defence Review, which will clearly encompass the Defence Medical Services (DMS), I have established a team to implement the recommendations of a recent review of the operational capability of the DMS. I have also ordered a review of the provision of secondary care in the UK by the Defence Secondary Care Agency, and called for proposals to improve morale and retention among DMS

personnel. I have directed that the work on these separate but interrelated issues be brought together in order to determine a structured way forward.

Surface Ships

21. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals for the provision of new surface ships for the Royal Navy. [16817]

Dr. Reid: There are currently 18 surface ships either under construction or completing contractor trials. In the last 12 months two ships, the Type 23 Frigate, HMS Grafton, and the Ocean Survey Vessel, HMS Scott, have been accepted from contractors and will be entering full operational service in the next few months. The next 12 months will see the acceptance of the Type 23 Frigate HMS Sutherland, the naming and acceptance of the helicopter carrier, HMS Ocean, and the launching of the Type 23 Frigate, HMS Kent, and the Single Role Minehunters, HMS Pembroke and HMS Grimsby. A contract was placed in October 1997 for the charter of additional Ro-Ro ships which from May 1998 will increase the heavy lift capability for the Joint Rapid Deployment Force to two vessels.

Future projects include replacing, early in the next century, the capabilities currently provided by the Type 42 Destroyers with the Horizon frigates, the Type 22 and 23 Frigates with a new class of Future Escort and a new class of Aircraft Carrier to supersede the Invincible class. In addition to these major programmes, a number of other projects including replacements for the Surveying Flotilla, Logistic Landing Ships and new Combat Stores Ship are also under consideration. These projects are, of course, being considered as part of the Strategic Defence Review.

Headquarters Refurbishment

22. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the cost of refurbishing his Department's headquarters. [16818]

Mr. George Robertson: Costs of the refurbishment of MOD Main Building will depend on proposals from the shortlisted consortia during the next stages of the procurement programme that I announced on 12 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *582*. Costs will continue to be closely examined as the public private partnership programme proceeds. Shortlisted bidders have the challenge of producing value for money solutions against the benchmark of my Department's public sector comparator.

ASTOR Project

23. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated value of the ASTOR project; and when he expects to announce his decision on this project. [16819]

Mr. Spellar: The estimated procurement cost of the ASTOR (Airborne Stand-Off Radar) project is in the region of £750 million. Final proposals for the full Development and Production phase have now been invited from the two contractors who carried out competitive Project Definition studies. In addition, the Ministry of Defence has agreed that a co-operative development of a variant of the US Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) should also be considered for meeting the UK ASTOR requirement. We aim to announce a decision in 1998.

Iraq

24. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are currently deployed overseas on duties related to the current situation in Iraq; and what plans he has to add to these numbers. [16820]

Dr. Reid: Some 800 UK Service personnel are deployed overseas on duties connected with the current situation in Iraq. Almost all are contributing to established land, sea and air operations (including UN operations) which predated the recent crisis caused by Saddam Hussein's decision to expel the US Unscom personnel.

In addition, HMS Invincible and RFA Fort Victoria deployed to the Mediterranean, embarking seven RAF Harrier aircraft, as part of the UK's response to the crisis, with a combined complement of some 1,300 personnel. There are no plans at present to deploy additional personnel.

Yorks and Lancaster Regimental Museum

25. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will restore the planned reduction in financial support towards the maintenance of the Yorks and Lancaster regimental museum in Rotherham. [16821]

Mr. Spellar: £6,000 of funding has been restored to the Museum in recognition of its valuable representative role for the Army and focus for local recruit activity. We have also offered our assistance in identifying alternative sources of income to enable the museum to cover any shortfall in funding.

Former Yugoslavia

26. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the cost of the United Kingdom's contribution in the former Yugoslavia will continue to be met from the contingency reserve. [16822]

Mr. George Robertson: Once the costs of the Bosnia operation in the current year are clearer, we will be able to assess more precisely how much of that cost can be absorbed within the Defence budget. I will discuss the funding of anything in excess of that sum with my Cabinet colleagues.

Bosnia

27. **Mr. Bruce George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current level of Britain's military contribution to the stabilisation force in Bosnia. [16823]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies), on 3 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *83*.

New Deal

28. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that the armed forces participate in new deal employment initiatives. [16824]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 14 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *688*.

Former Prisoners of War

29. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department took to ensure that his report following the review of the administration of the pay of officer prisoners of war and protected personnel in German and Italian hands during the second world war, published on 23 July, reflected the first-hand experiences of the officers involved. [16825]

Mr. Spellar: My decision on the Review of officer Prisoner of War and Protected Personnel pay deductions took full account of the lengthy submissions of the officers and Protected Personnel, their meetings with the previous Minister and the letters many of them wrote, all of which reflected their first hand experiences. This work also examined the considerable weight of contemporary evidence which survives.

The main concern of the Review was to examine the pay policy which covered these servicemen, and to consider the decisions which formed it and its implementation. It is clear that those concerned with this policy had a number of sources of detailed information about the views and circumstances of those in the camps, ranging from the formal Reports of Red Cross and other visits, to communications with individuals raising questions about their own pay.

Defence Diversification

30. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for defence diversification. [16826]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith).

Russian Defence Officials

31. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was discussed at his recent meeting with Russian defence officials; and if he will make a statement. [16827]

Mr. George Robertson: I paid a short, productive visit to Moscow on 3–4 November, where I had meetings with the Russian Defence Minister, General Sergeyev, the Secretary of the Defence Council, Dr. Kokoshin, and Foreign Minister Primakov.

Dr. Kokoshin and I agreed to develop discussions on the democratic control of defence. Foreign Minister Primakov and I exchanged views on Iraq.

The main purpose of my visit was to promote defence co-operation between the UK and Russia. General Sergeyev and I inaugurated a joint Russo-British Commission to oversee the management of defence co-operation between our countries. Among a range of bilateral issues discussed, we agreed that our navies should work towards closer co-operation in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.

We agreed on the value to both countries of the series of high-level British/Russian conferences on defence matters, held at Wilton Park, Sussex.

We also agreed to promote scientific co-operation between our Ministries of Defence, and that the Russians would send experts to a demining seminar in the UK next year. I took the opportunity to pass on an offer of assistance from The Royal British Legion to Russian veterans' organisations.

Strategic Defence Review

32. **Sir George Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the delay in completing the strategic defence review. [16828]

Dr. Reid: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *499–500*.

Chatham Dockyard

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims relating to alleged ionising radiation exposure at the workplace have been received by his Department from past civilian employees at Chatham Dockyard since it became a nuclear refit facility; and how many of these claimants have received compensation other than as a result of a common law claim. [17430]

Mr. Spellar: Chatham Dockyard became an approved nuclear submarine refit facility in 1966.

It is not possible to report how many claims relating to former Chatham Dockyard workers have been received by my Department since 1966 because this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, such information has been held centrally since 23 October 1986 and my Department's records show that forty claims for compensation for illness allegedly caused by exposure to ionising radiation relating to former Ministry of Defence civilian employees who worked at Chatham Dockyard have been received.

On 27 July 1994, the Ministry of Defence joined the British Nuclear Fuels Compensation Scheme for Radiation Linked Diseases. Membership of the Scheme covers past and present radiation workers including those at the Royal Dockyards before contractorisation in 1987. Thirty-two claims have been submitted to the Scheme of which seven have been rejected as ineligible, and twenty-five are under consideration. Prior to July 1994, all claims for alleged exposure to ionising radiation from civilian employees were considered on the basis of whether or not the Department had a legal liability to pay compensation. One of the eight claims received prior to July 1994 resulted in damages being awarded by the High Court; the remaining seven claims were not pursued. Therefore, none of the claimants has to date received compensation other than as a result of a common law claim.

Hunting Licences

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total income to his Department from the issue of licences to hunt on his Department's land in the last year for which figures are available. [17301]

Mr. Spellar: The income that my Department will receive from those licences issued to hunt foxes on the Defence Estate in the 1997–98 season will amount to £800. The full administrative costs associated with the preparation of such licences will also be recovered.

HMS Vigilant

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Trident D5 Missiles were loaded on to HMS Vigilant in the United States after the completion of its most recent test firing of missiles there. [18320]

Mr. Spellar: Following a very successful Demonstration and Shakedown Operation, HMS Vigilant collected 14 unarmed Trident D5 missiles from the US Navy's Strategic Weapon Facility Atlantic at Kings Bay, Georgia in preparation for her entry into operational service.

UN Special Commission, Iraq

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if members of the reserve forces can serve with the UN Special Commission in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [18873]

Dr. Reid: A Call-Out Order is in force which permits members of the reserve forces to be called out under Section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to support operations in the former republic of Yugoslavia and also in the region of Iraq. This includes service with the UN Special Commission in Iraq. Only suitably qualified volunteers are called out.

Low Flying

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the boundaries of the United Kingdom low-flying zones for fast jets. [16803]

Mr. Spellar: The UK Low Flying System is kept under continuous review to ensure that low flying is conducted as safely as possible with the minimum of disturbance to the public.

Recruitment

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase recruitment into the armed forces. [16807]

Dr. Reid: The Government is committed to addressing the very serious problem of undermanning inherited from the previous Administration and has made recruitment to the Armed Forces one of the top priorities. A number of new recruiting initiatives are in place and, there are signs that these measures are beginning to have an effect.

OCCAR Projects

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the in-service date slippage in the production of the COBRA project to date has been due to problems in partner countries; what measures he is undertaking to prevent similar problems in other OCCAR projects; and if he will make a statement. [17914]

Mr. Spellar: The slippage against the original in service date for the Counter Battery Radar (COBRA) system is 108 months. The principal reasons for the slippage are explained in the National Audit Office Major Project Report 1996 (HC238, session 1997–98, 15 August 1997). As the report notes:

(a) The timetable was first estimated when the Project Definition phase approved in 1986. The in-service date was reassessed at the end of that phase as a result of a better understanding of the programme and the work involved. This gave rise to a 23 month slippage from the original estimate.

(b) There were protracted negotiations between the three Governments, UK, France and Germany, and industry before the placement of the Development contract in 1990, which resulted in a further slippage of 36 months.

(c) The original in-service date was based on the assumption that there would be a seamless transition from development to production. This could not be achieved because a reduction in the number of Radars required by Germany invalidated the maximum price production option and led to the need for further development work, the Cost Reduction Programme, to reduce production costs. This programme resulted in a further slippage of 42 months.

There has been a further delay of seven months as the result of extended negotiations with EuroArt, the international industrial consortium, over their proposals to enter the production phase. We are currently assessing those proposals.

There are currently no UK collaborative projects being managed by Organisme Conjoint de Cooperation en matiere d'Armament (OCCAR), although we hope progressively to integrate projects, including COBRA, into the organisation. It is a primary aim of OCCAR to improve on past performance in the management of collaborative programmes. We will actively press for the adoption of best practice procurement techniques as part of our contribution to the development of OCCAR's procedures.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Housing (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much the Government spent in each of the last 10 years on *(a)* new social housing stock and *(b)* maintenance of social housing stock in (i) Staffordshire, (ii) the West Midlands and (iii) England. [16871]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 20 November 1997]*: The available information on allocation or outturns for expenditure on social housing stock made by the government since 1988–89 is set out below. A revised local authority capital finance regime and housing revenue subsidy system was introduced from April 1990, and thus prior years' figures are not directly comparable. Some of the resources allocated through the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund and City Challenge are used for investment in social housing but this element is not separately identified in the allocations made, and they are therefore not included below.

£ million

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*[1]1997–98*
England										
Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP) Net outturns	652	810	1,154	1,639	2,306	1,795	1,487	1,153	1,031	676
Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (ACG)/Basic Block allocations	1,119	874	1,396	1,343	1,290	1,378	1,038	994	943	628
Estate Action outturns	140	190	180	268	348	357	373	316	252	170
Cash Incentive Scheme allocations[2]	—	—	—	—	30	—	30	60	60	60
Estates Renewal Challenge Fund allocations	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	30	118
Other local authority allocations[3]	52	20	121	187	80	45	39	30	30	—
Management and maintenance (M and M) allowances for LA stock	1,897	2,007	2,955	3,070	3,206	3,266	3,298	3,332	3,375	3,307
Housing Action Trusts outturns	—	—	—	10	27	78	92	93	90	89
West Midlands Region										
Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP) Gross outturns	n/a	n/a	100	112	154	162	134	100	88	57
Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (ACG)/Basic Block allocations	118	92	122	120	120	130	101	102	100	69
Estate Action outturns	n/a	n/a	25	35	41	47	49	41	25	5
Cash Incentives Scheme allocations[2]	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	2	3	4
Estates Renewal Challenge Fund allocations	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	25
Other local authority allocations[3]	4	5	3	5	7	5	4	3	3	—
Management and maintenance (M and M) allowances for LA stock	192	205	328	342	359	363	361	366	375	359
Housing Action Trusts outturns	—	—	—	—	—	2	6	11	14	18
Staffordshire										
Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP) Gross outturns	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	21	19	13	14	n/a
Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (ACG)/Basic Block allocations	17	13	18	20	20	22	16	16	15	10
Estate Action outturns[4]	3	6	4	3	4	3	4	1	1	—
Cash Incentive Scheme allocations[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Estates Renewal Challenge Fund allocations	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	5
Other local authority allocations[3]	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—
Management and maintenance (M and M) allowances for LA stock	24	25	48	50	52	52	52	54	56	48
Housing Action Trusts outturns	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] All outturns for 1997–98 are latest estimates.
[2] Resources were provided for cash incentives schemes in 1990–91 and 1991–92, but within a package of measures directed at homelessness which are included in the 'other local authority' row.
[3] Covers special programmes for homelessness, rural housing, energy efficiency, New Town defective dwellings, Flats over Shops, the Housing Partnership Fund and the Private Sector Initiatives.
[4] Estate Action figures for Staffordshire 1988–89 to 1992–93 inclusive are allocations.

Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the Barclays Bank report concerning shortages of homes to buy. [17161]

Mr. Raynsford: Barclays Bank is one of a number of organisations reporting that there are currently more prospective buyers than there are homes for sale. Part of the reason is that confidence in the housing market has returned. Increasing numbers of first time buyers and people in rented accommodation are looking to buy but will have no home to sell. This imbalance is likely to level off as the market adjusts. The Government's planning policy guidance (PPG3: Housing) advises local planning authorities to ensure the availability of a continuous five year supply of housing land to cater for on-going housing requirements.

Lowell Park Mortgages

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the activities of Lowell Park Mortgages. [17529]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department can find no trace of any representations relating specifically to this company.

M25 Widening

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *255*, if he will now instruct the Highways Agency to send a substantive reply to Mr. Chris Fisher of FLAME consequent on the publication of the accelerated review. [17346]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In my previous answer to my hon. Friend on 3 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *255*, I said that the Highways Agency would reply once the outcome of the accelerated review was announced. In the event, the decision was to carry out a further review of the M25 widening scheme, that work is continuing and I would not wish to prejudice the outcome. The Highways Agency will give a substantive response to FLAME once that review has been completed. In the meantime FLAME's letter did raise some factual questions and I have asked the Highways Agency to respond to these issues directly to FLAME. A copy of the letter will be placed in the House Library.

Vessels (Port State Inspections)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many vessels were subject to a port state inspection at *(a)* Flotta and *(b)* Sullom Voe in (i) 1996 and (ii) 1 January to 31 October 1997; and in each case what percentage of the total number of vessels were inspected. [17609]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. and learned Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. James Wallace, dated 1 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of vessels subject to port state inspection at (a) Flotta and (b) Sullom Voe in (i) 1996 and (ii) 1 January to 31 October 1997 and, in each case, what percentage of the total number of individual ships visiting the ports were inspected.

Port state inspection was carried out in Flotta on one vessel in 1996, and on three vessels in the period 1 January to 31 October 1997. This represents, respectively, one percent, and five percent of the number of individual ships visiting the port. In Sullom Voe, twenty one vessels were inspected in 1996, and seven in the period 1 January to 31 October 1997, which represents sixteen percent and six percent, respectively, of the number of individual ships visiting during those periods.

The selection of vessels for inspection takes account of their age, the safety record of the flag of registration, how recently the ship was inspected with Europe and the outcome, and inspection effort is directed to obtain the greatest impact.

Water Quality (Fylde Coast)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* studies and *(b)* investigations the Environment Agency (i) has carried out and (ii) plans to carry out to determine the reasons for the failure of the waters off the Fylde Coast to meet the standards required under the European Community Bathing Water Directive in the last five years. [17878]

Angela Eagle: Additional monitoring and investigations have been undertaken by the Environment Agency since completion of the Fylde Coast bathing water improvement scheme. These include checking the performance of the scheme, the integrity of the local sewerage network and investigations into additional sources of microbiological contamination. Further information on these investigations, which are not yet concluded, is available from the Agency.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the powers available to him to tackle coastal pollution and *(b)* the occasions on which those powers have been used in respect of the Fylde Coast in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [17877]

Angela Eagle: The Secretary of State has wide powers under the Water Resources Act 1991 relating to water pollution. In respect of bathing waters on the Fylde Coast, the effect of The Bathing Waters (Classification) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991 No. 1597) and the associated Direction and Notice is to require the Environment Agency to exercise its powers to ensure, as far as is practicable, that the Bathing Water Directive quality standards are met.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussion *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency have had with North West Water on the failure of the waters off the Fylde Coast to meet the requirements of the European community Bathing Waters Directive. [17879]

Angela Eagle: Performance of the Fylde Coast bathing waters has been the subject of considerable discussion between the Department, the Environment Agency and North West Water, and this will continue. Improving compliance with the Bathing Water Directive is a high priority for the Government.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how health and safety issues arising from the year 2000 computer problem are being addressed by his Department. [18026]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has commissioned research into the safety-critical aspects of date discontinuity problems associated with the year 2000 computer problem and the research will be published shortly. HSE has also established a committee within government to ensure that the results of this research and other experience can be shared with enforcing authorities and used as a basis of advice to dutyholders who may have safety-critical systems. Further guidance will be published next year. Health and Safety inspectors will remind dutyholders of their legal responsibilities to make sure that control systems are safe and will take enforcement action where the risks and circumstances justify it.

Commuting

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in what ways his Department's objective of reducing commuting is reflected in planning guidance. [18303]

Mr. Raynsford: Existing Planning Policy Guidance on Transport (PPG13) and Planning Policy Guidance on Town Centres and Retail Developments (PPG6) encourage local authorities to locate major generators of travel demand in existing centres which are highly accessible by means other than the private care, and to strengthen existing local centres in both urban and rural areas which offer a wide range of everyday community, shopping and employment opportunities, in order to reduce the need to travel.

The Government regards the closer integration of transport and land-use planning as an important part of its current wide-ranging review of transport policy. The White Paper on integrated transport is due in the spring.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what would have been the effect in 1997–98 on *(a)* the standard spending assessment and *(b)* the revenue support grant for (i) each class of authority and (ii) each local authority in England, had the indicator for shared and non-permanent accommodation been removed from the social index used in the calculation of SSAs, assuming that the national aggregate finance had remained at the current level. [17963]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* Figures showing the effect in 1997–98 on standard spending assessments (SSAs) of removing the shared and non-permanent accommodation indicator from the Social Index are not readily available. Figures showing the effect of the same change in 1996–97 are given for each class of authority and each local authority in England in the "Standard Spending Assessments Sub-Group Report for 1997–98", published by the Department of the Environment in 1996, a copy of which is in the Library.

It is not possible to quantify the effect of the change on revenue support grant (RSG), because the total amount of RSG available depends upon, among other things, the amount of the SSA Reduction Grant payable for the relevant year. This, in turn, depends upon the decisions made on the arrangements for the payment of SSA Reduction Grant and the pattern of SSA changes in the relevant year.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what would have been the change in *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* revenue support grant in 1997–98 for (i) each local authority in London and (ii) London as a whole, had the resident population been used as the client group in the 'All Other Services' SSA, assuming that the national aggregate external finance had remained at the current level. [17962]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* Figures showing the effect in 1997–98 on standard spending assessments (SSAs) of using the resident population as the client group for the purpose of adjusting for extra costs due to population density, population sparsity and varying socio-economic characteristics in the 'All Other Services' SSA are given for each local authority in London, and for London as a whole, in the "Standard Spending Assessments Sub-Group Report for 1998–99". A copy of this document is in the Library.

It is not possible to quantify the effect of the change on Revenue Support Grant (RSG), because the total amount of RSG available depends upon, among other things, the amount of the SSA Reduction Grant payment for the relevant year. This, in turn, depends upon the decisions made on the arrangements for the payment of SSA Reduction Grant and the pattern of SSA changes in the relevant year.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the standard spending assessment in 1997–98, for *(a)* the City of Westminster, *(b)* the London Borough of Islington and *(c)* the London Borough of Southwark, indicating for each the (i) density of population, (ii) proportion of people from ethnic minorities, (iii) proportion of people living in over-crowded accommodation, (iv) proportion of people aged over 85 years and (v) proportion of elderly people living alone. [17971]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* Information for the City of Westminster, the London Borough of Islington and the London Borough of Southwark on the Standard Spending Assessments for 1997–98, the proportion of people likely to be from ethnic minorities and the proportion of people living in overcrowded accommodation is available in the "Standard Spelling Assessment Handbook 1997–98", published by the Department of the Environment. A copy of this document is in the Library.

Information for the same three authorities on the density of population, the proportion of people aged over 85 years and the proportion of elderly people living along is also available in the Library.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes to the standard spending assessment formula methodology he is assessing for implementation in 1998–99; and if he will indicate for each option its potential financial impact on each class of local authority in England expressed *(a)* as the net change in its standard spending assessment and *(b)* as the net change in its standing spending assessment divided by (i) the aggregate number of Band D equivalent dwellings and (ii) chargeable dwellings, as used for council tax setting in 1997–98, for that class of authority. [17972]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* We shall announce shortly our proposals for changes to the Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) formula methodology for implementation in 1998–99. In reaching our decisions, we have had regard particularly to the possible changes discussed this year with the Local Government Association. A report on these discussions, including illustrations of the effect of possible changes on SSAs, is given in the "Standard Spending Assessments Sub-Group Report for 1998–99", a copy of which is in the Library.

Figures for each class of authority in England of the aggregate number of Band D dwellings and the number of chargeable dwellings, as used for council tax-setting in 1997–98, are also available in the Library.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the submissions his Department has received on the 1998–99 local authority settlements; and if he will summarise their main recommendations and indicate the date on which they were received. [17969]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* My right hon. Friend has received a large number of submissions from the local authority associations, local authorities and others, including, for example, considerable correspondence during the SSA sub-group's consideration of SSAs for 1998–99. It would be disproportionately expensive to cover all submissions

received on this issue. We have been carefully considering all submissions as we take decisions on our proposals for local government revenue expenditure in the coming financial year. We will be announcing the provisional settlement next week and local authorities and others will have the opportunity to comment on our proposals in the consultation process that will follow.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what would have been the effect in 1997–98 on the *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* revenue support grant for each (i) class of authority and (ii) local authority in England had the share of SSA for additional educational needs changed in line with changes in numbers of income support claimants, assuming the national aggregate external finance had remained at the current level. [17967]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* Figures showing the effect in 1997–98 on Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) of changing the share of SSA for additional educational needs in line with changes in numbers of income support claimants are not readily available. Figures showing the effect of the same change in 1996–97 are given for each class of authority and each local authority in England in the "Standard Spending Assessments Sub-Group Report for 1997–98", published by the Department of the Environment in 1996. A copy of this document is in the Library.

It is not possible to quantify the effect of the change on Revenue Support Grant (RSG), because the total amount of RSG available depends upon, among other things, the amount of the SSA Reduction Grant payable for the relevant year. This, in turn, depends upon the decisions made on the arrangements for the payment of SSA Reduction Grant and the pattern of SSA changes in the relevant year.

London Government

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which regional chamber will cover London; and if he will set out its boundaries. [18177]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* In July we published proposals for a new elected strategic authority for London, to cover the area comprising the 32 London Boroughs and the Corporation of the City of London. Subject to a referendum on 7 May, we shall introduce substantive legislation next year to establish the new authority.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if his Department proposes to treat the GLA as a tier of regional government. [18172]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* The GLA will be a new form of city-wide strategic local Government.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reviews his Department plans of the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation by local authorities. [18577]

Mr. Raynsford: We monitor the extent to which local authorities use bed-and-breakfast accommodation for homeless households through the quarterly statistics that authorities supply to us.

Bed-and-breakfast hotels may have a role to play as very short-term accommodation, but, as my Department's Code of Guidance on the homelessness legislation states, should be used only as a last resort.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria he uses to determine which planning appeals for supermarket developments are called in for his own determination. [18199]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* In recovering planning appeals for his determination, as distinct from planning applications called in prior to decision by a local planning authority, my right hon. Friend has regard to the criteria in paragraph 36 of the Government's response to the Fifth Report from the Environment Committee, Session 1985–86 (Cmnd. paper 43).

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors underlie the prohibition of appeals against a planning application which is allowed by a local authority. [17242]

Mr. Raynsford: In recent years, the scope for third parties to participate in the planning process has been increased by requiring that development plan policies are adopted only after widespread consultation and making it a statutory requirement that all planning applications are publicised. It is the responsibility of local planning authorities to act in the general public interest when determining planning applications and we therefore have no plans to introduce a third party right of appeal against the granting of planning permission. Such a right could be used to delay or effectively veto many acceptable developments needed for the health and growth of our economy.

Water Saving Trust

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will establish a water saving trust with a similar remit to the Energy Saving Trust. [18502]

Angela Eagle: We have no plans to establish such a trust. The Environment Act 1995 introduced a duty for the water companies to promote the efficient use of water, and we look to the water companies to fulfil this duty with vigour, imagination and enthusiasm.

A49 (Shropshire)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many fatalities have occurred as a result of accidents on the A49 in Shropshire in each of the past 10 years. [18410]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is shown in the following list:

1987: 8
1988: 0
1989: 5
1990: 8
1991: 2
1992: 9
1993: 5
1994: 8
1995: 4
1996: 4.

Liability Orders

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to amend legislation to allow the cancellation of liability orders where these have been made in error. [17241]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department's recent consultation paper on council tax enforcement included a proposal to give local authorities a power to request a magistrates' court to overturn a liability order where they consider it to have been made in error. The outcome of the consultation exercise will be announced shortly.

Factory Noise

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review permitted noise levels from urban factories. [17243]

Angela Eagle: It is for local authorities to deal with noise pollution from urban factories. Noise from certain factories will be considered as part of my Department's continuing consultation on the future implementation of EC Directive 96/61 "Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control".

Waste Management (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the holders of a waste management licence in West Yorkshire. [17244]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency is required to maintain a public register of current waste management licences. I have been informed by the Environment Agency that its public register records the following as holders of waste management licences in West Yorkshire:

A. A. Bathie Ltd., T/A Viaduct Metals
A. G. and H. G. Groundworks Ltd.
A. & D. McGregor T/A McGregor Brothers
A. Ross T/A A. Ross and Son Metal Merchants
A. B. Kelly
A. Hudson
A. Dean
A. B. Hall T/A A B Autos
Abingway Properties plc
Able Fuels
Alan Finnemore T/A Batley Car Spares
Albert Stanley Fenn
Alf Ellis T/A Ellis Metals Ltd.
Ansar Farooq Dad
Arcon Plant Ltd.
Arthur Brook Ltd.
Arthur Brooke Ltd.
Autospares Bingley Ltd.
B. C. Balmforth
B. Simpson T/A CWRS Ltd.
B. Stevenson T/A Aireborough Mini Skips
B. Woodhead
BBA Fricton Ltd.
Bellmore Stud Ltd.
Berry and Marshall (Bolton Woods)
Biffa Waste Services Ltd.
Blackleigh Limited
Blacktop Ltd.
Bradford Waste Traders Ltd.
Bradley and Holmes Ltd.
Bradmet Asbestos Unit
Bradmet Highways
Bradmet Landscapes
Brighouse Skip Hire
Britannia Recycling Ltd.
British Gas plc North Eastern
British Gas plc, Trans Co.
British Waterways
British Waterways Board
British Waterways North Yorkshire Navigations
Bursaul Landfill Site Services Ltd.
C. S. Davidson T/A C. Davidson & Son
C. Rhodes & Son Ltd.
C. F. Harris Ltd.
C. Heath & Son
C. G. Fell T/A Vellco Tyres Co.
C. J. McNally
C. R. Longley Ltd.
C. W. J. Saunders
C. F. Moon
C. & J. Blackburn
Caird Bardon Ltd.
Calderdale Met Borough Council
Cannon Hygiene Ltd.
Car Disposals Ltd.
Carlton Landfill Operations
Central Drawing Off. Services
Chancename Ltd. T/A Newmet
Chapmans Casks and Drums Ltd.
Chemwaste Ltd.
Christopher Atkinson
City of Bradford Metropolitan Council
City of Bradford Bradmet Services
Clays of Addingham Ltd.
Cleanmet Ltd.
CLM Properties Ltd.
CMS (Highways)
Colne Valley Skip Hire
Crossley Evans Ltd.
Crossley and Evans Ltd.
Crossley & Craven Ltd.
D. Greenwood
D.A. Rathmell and Sons
D. Firth
D.G. Robinson T/A Ferrybridge Motor Spares
D. Hoare
Darrington Quarries Ltd.
Dean Langton T/A Skelton Waste Disposal
Demex Ltd.
Du Pont UK Ltd.
E. & J. M. Beecroft
E. Bailey
E. Rhodes
E. Pease & Son Ltd.
E. Simpson
E. Moulson
E. Wilkinson T/A Licensed Tyre Disposals
Earthmover Tyres Yorkshire Ltd.
Environment Agency
Eric France & Son (Metals) Ltd.
Eric Winterburn T/A Viking Car Spares

F. M. Atha
F. W. Thompson
F. Long
Firth Carpets Ltd.
Fryston Recovery Ltd.
G. Sharp T/A Autos
G. & S.C. Hackney T/A Thorpe Autobodies
G.W. Butler Ltd.
G. Bennett
G & K Pearce T/A Acorn Skip Hire
Geoff Wormersley Jnr
Gill Demolitions Ltd.
Glendennings (Containers) Ltd.
Glintdale Ltd. T/A Quickskip
Gordon Smith
Greencroft Plastics Ltd.
Grosvenor Chemicals Ltd.
H. M. Fitzsimmons
H. & D. Douglas (Tyres) Ltd. T/A Stafford Tyre Co.
H. Smith & Sons Ltd.
H. Moore Ltd. (Metal Broker)
Halifax Metal Processors Ltd.
Hard York Ltd.
Harry Carr (Autowreckers) Ltd.
Haworth Scouring Co.
Hengbays (1984) Ltd.
Henry Waddington Nelson
Hicks Haulage
Hickson Ltd. T/A Hickson Fine Chemicals
Hillridge Ltd.
Hinchliffe Brothers
I. M. (Contractors) Ltd.
I. Paris
Ibstock Brick (Nostell) Ltd.
IMI Yorkshire Alloys Ltd.
Infrastructure Services Northern Track Removals
J. Bower
J. A. Stevenson
J. Hudson
J. Snee
J. N. Hirst
J. R. Towriss
J. Hornby and Sons Ltd.
J. S. Miller & Co. Ltd.
J. S. Bamforth & Co. Ltd.
J. W Hinchcliffe Ltd.
J. W. Crowther & Son Ltd.
J. A. Dickinson T/A Dickinson Autos
J. Turkington T/A Knostrop Autowreckers
J. W., J. H. & D. Whiting T/A Whiting Brothers
J. Crisp T/A Dragon Bridge Dismantlers
J. Liversidge & Son and L. Barbidge and Sons
J. B. Garahan Ltd.
J. M., R. A. & G. V. Beckett T/A Jim Beckett Commercial Motor Dealers Vehicles & Spares
J. Hand
J. E. Crowther (Holdings) plc
J. A. Whitehead Services (Littletown) Ltd.
J. B. Hill & Sons Ltd.
J. Jagger & Sons
J. E. Crowther Ltd.
J. Ward T/A Phoenix Auto Dismantlers
J. Brook
J. T. Singleton & Son
J. Matthews T/A J. M. Metals
J. Brotherton
J. Brooksbank
Jack Stephenson & Phyllis Stephenson T/A J. & P. Stephenson
James Rodney Hulme
James Macnair T/A Thornes Wharf Vehicle Spares
James Pickup
John Alderson & Son Ltd.
John Milner & Sons Ltd.
Johnsons Wellfield Quarries
Joseph Sykes Brothers Ltd.
K. Armstrong
K. Briggs
K. Appleyard T/A Thorpe Lane Commercial
K. Durkin & N. Ramsey T/A Prestige Salvage Co.
K. Moorhouse
K. S. Cooper
K. Johnson
K. A. Rothery
K. Ibbertson
Killgerm Chemicals Ltd.
Kirklees Metropolitan Council
Kirklees Highways Services
L. Junior Power
L. Whitaker
L. Power
Lambson Fine Chemicals Ltd.
Leeds City Council (Asbestos Unit)
Leeds City Council
Linfact Installations Ltd.
Linpac Plastics Ltd.
Lloyd Loaders (M. H.) Ltd.
M. J. Procter
M. Brook
M. Lovatt T/A A1 Tool and Skip Hire
M. Andrews
M. Hutchinson
M. Witcombe
M. and C. Dismantlers
M. Greenwood
M. B. Wood
M. & S. Kent T/A Wetherby Skip Services
M & B Haulage
Mahmood Atkhar
Marshalls Mono Ltd.
Marshalls plc.
Messrs Conroy and Booth Ltd.
Messrs K. M. & R. Humphrey T/A KMR
Metaltreat Ltd.
Michael Willey
Mitchell Cotts Chemicals Ltd.
Modern Car Spares Ltd.
Mone Bros. (Civil Eng.) Ltd.
Mone Bros. (Excavations) Ltd.
Monoplas Industries Ltd.
Morley Waste Traders Ltd.
Mr. Grabovski T/A Star Salvage
Muktubs (UK) Ltd.
M. W. Horner
N. and R. Contractors Ltd.
N. C. Woolford T/A Leeds Skip Services
N. Crossley
National Power plc
Naylor Bros. (Clayware) Ltd.
Normanton Brick Company Ltd.
Northern Drums Ltd.
Norver Paints Ltd.
Oats Royd Mill Ltd.
Octave Four Ltd.
On-The-Dot Ltd.
Orcol Fuels Ltd.
P. H. Sanders
P. Garnett & Son Ltd.
P. Wagstaff T/A Waggies Auto Spares
P. Brewerton
P. Drake
P. Downham
P. A. Austick T/A Stanningley Motors
P. Metcalfe T/A Betta Skip Hire
P. Popek
P. & E. Murphy T/A Skiplift
P. Singh T/A Churwell Car Spares
P. R. Jones
Park Pitt Landfills Ltd.
Parkinson and Spencer Refrac Ltd.
Percy Pickard (Sales) Ltd.
Personnel Hygiene Services Ltd.
Peter Bould T/A Boulds Bins

Pinegreen Ltd.
Plastic Drum Reconditioning
Pole Moor Auto Spares
R. Spivey & Sons Ltd.
R. Gentry T/A M. G. Skip Hire
R. Kaye
R. D. Skinner & A. Skinner T/A Jeff Skinner Skip Hire
R. Crossley
R. Askew
R. Wisher
R. J. Patchett Ltd.
R. A. Taylor
R. F. Winder Electrical Ltd.
R. Woodhead
Ray Allen & Sons
Readymix (Huddersfield) Ltd.
Reflecting Roadstuds Ltd.
Rentokil Initial plc
Reusable Building Supplies
Rhodar Ltd.
Richard Schofield
Richard Hall
Ridgenorth Ltd. T/A T. Holmes and Co.
Rigby Cold Drawn
Robinson & Birdsell Ltd.
Robinson Bros. (Airedale Demolitions) Ltd.
Robinson Group Ltd.
Ryhill Landfill Site Ltd.
S. Clark T/A Auto Salvage Autowreckers
S. Pickard
S. R. Parker
S. Wagstaff
S. J. Mitchell T/A Crest Properties
S. Brook
S. W. Shelton T/A Bridge Supply Company
S. & R. M. Peel
Safety-Kleen UK Ltd.
Sheppard Group Bradford Ltd.
Shipley Paint Ltd.
Silver Lining Industries Ltd.
SIS Chemicals Ltd.
Solvo Ltd.
South Elmsall Quarries Ltd.
Stephenson Bros. (Haulage) Ltd.
Synthomer Ltd.
T. E. Lowe
T. Sandham T/A Aireborough Waste Traders
T. Matthews
T. A. Plunkett
T. Musgrove
T. Kelly
T. Berryman & Sons Ltd.
T. R. & R. Bainbridge T/A L. Bainbridge & Sons
T. H. Holroyd Ltd.
Tarmac Heavy Building Materials UK Ltd.
The Design Practice
Thomas Arthur Brotherton
Thornton Processing Ltd.
Tourberry Ltd.
Tyre Collection Services Ltd.
UK Waste Management Ltd.
United Leeds Teaching Hosps.
W. H. Robinson Ltd.
W. S. Crossley (Yorkstone) Ltd.
W. T. Knowles and Sons Ltd.
W. M. Beattie (Leeds) Ltd., T/A Plant Hire Co.
Wainmans
Wakefield Demolition Co. Ltd.
Walker May (Halifax) Ltd.
Wayne Peter Simpson
Waystone Ltd.
Webfell Ltd.
Webfell
Wells and Moorhouse Ltd.
West Yorkshire Waste Management Joint Committee
West Riding Waste Disposal
Westwood Yarns Ltd.
Wilkinson Brothers
William Ernest Ley
Woolcombers (Processors) Ltd.
Wright Bros. (Clayton) Ltd.
Wright Engineers (Burley) Ltd.
Y. Tweedale
Yorkshire Electricity
Yorkshire Metal Traders Ltd.
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd.
Yorkshire Water Enterprises
Yorkshire Electricity Group plc
Yorkshire Environmental Limited T/A Global Environmental Services
Zeneca

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions were pursued, in West Yorkshire, for contraventions of waste management regulations in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [17245]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency is responsible for the enforcement of waste management legislation. I have been informed by the Environment Agency that the number of waste-related prosecutions in West Yorkshire brought by the Agency, and prior to 1 April 1996 by waste regulation authorities, for the calendar years 1993–1997 is as follows:

	Number
1993	18
1994	20
1995	16
1996	20
1997 (to date)	25

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions the Health and Safety Executive has brought against employers who have failed adequately to control exposure to substances hazardous to health under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 since January 1995 in which the employer was charged with failing to reduce the level of exposure below the maximum exposure limit; and how many have been successful. [18414]

Angela Eagle: Such prosecutions can be brought only under Regulation 7(1) of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1994 for failure to ensure that exposure is adequately controlled. Charges cannot be laid separately under Regulation 7(6) which explains the duty with regard to substances for which a maximum exposure limit is specified. There have been five informations laid under Regulation 7(1) resulting in five convictions during 1996–97. This information is provisional. Information prior to 1996–97 is not available at this level of detail due to the coding system then used by HSE.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions the Health and Safety Executive has brought against employers who have failed adequately to control

exposure to substances hazardous to health under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994; and how many have been successful. [18413]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Executive has brought 28 prosecutions under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1994. Of these, 22 have resulted in convictions. The provisional figures for 1997 are 11 prosecutions resulting in 11 convictions.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures Health and Safety Executive officials are taking to ensure that levels of exposure to substances hazardous to health are reduced below the maximum exposure limit. [18415]

Angela Eagle: Where a maximum exposure limit (MEL) has been assigned, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1994, as amended, require employers to control exposure to as low a level as is reasonably practicable and in any case below that MEL.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors enforce COSHH by assessing employers' arrangements for controlling health risks and, in particular, the measures they take to reduce exposures, including monitoring to test compliance with exposure limits.

HSE also publishes considerable practical advice on controlling exposure and inspectors refer to such guidance as illustrating good practice. Publicity and enforcement campaigns are also targeted at priority classes of substances, many of which have maximum exposure limits.

"Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas"

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department has taken in the last 12 months to assess the extent of the problem of failure to report in pursuance of the recommendation of Lord Donaldson's Report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas". [18187]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Marine Safety Agency, Mr. R. Bradley, to write to the hon. and learned Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. James Wallace, dated 1 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question about the steps taken to assess the extent of the problem of failure to report, pursuant to recommendation 71 of Lord Donaldson's Report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas."

Since the publication of the report by Lord Donaldson the Department has implemented Council Directive 93/75/EEC. The implementing Regulations make it compulsory for masters of vessels which find themselves in circumstances which may cause pollution or damage, either to themselves or to the UK coastline, to report to the Coastguard. This significantly strengthens the position as against that prevailing at the time of the report.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's Inquiry Report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" in a form similar to that placed in the Library on 31 October 1996. [18186]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government is currently reviewing the progress made in implementing the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's Inquiry. I will place copies of a progress report in the Library shortly.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department has taken to monitor the operation of the voluntary certification scheme issued by the Marine Safety Agency in May 1995 in pursuance of recommendation 51(c) of Lord Donaldson's Report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas". [18190]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Marine Safety Agency, Mr. R. Bradley, to write to the hon. and learned Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. James Wallace, dated 1 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question about what steps the Department has taken to monitor the operation of the voluntary certification scheme issued by the Marine Safety Agency in May 1995 in pursuance of recommendation 51(c) of Lord Donaldson's Report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas".

The voluntary certification scheme, published in Merchant Shipping Notice number M.1616, encouraged ship operators to gain certification to the International Safety Management (ISM) Code in advance of the mandatory compliance dates.

Our records indicate that those passenger roll-on/roll-off ferries and their operating companies, which were required to comply with the Code under Council Regulation (EC) No 3051/95, have all achieved certification.

In addition, good progress is being made on the certification of companies and the vessels they operate which are required to comply with the Code by 1 July 1998, by virtue of the new Chapter IX to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) 1974 Convention. The vessel types affected in this phase of implementation are oil tankers, chemical tankers, gas carriers, bulk carriers and cargo high speed craft, all of 500 gross tonnage and over, and all passenger ships including passenger high speed craft. We are liaising closely with ship operators who have already applied under the voluntary scheme, to ensure certification is achieved as soon as possible. We have been in contact also with the few who have not yet formally applied to enquire about their progress and intentions.

Coastguard Minute 20/96

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the text of Coastguard Minute 20/96 sent to coastguard stations in July 1996 [18191]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Coastguard agency, Mr. C. Harris, to write to the hon. and learned Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. James Wallace, dated 1 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Coastguard Minute 20/96.

I enclose a copy of Coastguard Minute 20/96 "SAR situation reports (SITREPS) and morning press reports" as requested.

HM COASTGUARD

Coastguard Minute 20/96

Distribution C

Sar Situation Reports (SITREPS) And Morning Press Reports

Ref: A. CG3 Vol. 3 Part 2 Section 7

B. CG3 Vol. 2 Part 5 Section 1

1. Representations have been received at CGHQ concerning the publication in Lloyd's List of information on alerts, emergencies and equipment failures, passed by the Offshore Industry and Merchant Vessels to HM Coastguard in good faith and on the understanding that there will be an embargo on further publication. However, despite the "For information not for publication" affix, these articles *are* being published.

2. Staff should be well aware of the value of rapid and open reporting between Industry and ourselves and should be conscious that unnecessary media emphasis on what turns out to be a precautionary report is not conducive to maintaining the necessary rapport. We must however, also be mindful, as a government agency, of being aware of the publics' expectation for us to report emergency incidents without fear or favour.

3. (a) Effective upon receipt of this minute, SAR situation reports are not to be transmitted to Lloyds, except where *positive* SAR[1] action occurs.

(b) Reports in accordance with Ref. B (Paragraph 1.6.2) are to continue, however to clarify the situation, the term "wreck or casualty" does not include precautionary alerts or reports of vessel stoppages.

4. In accordance with Ref. A, SITREPS should normally only be sent when positive SAR action is taken or required; for example, precautionary alerts from an offshore installation or a report of a vessel stopped for mechanical repairs would not normally warrant a SITREP unless/until the situation deteriorated.

5. In future, tighter control is to be maintained on the occasions when SAR SITREPs are released to external authorities. SWOs/DMTs/RDOs are to assess the requirements for SITREPs more rigorously, paying particularly attention to the SITREP address list.

6. Morning reports to CGHQ should continue as per Ref. A. Where these are used for external distribution, they should be edited to reflect only those incidents where positive SAR action was taken.

7. This Coastguard Minute remains extant until superseded or incorporated into Coastguard Instructions.

J ASTBURY

Chief Coastguard

15 July 1996

Department of Transport—CG2 2/1/5/15

Coastguard Minute 19/96 was circulated Distribution B

[1] Positive SAR is where assets are mobilised and despatch to an incident.

On-train Telephones

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that public on-train telephones are equipped with induction loops; and what steps his Department has taken in pursuing this matter with the Office of the Rail Regulator. [17931]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Regulator will be reviewing his Code of Practice for Disabled Passengers in the New Year; the revised Code will take account of the regulations made under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The draft regulations include a proposal that on-train telephones are equipped with inductive couplers.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the proposed regulations for railway rolling stock under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will ensure that public on-train telephones are equipped with induction loops. [17932]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are currently drawing up draft regulations for railway rolling stock under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. They will be issued for public consultation early in the New Year.

The regulations cover a wide range of features to ensure that disabled people can travel on trains in safety and with reasonable comfort. The draft regulations include a proposal that public on-train telephones are equipped with inductive couplers.

South Downs

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what representations he has received about the protection of the South Downs; [17922]

(2) when he plans to announce a decision about the future of the South Downs Conservation Board; [17923]

(3) what representations he has received about the future of the South Downs Conservation Board. [17924]

Angela Eagle: Ministers have received a number of representations about the protection of the South Downs and about the future of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board. At our request, the Countryside Commission is carrying out the consultation on the long term arrangements for the South Downs. A conference was held in Brighton on 26 November to launch the consultation, at which it was announced that the consultation period has been extended to 1 February. Copies of the consultation document are available from the Countryside Commission's London office and from

libraries within the South Downs and surrounding towns. The Commission will analyse the responses and bring the results and advice to Ministers next spring.

Port Control Inspections

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of *(a)* all foreign flag vessels, *(b)* oil tankers, *(c)* passenger ships and *(d)* bulk carriers were the subject of port state control inspections in United Kingdom ports in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) January to October 1997. [18189]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Marine Safety Agency, Mr. R. Bradley, to write to the hon. and learned Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. James Wallace, dated 1 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question about the inspection of foreign flag vessels in United Kingdom ports.

Please find below the figures you requested. You will note that Marine Safety Agency statistics are compiled by financial year rather than by calendar year.

Port state control inspections by ship type

Per cent.

	1995/6	*1996/7*	*April–October 1997*
All foreign vessels	30.6	27.4	25.9
Oil tankers	17.4	15.8	10.0
Passenger ships	71.8	91.7	85.7
Bulk carriers	65.3	74.7	74.8

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what United Kingdom port state control inspections of the vessel "Green Lily" have taken place since 1 January 1996. [18188]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Marine Safety Agency, Mr. R. Bradley, to write to the hon. and learned Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. James Wallace, dated 1 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question abut the vessel "Green Lily".

Since 1 January 1996, "Green Lily" has been inspected once by the Marine Safety Agency. This inspection was conducted on 24 March 1997 at Hull. No deficiencies were noted.

Alexandra Palace and Park

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library the correspondence between his Department and the London Borough of Haringey since 1 January 1990 regarding Alexandra Palace and Park; and if he will make a statement. [18193]

Ms Armstrong: The Department has had a considerable volume of correspondence with Haringey over Alexandra Palace and Park in the last seven years. Much of its relates to a deficit of approximately £55 million which the authority has accrued in respect of the property. As such, a large part of the content of these letters is therefore commercially sensitive and is exempt from release to a third party under the Department's Code of Practice on Open Government.

Identifying the correspondence and the information that is confidential would be time-consuming and could not be undertaken except at disproportionate cost.

Driving Licences (Diabetics)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what medical conditions are specifically identified in legislation as preventing a person holding a licence enabling them to drive a vehicle in Groups C and D. [17392]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 requires the Secretary of State to refuse to grant a licence if he is satisfied that an applicant is suffering from a relevant disability. Relevant disabilities which are a bar to the holding of a Category C or D licence are:

inability to read a number plate under prescribed conditions;

eye abnormality which prevents a person from meeting prescribed visual acuity standards, or sight in one eye only;

diabetes requiring insulin treatment;

epileptic attack or treatment for epilepsy within the previous 10 years;

liability to seizures other than as a result of epilepsy;

liability to disabling giddiness or fainting, including as a result of an implanted electrical cardiac device;

severe mental disorder;

persistent misuse of alcohol or drugs;

becoming a High Risk Offender as a result of disqualification for a drink/drive offence; and

any other disability which is likely to lead to a danger to other road users.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications of the proposed restrictions on issuing driving licences to people with insulin-dependent diabetes on those whose current employment requires them to drive vehicles in Groups C and D; if he will review such restrictions to allow licences to be granted in very exceptional cases; and if he will make a statement. [17393]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Legislation has since 1991 prohibited the grant of category C and D licences—giving entitlement to lorries over 7.5 tonnes and buses with more than 16 seats—to insulin dependent diabetics. The provisions which come into force on 1 January 1998 apply only to those having entitlement to drive vehicles in category C1 (lorries up to 7.5 tonnes) and category D1 (minibuses) obtained through passing a test to drive cars. The D1 entitlement is qualified "Not for hire or reward" and holders should therefore not be employed as drivers. It is impossible to establish the number of people who are employed as drivers of C1 vehicles who are insulin-dependent. In any case a number of studies by experts in the field on the consequences of insulin treatment have shown that insulin treatment leads to a significant risk of hypoglycaemia. This can lead to loss of consciousness, as well as other effects such as diminished judgment. It is well established that hypoglycaemia can occur without

warning and a number of accidents have directly resulted from this. The Honorary Advisory Panel on Diabetes and Driving have advised that there are, in their judgment, no exceptional cases, and confirmed that granting licences to drive lorries up to 7.5 tonnes and minibuses to those who are insulin-dependent is not in the interests of road safety.

Coastguard Reports

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions between 1 August 1996 and 31 October 1997 coastguard search-and-rescue situations reports were not released to Lloyd's List. [18192]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Social Services (Oxfordshire)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received from Oxfordshire about the reductions in social service provision in the county. [18390]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations about the funding of Oxfordshire County Council. Many of these have referred to proposals by the County Council to make reductions in its services, including social services.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Big Cats

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responsibility his Department has for monitoring sightings of big cats. [17874]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office has no responsibility for monitoring the sightings of big cats.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sightings of big cats have been reported to the police in Norfolk. [17875]

Mr. Michael: Since 1 July 1997, Norfolk Constabulary have received 54 reports of a "big cat", mostly sighted in the Norwich area.

Young Offenders

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it takes, on average, from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, and for other young offenders. [18874]

Mr. Straw: Information on the time between arrest and sentence for young offenders is not available from historical records, as the previous Government did not collect data on time intervals from arrest. However, we have recently completed a survey of persistent young offenders dealt with by the youth justice system in 1996. That survey indicates that in 1996 the average time between arrest and sentence for persistent young offenders was 142 days.

An Audit Commission survey of 600 young offenders in 1996 suggests that the average time between arrest and sentence for all young offenders was 121 days[1]. The Time Intervals Survey, published by the Lord Chancellor's Department, indicates that in 1996 the average time from offence to completion for defendants in indictable cases dealt with by the Youth Court was 131 days. The White Paper "No More Excuses—A New Approach to Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales" (Cm 3809) erroneously stated (paragraph 7.1) that this figure of 131 days was the average interval between arrest and sentence for a young offender.

We are ensuring that systems are put in place to monitor the time between arrest and sentence in the future for persistent young offenders and other young offenders.

Notes:

[1] Audit Commission, Misspent Youth: Young People and Crime, November 1996.

[2] Time Intervals for criminal proceedings in the magistrates' courts, Lord Chancellor's Department, March 1997 (Issue 1/97).

Mukesh Gajjar

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the deportation order in the case of Mukesh Gajjar. [18316]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The decision not to revoke the deportation order against Mukesh Gajjar is currently under appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority.

Final Product Cosmetic Testing Ban

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of animal deaths, broken down by species, which will be averted by the voluntary ban on final product cosmetic testing on animals. [17885]

Mr. George Howarth: The "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain, 1996" were laid in the House in July. Table 10 shows that 252 procedures were for the purpose of safety testing of finished cosmetic products, the category of tests covered by the voluntary ban. Table 10a shows that these involved 220 animals (34 rats, 162 guinea-pigs and 24 rabbits). Most of these animals would only have experienced low levels of suffering and would not have died as a result of the procedure.

The ban on cosmetic product testing is an important first step. We announced on 6 November that we would also be exploring a ban on the testing of ingredients for "vanity" products and finished household products.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankan asylum seekers have been granted refugee status or leave to remain in the UK in the past 12 months *(a)* without the intervention of a special adjudicator and *(b)* following intervention by a special adjudicator. [17912]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: During the period 1 November 1996 to 31 October 1997, a total of 1,900 initial decisions, excluding dependants, were made on asylum applications

lodged by Sri Lankan nationals. Of these, 40 were to recognise the applicant as a refugee and grant asylum, 10 were to refuse asylum but grant exceptional leave (to enter/remain in the United Kingdom) and 1,850 were to refuse both asylum and exceptional leave.

Provisional information indicates that, during the same time period, special adjudicators determined approximately 1,140 appeals lodged by Sri Lankan nationals against the refusal of asylum. Of these, an estimated 8 per cent. were allowed, 87 per cent. were dismissed and 5 per cent. were withdrawn.

An allowed appeal does not necessarily result in an automatic grant of refugee status or a grant of exceptional, or other, leave to remain in the United Kingdom. In cases where the allowed appeal relates to an initial refusal of asylum on safe third country grounds, the Asylum Directorate will then usually consider the application substantively—any subsequent, adverse decision attracting a further right of appeal before the special adjudicator. Additionally, in cases where reasonable grounds exist, the Home Office may elect to challenge an adjudicator's determination by lodging an appeal with the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.

I regret that a reliable breakdown of asylum decisions made following appeal determinations is not available.

Prisons (Boards of Visitors Reports)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates of publication for each board of visitors annual report for 1996 and *(a)* each privately managed prison and *(b)* each publicly managed prison; and if he will make a statement. [18086]

Ms Quin: Each Board of Visitors has a statutory duty under Prison Rule 97 to report annually to the Home Secretary on the state of the prison and its administration and include advice and suggestions as they consider appropriate.

Boards of Visitors Annual Reports are not published documents. They are made to the Secretary of State who permits the Board to publish their Annual Report, if they wish, subject to allowing a period of notice to elapse before publication and to removal of any material which is confidential.

Fifty Boards have published their 1996 Annual Reports. The Boards and the publication dates of their Reports are as follows:

Board	*Publication date*
Privately managed prisons	
Blakenhurst	December 1996
Wolds	April 1997
Publicly managed prisons	
Aldington	January 1997
Askham Grange	February 1997
Bedford	May 1997
Belmarsh	February 1997
Blantyre House	February 1997
Blundeston	April 1997
Bristol	February 1997
Brixton	May 1997
Bullwood Hall	January 1997
Channings Wood	February 1997
Chelmsford	January 1997
Dartmoor	January 1997
Deerbolt	January 1997
Downview	March 1997
Drake Hall	January 1997
Erlestoke	January 1997
Exeter	January 1997
Feltham	March 1997
Ford	February 1997
Full Sutton	January 1997
Guys Marsh	February 1997
Haslar	January 1997
High Down	February 1997
Highpoint	August 1997
Hollesley Bay	May 1997
Holloway	April 1997
Hull	January 1997
Huntercombe	May 1997
Kingston	April 1997
Kirkham	January 1997
Lancaster Farms	February 1997
The Mount	April 1997
Northallerton	January 1997
Norwich	April 1997
Nottingham	April 1997
Pentonville	April 1997
Preston	January 1997
Risley	April 1997
Send	January 1997
Swaleside	March 1997
Swansea	May 1997
The Verne	April 1997
Wandsworth	April 1997
Wayland	August 1997
Wetherby	May 1997
Whatton	August 1997
Whitemoor	February 1997
Winchester	March 1997

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of the renewed contract between his Department and United Kingdom Detention Services Limited in respect of Her Majesty's Prison, Blakenhurst; and if he will make a statement. [18087]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) on 19 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *247–49*, that he would extend the contract for the management of Her Majesty's Prison, Blakenhurst by UKDS Limited for a further three years. The detailed contractual terms are being finalised and, as is usual for prison management contracts, a copy of the signed contract will be placed in the Library.

Prison Service

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what occasions and on what basis the Prison Service Contracts and Competition Group has provided consultancy, advice and assistance to foreign governments and private contractors; what income has been received as a result on those occasions; and if he will make a statement. [18090]

Ms Quin: Since 1995–97, members of the Prison Service Contracts and Competition Group (CCG) have met or provided information on request to officials of the following national governments:

Australia
Colombia
Canada
Fiji
Israel
Japan
Trinidad and Tobago
New Zealand
United States of America

Similar assistance has been provided to the following provincial or state governments or administrations:

South Australia
Western Australia
Victoria
New Brunswick
Nova Scotia
Ontario
Oklahoma

These contacts were either part of an itinerary of visits arranged by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or, in the majority of cases, reflect the reciprocal exchange of information between the Prison Service and other prison services throughout the world.

More extensive advice and assistance was provided this year to the Republic of South Africa in connection with its pilot programme for the design, construction, management and financing (DCMF) by private contractors of 5,400 new prison places. The Head of CCG was an independent member of the evaluation panel that assessed application by contractors to prequalify to tender for these contracts. CCG also arranged a short briefing programme in the United Kingdom, which included meetings with officials at the Treasury and staff of the Private Finance Panel Executive, for officials from the Republic of South Africa's ministries of Public Works, Corrections and Finance.

There were no charges for such assistance; most of the meetings were of a short duration.

Relations with private contractors are restricted to the administration of existing contracts and actions necessary for the procurement of future contracts.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much income the Prison Service received for staff recruitment advertisements placed in Prison Service publications by private prison and escort service operators in the last six financial years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [18091]

Ms Quin: Prison Service News has carried three such advertisements during the past two years, earning from them £990 in the financial year 1996–97 and £200 in the current financial year (to the end of October). There were no such advertisements placed in 1995–96, the only other year for which such detailed advertising records are available.

All income from such advertising is appropriated in aid of Prison Service expenditure through the Supply Estimates.

Departmental Staff (Early Retirement)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officials in his Department and its agencies, in the grade of assistant secretary and above, or equivalent, took early retirement, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; what is the estimated additional cost of those early retirements; how many in each year retired on *(a)* medical grounds and *(b)* grounds related to performance; how many were subsequently re-engaged for any period on a consultancy basis; and if he will make a statement. [18093]

Mr. Straw: Details of the number of officials in the grade of assistant secretary and above, or equivalent—now members of the Senior Civil Service—who retired early, including those leaving on medical grounds, are shown in the table. Information is available only for the last six years. During this period, no early retirements on grounds of performance are recorded.

Number of officials in the Home Department (and agencies) at SCS level (previously grade 5 and above or equivalent) who have taken early retirement since 1992

Year	*Total retiring early (number on ill health grounds in brackets)*
1992	1
1993	2
1994	6 (1)
1995	4
1996	[1]19
1997 (to end November)	3 (2)

[1] Includes 18 early retirements resulting from loss of senior posts following Home Office Senior Management Review.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many public appointments he has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16780]

Mr. Straw: Since 1 May 1997, I have made 323 public appointments, of which 58 (18 per cent.) receive remuneration.

The information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all Departments in an aggregated form.

Private Prison Contracts

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide details of each default notice issued in the last two years for failure to comply with private prison contract conditions; and if he will make a statement; [18088]

(2) if he will list the dates, amounts and details of the financial penalties incurred by private prison operators for contract failures; and if he will make a statement. [18089]

Ms Quin: There have been two occasions when the contractors managing prisons were penalised financially. First, in February 1994, a payment of £41,167 (excluding value added tax) was withheld from UKDS Limited because of an incident at Her Majesty's Prison, Blakenhurst, which resulted in a temporary reduction in cell availability. Second, a deduction of £526 was made from payments due to Group 4 under the contractual performance measurement system for Her Majesty's Prison, Buckley Hall.

Notices issued to contractors managing prisons when they fail to comply with their contract are now termed improvement notices; in the past, they have sometimes been described as cure or default notices. The number of and reasons for such notices issued to privately managed prisons since 1 November 1995 are set out in the table below.

Prison	*Date*	*Reason for notice*
Her Majesty's Prison Blakenhurst	22 November 1995	Failure to provide a full set of standing orders in the prison library
	3 September 1996	Failure to maintain accurately prisoners' records
	25 March 1997	Failure to provide meals for prisoners transferring to another prison
Her Majesty's Prison Buckley Hall	17 January 1996	Failure to operate fully the personal officer scheme
	17 January 1996	Failure to provide sufficient work opportunities
	15 August 1996	Employment of three members of staff without security clearance
	10 April 1997	Failure to comply with procedures laid down in the Security Manual
	6 November 1997	Operation of prison shop by subcontractor without Her Majesty's Prison Service authorisation
Her Majesty's Prison Doncaster	—	—
Her Majesty's Prison Wolds	—	—

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the access by the family or representatives of a deceased prisoner to the Prison Ombudsman; and if he will make a statement. [18278]

Ms Quin: We have received one representation from the family of a prisoner who died in custody, and another from the campaigning group Inquest on behalf of the family of a prisoner who died in custody. Inquest have also raised the question of the Prison Ombudsman's remit separately with my right hon. Friend.

The Prison Service already carries out an internal investigation into every death in custody and the Service is currently considering whether future reports should be made public. In light of the outcome of this review, we will consider whether there is a case for extending the Prison Ombudsman's remit.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths of prisoners have occurred at HMP Belmarsh, in the past year; what were the causes; and if he will make a statement. [18279]

Ms Quin: Four prisoners at Belmarsh prison have died in the past year. The inquest on one of these deaths was completed on 10 September 1997; the cause of death was hanging. The remaining inquests are outstanding; the cause of death in these cases has been initially classified as apparent suicide by hanging.

Myra Hindley

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors lay behind his decision to keep Myra Hindley in prison for the rest of her life. [17720]

Mr. Straw: Following my reply to a Question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Ms Jones) on 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *419–20*, about a revised policy on setting tariffs for mandatory life sentence prisoners, Myra Hindley's solicitors asked that I should indicate whether I proposed to stand by her present whole life tariff. I have looked at the papers considered by my predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), before he set her present whole life tariff. They include descriptions of the crimes for which she was convicted, the judicial comments made in her case, and her representations. I saw no reason to depart from his decision. Myra Hindley's solicitors wish to make further representations on the subject of whether her whole life tariff should be reduced by reason of "exceptional progress" by her. When I receive such representations, I shall consider them.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the *(a)* desirability and *(b)* practicality of making the installation of smoke alarms in domestic dwellings mandatory; [17645]

(2) what steps he is taking to encourage the installation of smoke alarms in domestic dwellings [17644]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government recognise the significant contribution made by smoke alarms to the protection of life and property. The installation of properly maintained smoke alarms in households has been the centrepiece of our efforts to reduce fire casualties for some time.

Since 1992, the Building Regulations require all new dwellings in England and Wales to have a smoke alarm system installed. For existing properties, the policy has

been to ensure that people are aware of the potentially life saving benefits of smoke alarms; and to encourage them to install smoke alarms in their homes and maintain and test them regularly. These efforts, and those of brigades, increased ownership from 9 per cent. in 1987 to its present figure of 79 per cent.

Our efforts on fire prevention certainly need to be redoubled. In this respect, I welcome the report earlier this month to my right hon. Friend from the Community Fire Safety Task Force. The Task Force considered the mandatory installation of smoke alarms, but felt this would not be practicable. However, they argued for the refocusing of the fire service towards prevention and set ambitious targets for reducing the incidence of fires, deaths and casualties in the home.

There is clearly still more to be done to install smoke alarms in those households who are most vulnerable or at greatest risk of having a fire. The Task Force report identifies means of achieving this. We are consulting widely on their recommendations and in light of responses will decide on the way forward.

Visitors' Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent appeals procedure for refusal of visitors' visas. [18317]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are committed to providing a streamlined right of appeal for visitors denied a visa and we are examining the options for achieving this. We hope to make an announcement in due course.

Voting Systems

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Independent Commission on the Voting System. [18561]

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has today appointed Lord Jenkins of Hillhead to be the Chairman of the Independent Commission on the Voting System. The other members will be Lord Alexander of Weedon, Lady Gould of Potternewton, Sir John Chilcot and Mr. David Lipsey.

The Commission's terms of reference will be:

"The Commission shall be free to consider and recommend any appropriate system or combination of systems in recommending an alternative to the present system for Parliamentary elections to be put before the people in the Government's referendum.

The Commission shall observe the requirement for broad proportionality, the need for stable government, an extension of voter choice and the maintenance of a link between hon. Members and geographical constituencies".

The Commission will begin its work early in the new year and has been asked to report within twelve months.

Prisoners (Books and Magazines)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Prison Service's policy on the taking of books and magazines into prisons for inmates. [16181]

Ms Quin: The taking of books and magazines into prisons is covered by Prison Service policy on prisoners' property brought in on reception and visits, or sent in by post. Books or magazines of a category allowed by the local establishment may be handed in and then checked by the prison authorities before giving it to the prisoner. The Governor of each establishment has discretion to restrict the handing in of any property within the powers given by Prison Rules 41, 42 and 85 and Young Offender Institution Rules 45 and 69 (Copies available in the Library) to avoid, for example:

(a) undermining the incentive and earned privileges scheme; or

(b) compromising the security of establishments.

The Governor of each establishment has complete discretion over the handing in of property. If, for security reasons, a particular prison restricts the handing in of property which prisoners may normally have in their possession, facilities will be made for prisoners to purchase these items either through the prison shop or through approved mail order arrangements by suing their private cash and/or earnings.

It is planned to review existing policy on the handing in of prisoners' property during 1998–99.

Fire Brigades

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the personnel of each fire brigade by ethnic origin, sex and grade. [17785]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils' Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities produces an annual report which includes statistical information on fire brigade personnel. The Committee's Fourth annual report was published on 22 October 1997 and circulated to all fire authorities and brigades. I am placing a copy in the Library. The report includes data on personnel employed by fire brigades, analysed by gender and ethnic origin.

The attached tables, based on recent statistical returns from fire brigades, provide a further breakdown, by rank, gender and ethnic origin, of uniformed personnel within the fire service for England and Wales for the year ending 31 March 1997. Copies of these have also been placed in the Library.

Wholetime men as of 31 March 1997

White

Rank	*CFO*	*ACO*	*DACO*	*SDO*	*DO I*	*DO II*	*DC III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	1	2	0	0	6	0	9	18	54	58	78	411
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	0	4	0	4	8	25	31	42	181
Berkshire	1	3	0	0	3	6	2	10	26	54	63	245
Buckinghamshire	1	2	0	2	0	5	0	10	19	38	44	177
Cambridgeshire	1	2	0	1	0	6	0	9	23	28	42	140
Cheshire	1	2	0	1	3	1	9	17	47	60	86	389
Cleveland	1	2	0	4	0	5	4	12	46	59	97	392
Cornwall	1	1	0	0	3	0	4	12	13	32	22	88

Wholetime men as of 31 March 1997

White

Rank	*CFO*	*ACO*	*DACO*	*SDO*	*DO I*	*DO II*	*DC III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Cumbria	1	1	0	2	0	3	6	12	28	30	21	175
Derbyshire	1	2	0	0	3	1	5	12	37	49	70	275
Devon	1	2	0	3	0	10	0	19	52	69	53	327
Dorset	1	2	0	2	0	8	0	10	21	37	35	178
Durham	1	2	0	3	0	5	0	11	19	49	53	262
Essex	1	2	0	4	0	8	0	18	67	87	136	585
Gloucestershire	1	1	0	0	2	0	4	10	14	28	23	140
Hampshire	1	2	0	7	0	15	0	21	47	96	99	481
Hereford and Worcester	1	1	1	1	2	0	5	9	25	48	44	203
Hertfordshire	1	3	0	0	6	0	9	9	53	80	59	357
Humberside	1	3	0	0	8	0	11	19	41	71	77	470
Kent	1	3	0	8	0	6	7	25	70	97	143	574
Lancashire	1	1	2	4	2	12	1	23	87	110	101	619
Leicestershire	1	2	0	4	0	6	2	6	27	36	49	272
Lincoln	1	2	0	2	0	6	1	10	23	22	23	93
Norfolk	1	1	0	0	3	0	8	13	26	31	33	171
Northamptonshire	1	1	0	2	0	4	0	4	24	34	32	178
Northumberland	1	1	0	1	0	4	1	8	12	27	26	121
Nottinghamshire	1	3	0	2	0	9	0	12	36	81	85	356
Oxfordshire	1	2	0	0	3	3	3	8	29	26	25	117
Isles of Scilly	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	4
Shropshire	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	5	15	26	32	113
Somerset	1	1	0	1	1	2	4	6	17	24	18	95
Staffordshire	1	2	0	4	0	8	0	13	33	61	75	271
Suffolk	0	3	0	1	3	2	0	20	20	31	29	146
Surrey	1	2	0	3	0	7	0	19	41	91	82	470
East Sussex	1	2	0	3	2	4	0	14	30	50	68	255
West Sussex	1	2	0	1	2	2	8	12	33	42	61	222
Warwickshire	1	2	0	1	1	1	4	7	21	30	53	184
Isle of Wight	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	3	5	6	6	31
Wiltshire	1	1	0	1	1	5	1	12	19	24	25	117
North Yorkshire	1	2	0	0	5	2	5	16	23	36	50	219
Total 1997	38	72	5	68	66	159	118	482	1,251	1,891	2,160	10,104
Greater Manchester	1	5	0	7	7	5	31	53	183	210	169	1,487
Merseyside	1	3	0	5	1	9	9	23	120	182	166	959
Tyne and Wear	1	3	0	5	0	10	19	3	112	103	153	620
West Midlands[1]	1	4	0	8	5	9	8	32	211	214	201	1,302
South Yorkshire	1	3	0	4	0	2	4	16	74	111	118	548
West Yorkshire	1	4	0	4	0	17	0	30	143	179	237	1,106
London	1	7	2	11	13	51	9	106	445	489	559	3,951
Total 1997	7	29	2	44	26	103	80	263	1,288	1,488	1,603	9,973
Mid and West Wales	1	3	0	3	3	7	4	16	52	60	52	299
North Wales[1]	1	1	1	1	4	4	7	9	24	35	35	160
South Wales	1	3	0	6	2	10	0	21	77	113	97	597
Total 1997	3	7	1	10	9	21	11	46	153	208	184	1,056
Grand Total 1997	48	108	8	122	101	283	209	791	2,692	3,587	3,947	21,133

[1] Includes DFCO.

From the rank of CFO to SDO there is a total of 1 from the ethnic minorities: there is 1 "Asian" SDO in the West Midlands Fire Service.

Black

Rank	*DO II*	*DO III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Berkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cambridgeshire	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Cheshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Devon	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hampshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Black

Rank	*DO II*	*DO III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Kent	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Leicestershire	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Lincoln	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	5
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 1997	0	0	2	3	2	4	44
Greater Manchester	0	0	1	1	0	0	9
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Tyne and Wear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands[1]	0	0	0	0	0	6	27
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
West Yorkshire	0	0	1	0	0	1	6
London[1]	0	0	1	2	5	7	132
Total 1997	0	0	3	3	6	14	184
Mid and West Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Wales[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Grand total 1997	0	0	5	6	8	18	231

[1] Includes DFCO. From the rank of CFO to SDO there is a total of 1 from the ethnic minorities: There is 1 "Asian" SDO in the West Midlands Fire Service.

Asian

Rank	*DO II*	*DO III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Berkshire	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Devon	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Lincoln	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Asian

Rank	*DO II*	*DO III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
West Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 1997	0	0	1	1	3	1	15
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tyne and Wear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands[1]	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
London[1]	0	0	0	0	0	2	17
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	1	3	28
Mid and West Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Wales[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grand total 1997	0	0	1	1	4	4	44

[1] Includes DFCO. From the rank of CFO to SDO there is a total of one from the ethnic minorities: There is one "Asian" SDO in the West Midlands Fire Service.

Other

Rank	*DO II*	*DO III*	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Berkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cheshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cleveland	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Devon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leicestershire	2	0	2	8	4	11	41
Lincoln	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Other

Rank	DO II	DO III	ADO	STN O	SUB O	LDG FF	FF
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total 1997	2	1	4	9	4	13	64
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Tyne and Wear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
London[1]	0	0	2	3	3	4	55
Total 1997	0	0	2	3	5	4	76
Mid and West Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Wales[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand total 1997	2	1	6	12	9	17	140

[1] Includes DFCO. From the rank of CFO to SDO there is a total of 1 from the ethnic minorities: There is 1 "Asian" SDO in the West Midlands Fire Service.

Wholetime women as of 31 March 1997

White

Rank	CFO	ACO	DACO	SDO	DO I	DO II	DO III	ADO	STN O	SUB O	LDG FF	FF
Avon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Berkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Cheshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
Devon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hampshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Kent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Lincoln	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
West Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Wholetime women as of 31 March 1997

White

Rank	*CFO*	*ACO*	*DACO*	*SDO*	*DO I*	*DO II*	*DO III*	*ADO*	*STN 0*	*SUB 0*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	119
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Tyne and Wear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	0	6
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	43
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	3	2	59
Mid and West Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Grand total 1997	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	5	4	184

There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

Black

Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	1
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertforshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincoln	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Total 1997	0	1
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0

Black

Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
West Midlands	0	1
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	7
Total 1997	0	8
Mid and West Wales	0	0
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Grand Total	0	9

There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

Asian

Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincoln	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0

	Asian	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	1
Total 1997	0	1
Mid and West Wales	0	0
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Grand Total 1997	0	1

There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

	Other	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincoln	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0

	Other	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	4
Total 1997	0	4
Mid and West Wales	0	0
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Grand Total	0	4

There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

Retained women as of 31 March 1997

				White	
Rank	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0	0	0	2
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	4
Berkshire	0	0	0	0	4
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0	14
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	1	5
Cheshire	0	0	0	0	6
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	1
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	2
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	3
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	2
Devon	0	0	0	0	7
Dorset	0	0	0	0	2
Durham	0	0	0	0	2
Essex	0	0	0	1	3
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	6
Hampshire	0	0	0	0	8
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0	6
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	1	1
Humberside	0	0	0	1	2
Kent	0	0	0	0	5
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	6
Leicestershire	0	0	0	1	1
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	12
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	6
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	4
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	3
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	4
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	11
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	5
Somerset	0	0	0	0	2
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	6
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	5
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	4

Retained women as of 31 March 1997

				White	
Rank	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
West Sussex	0	0	0	0	4
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	2
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	1	1
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	4
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	4
Total 1997	0	0	0	6	169
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	1	0
Merseyside[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	0	0	0	0	1
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	2
London[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Total 1997	0	0	0	1	3
Mid and West Wales	0	0	0	0	6
North Wales	0	0	0	0	7
South Wales	0	0	0	0	3
Total 1997	0	0	0	0	16
Grand total	0	0	0	7	188

[1] No retained service. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

	Black
Rank	*Number*
Avon	0
Bedfordshire	0
Berkshire	0
Buckinghamshire	0
Cambridgeshire	0
Cheshire	0
Cleveland	0
Cornwall	0
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	0
Devon	1
Dorset	0
Durham	0
Essex	0
Gloucestershire	0
Hampshire	0
Hereford and Worcester	0
Hertfordshire	0
Humberside	0
Kent	0
Lancashire	0
Leicestershire	0
Lincolnshire	0
Norfolk	0
Northamptonshire	0
Northumberland	0
Nottinghamshire	0
Oxfordshire	0
Isles of Scilly	0
Shropshire	0
Somerset	0
Staffordshire	0
Suffolk	0
Surrey	0
East Sussex	0
West Sussex	0
Warwickshire	0
Isle of Wight	0
Wiltshire	0
North Yorkshire	0
Total 1997	1
Greater Manchester	0
Merseyside[1]	0
Tyne and Wear	0
West Midlands	0
South Yorkshire	0
West Yorkshire	0
London[1]	0
Total 1997	0
Mid and West Wales	1
North Wales	0
South Wales	0
Total 1997	1
Grand total 1997	2

[1] No retained service. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

	Asian
Rank	*Number*
Avon	0
Bedfordshire	0
Berkshire	0
Buckinghamshire	0
Cambridgeshire	0
Cheshire	0
Cleveland	0
Cornwall	0
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	0
Devon	0
Dorset	0
Durham	0
Essex	0
Gloucestershire	0
Hampshire	0
Hereford and Worcester	0
Hertfordshire	0
Humberside	0
Kent	0
Lancashire	0
Leicestershire	0
Lincolnshire	0
Norfolk	0
Northamptonshire	0
Northumberland	0
Nottinghamshire	0
Oxfordshire	0
Isles of Scilly	0
Shropshire	0
Somerset	0
Staffordshire	0
Suffolk	0
Surrey	0
East Sussex	0
West Sussex	0
Warwickshire	0
Isle of Wight	0
Wiltshire	0
North Yorkshire	0
Total 1997	0

Asian	
Rank	*Number*
Greater Manchester	0
Merseyside[1]	0
Tyne and Wear	0
West Midlands	0
South Yorkshire	0
West Yorkshire	0
London[1]	0
Total 1997	0
Mid and West Wales	0
North Wales	0
South Wales	0
Total 1997	0
Grand total 1997	0

[1] No retained service. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

Other	
Rank	*Number*
Avon	0
Bedfordshire	0
Berkshire	0
Buckinghamshire	0
Cambridgeshire	0
Cheshire	0
Cleveland	0
Cornwall	0
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	0
Devon	0
Dorset	0
Durham	0
Essex	0
Gloucestershire	0
Hampshire	0
Hereford and Worcester	0
Hertfordshire	0
Humberside	0
Kent	0
Lancashire	0
Leicestershire	0
Lincolnshire	0
Norfolk	0
Northamptonshire	0
Northumberland	0
Nottinghamshire	0
Oxfordshire	0
Isles of Scilly	0
Shropshire	0
Somerset	0
Staffordshire	0
Suffolk	0
Surrey	0
East Sussex	0
West Sussex	0
Warwickshire	0
Isle of Wight	0
Wiltshire	0
North Yorkshire	0
Total 1997	0
Greater Manchester	0
Merseyside	0
Tyne and Wear	0
West Midlands	0
South Yorkshire	0

Other	
Rank	*Number*
West Yorkshire	0
London[1]	0
Total 1997	0
Mid and West Wales	0
North Wales	0
South Wales	0
Total 1997	0
Grand total 1997	0

[1] No retained service. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of firefighter.

Retained men as of 31 March 1997

				White	
Rank	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	8	14	32	157
Bedfordshire	0	8	8	16	101
Berkshire	0	0	13	28	119
Buckinghamshire	0	1	13	36	149
Cambridgeshire	0	0	31	75	228
Cheshire	0	0	9	34	142
Cleveland	0	0	6	12	66
Cornwall	0	24	31	47	313
Cumbria	0	7	43	72	429
Derbyshire	0	0	27	64	293
Devon	0	14	68	111	470
Dorset	0	9	24	67	236
Durham	0	2	14	30	108
Essex	0	10	33	73	342
Gloucestershire	0	7	25	48	195
Hampshire	0	0	49	112	537
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	25	55	250
Hertfordshire	0	0	22	42	189
Humberside	0	0	21	49	221
Kent	0	0	42	105	584
Lancashire	0	6	32	57	285
Leicestershire	0	3	16	35	152
Lincolnshire	0	0	34	80	314
Norfolk	0	6	38	84	299
Northamptonshire	0	0	17	34	135
Northumberland	0	0	13	28	132
Nottinghamshire	0	0	21	60	232
Oxfordshire	0	4	23	51	182
Isles of Scilly	1	1	1	6	25
Shropshire	0	5	22	50	194
Somerset	0	20	15	46	293
Staffordshire	0	0	17	61	260
Suffolk	0	0	36	79	303
Surrey	0	3	9	18	103
East Sussex	0	0	13	44	182
West Sussex	0	15	19	75	238
Warwickshire	0	0	13	34	146
Isle of Wight	0	9	13	25	114
Wiltshire	0	4	19	60	229
North Yorkshire	0	4	26	66	271
Sub total	1	170	915	2,101	9,218
Greater Manchester	0	0	4	8	42
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0	2	4	16
West Midlands	0	0	1	2	9
South Yorkshire	0	2	5	9	51
West Yorkshire	0	4	11	26	137
London	0	0	0	0	0
Sub total	0	6	23	49	255

Retained men as of 31 March 1997

				White	
Rank	*ADO*	*STN O*	*SUB O*	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Mid and West Wales	0	5	51	98	484
North Wales	0	21	44	90	392
South Wales	0	3	29	70	292
Sub total	0	29	124	258	1,168
Grand total 1997	1	205	1,062	2,408	10,641

[1] No retained service. From the rank of ADO to Sub O there are a total of two from ethnic minorities: There is one "black" Stn O in the Dorset Fire Service. There is one "other" SubO in the Northamptonshire Fire Service.

	Black	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Mid and West Wales	0	0
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Sub total	0	0
Grand total 1997	1	18

[1] No Retained Service. From the rank of ADO to Sub O there are a total of two from ethnic minorities: There is one "Black" Stn O in the Dorset Fire Service. There is one "Other" Sub O in the Northamptonshire Fire Service.

	Black	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	1	0
Buckinghamshire	0	1
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	1
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	1
Hertfordshire	0	1
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	1
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	2
Oxfordshire	0	1
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	3
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	1
Warwickshire	0	2
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	2
North Yorkshire	0	1
Sub total	1	17
Greater Manchester	0	1
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	0
Sub total	0	1

	Asian	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	1
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	1
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	1
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	1
Lancashire	0	3
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	1
Norfolk	0	1
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	1
Staffordshire	0	1
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	1
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Sub total	0	12
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	0
Sub total	0	0

	Asian	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Mid and West Wales	0	0
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	1
Sub total	0	1
Grand total 1997	0	13

[1] No Retained Service. From the rank of ADO to Sub O there are a total of two from ethnic minorities: There is one "Black" Stn O in the Dorset Fire Service. There is one "Other" Sub O in the Northamptonshire Fire Service.

	Other	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Sub total	0	0
Grand total 1997	4	61

[1] No Retained Service. From the rank of ADO to Sub O there are a total two from ethnic minorities. There is one "Black" Stn O in the Dorset Fire Service. There is one "Other" Sub O in the Northamptonshire Fire Service.

	Other	
Rank	*LDG FF*	*FF*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	1
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	1
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	2
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	1	19
Lincolnshire	0	0
Norfolk	0	1
Northamptonshire	3	27
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	8
Oxfordshire	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	2
North Yorkshire	0	0
Sub total	4	61
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	0
Sub total	0	0
Mid and West Wales	0	0

Control room women as of 31 March 1997

	White					
Rank	*PFCO*	*GFCO*	*FCO*	*SFCOp*	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
Avon	0	0	2	0	5	8
Bedfordshire	1	1	0	4	3	8
Berkshire	0	1	0	0	3	9
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	3	4	10
Cambridgeshire	0	1	0	4	4	13
Cheshire	0	0	2	1	1	13
Cleveland	0	0	1	3	6	13
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cumbria	0	0	0	1	2	7
Derbyshire	0	1	4	2	1	9
Devon	0	0	4	1	4	11
Dorset	0	0	0	1	3	10
Durham	0	0	1	5	4	16
Essex	1	1	4	6	8	36
Gloucestershire	0	0	1	2	4	9
Hampshire	0	1	1	1	0	12
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	1	4	3	12
Hertfordshire	0	0	1	1	0	14
Humberside	0	0	2	3	2	12
Kent	0	1	4	5	8	20
Lancashire	1	0	4	4	7	23
Leicestershire	0	1	2	1	3	8
Lincolnshire	0	0	1	5	4	11
Norfolk	1	0	2	2	3	8
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	1	3	7
Northumberland	0	0	1	4	4	8
Nottinghamshire	0	1	3	4	3	9
Oxfordshire	0	1	0	3	2	9
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	1	4
Somerset	0	0	0	4	4	8
Staffordshire	1	0	4	3	8	10
Suffolk	0	0	1	3	3	11
Surrey	0	1	4	4	4	13
East Sussex	0	0	0	2	1	9
West Sussex	1	0	1	3	8	10
Warkwickshire	0	0	0	4	3	6
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	1	3	1
Wiltshire	0	0	0	3	2	7
North Yorkshire	0	0	1	4	3	11
Total 1997	5	11	52	102	134	417
Greater Manchester	1	6	4	8	5	44
Merseyside	1	1	5	10	10	30
Tyne and Wear	1	0	4	3	5	16
West Midlands	1	2	7	8	14	31
South Yorkshire	1	0	4	3	3	12
West Yorkshire	0	2	0	1	4	21
London	0	0	0	2	7	61
Total 1997	5	11	24	35	48	215
Mid and West Wales	0	1	2	6	9	13

Control room women as of 31 March 1997

						White
Rank	*PFCO*	*GFCO*	*FCO*	*SFCOp*	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
North Wales	0	0	2	4	8	23
South Wales	0	1	5	14	13	25
Total 1997	0	2	9	24	30	61
Grand total 1997	11	24	85	161	212	693

No control room staff in the Isles of Scilly Fire Brigade. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of LFCOp.

	Black	
Rank	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Grand total 1997	0	6

No control room staff in the Isles of Scilly Fire Brigade. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of LFCOp.

	Black	
Rank	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	1
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	1
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Total 1997	0	2
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	2
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	2
Total 1997	0	4
Mid and West Wales	0	0

	Asian	
Rank	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	1	1
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Total 1997	1	1
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Mid and West Wales	0	0

Asian

Rank	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Grand total 1997	1	1

No control room staff in the Isles of Scilly Fire Brigade. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of LFCOp.

Other

Rank	*LFCOp*	*FCOp*
Avon	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	0	0
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0
Devon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Durham	0	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	0
Humberside	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	0
Leicestershire	0	1
Lincolnshire	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Shropshire	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
East Sussex	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Wiltshire	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Total 1997	0	1
Greater Manchester	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
West Midlands	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
London	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Mid and West Wales	0	0
North Wales	0	0
South Wales	0	0
Total 1997	0	0
Grand total 1997	0	1

No control room staff in the Isles of Scilly Fire Brigade. There are no women from ethnic minorities above the rank of LFCOp.

Control room men as of 31 March 1997

White

Rank	*PFCO*	*GFCO*	*FCO*	*SECOp*	*LECOp*	*FCOp*
Avon	0	1	2	5	3	4
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	1	1	0
Berkshire	0	0	1	4	4	3
Buckinghamshire	0	1	1	1	0	1
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cheshire	0	0	2	3	3	4
Cleveland	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cornwall	0	0	1	4	5	2
Cumbria	0	0	1	3	2	1
Derbyshire	0	0	1	2	2	2
Devon	0	1	1	3	0	2
Dorset	0	0	1	3	1	0
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	1
Essex	0	0	0	2	0	2
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	2	0	2
Hampshire	1	0	3	6	0	7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0	1	1
Hertfordshire	0	1	3	3	0	1
Humberside	0	1	2	1	2	5
Kent	0	0	0	1	1	0
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	1	0
Leicestershire	0	0	3	2	1	1
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	0	0	1	2	0	2
Northamptonshire	0	0	1	3	1	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	1	1	1	3
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	1	3	1
Shropshire	0	0	1	5	3	4
Somerset	0	0	1	2	0	1
Staffordshire	0	0	0	1	0	1
Suffolk	0	0	1	2	1	0
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	0	0	1	2	3	6
West Sussex	0	0	0	1	1	4
Warwickshire	0	0	1	0	2	2
Isle of Wight	0	0	2	4	1	0
Wiltshire	0	0	1	2	2	1
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	1	2
Total 1997	1	5	33	73	47	68
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	0	0	3
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	1	3
Tyne and Wear	0	1	0	1	3	4
West Midlands	0	0	0	0	0	1
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	3	1	4
West Yorkshire	1	0	4	3	5	10
London	0	1	4	9	11	13
Total 1997	1	2	8	16	21	38
Mid and West Wales	0	0	1	2	1	10
North Wales	0	0	0	1	0	2
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total 1997	0	0	1	3	1	14
Grand total 1997	2	7	42	92	69	120

No control room staff in the Isles of Scilly Fire Brigade. From the rank of PFCO to FCOp there are a total of 2 from ethnic minorities: There is 1 "Black" FCOp in the London Fire Brigade. There is 1 "Other" FCOp in the Hertfordshire Fire Service.

"Corpus Juris"

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 28 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *778*, concerning the document "Corpus Juris", under what authority and terms of reference and for what reason this paper was produced; and by what Ministerial Council of the Community and under which article or treaty any formal proposal would be made. [17319]

Mr. Michael: I have no information about the provenance of the document beyond the fact, which is stated in the introduction to the document and was referred to by my hon. Friend in his earlier question, that the work was done by researchers at the request of the Director General for Financial Control of the European Commission.

As has been made clear, the paper has no status beyond that of a possible discussion document, for the commissioning of which no formal Treaty base is required. None of the recommendations has been formally proposed in the Council, nor has the paper itself been formally presented to or discussed in any European Union forum. If the Commission were formally to table proposals arising from the text, it would be for it alone to decide where, and on which Treaty base, to introduce them; that would clearly depend on the content of such proposals. In some areas to which the text refers, e.g. police and judicial co-operation, the Commission does not have any formal right of initiative. Any proposal in these areas would therefore need to be presented by a member state.

Since the document covers issues which span the First and Third Pillars of the Treaty on European Union. I do not think I can usefully speculate about which article might be used if a formal proposal were made or which Ministerial Council might be involved.

Asylum Seekers (Nigeria)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for asylum from Nigeria have *(a)* been granted refugee status, *(b)* been given exceptional leave to remain, *(c)* not yet had their application determined and *(d)* been removed to Nigeria for each of the last 10 years and for 1997 to the latest available date. [18101]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom from nationals of Nigeria, excluding dependants, initial decisions[1,2,3], and removals/voluntary departures, for the years 1987 to 1996 and 1997 (January to October)

Number of principal applicants

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*[4]1997*
Asylum applications[1]	10	10	20	135	335	615	1,665	4,340	5,825	2,900	1,290
Decisions[1,2,3]	10	10	5	15	25	210	360	1,495	2,630	5,145	3,855
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	—	—	—	—	*	—	—	*	*	15	40
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	5	5	*	—	—	*	10	5	5	10	30
Refused asylum and exceptional leave to remain	5	5	5	15	25	210	350	1,485	2,625	5,120	3,785
Applications outstanding (at end of year)	n/a	n/a	40	160	450	870	2,455	5,100	7,940	5,225	[5]2,680
Removals[6]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	65	105	190	285	395	330
Port[7]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	50	75	125	190	215	185
Third country	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	30	40	35	30
Substantive	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	60	90	150	185	155
In country[8]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	30	70	95	180	245

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with "*"= 1 or 2 and "n/a"= not available.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications made in same year.
[3] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[4] Provisional. January to October.
[5] Relates to position at end of September 1997.
[6] Refused asylum seekers removed from the United Kingdom—includes persons removed to countries other than those of their nationality.
[7] Includes any voluntary departure up to and including notification of the decision on the asylum application but excludes any subsequent departure.
[8] Includes removals under enforcement powers and those departing voluntarily following enforcement action but excludes all other voluntary departures.

Campsfield Detention Centre

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been charged following incidents in Campsfield Detention Centre last August; and if he will make a statement. [18079]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Following the disturbances at Campsfield House detention centre on 20 August, a thorough investigation of the events was conducted by Thames Valley Police. Thirteen detainees were charged initially with violent disorder. Twelve were remanded in prison custody and one was granted bail. On 12 November, charges against four of the detainees were dropped and they were returned to immigration detention. The remainder have now been charged with riot. They appeared at Oxford Magistrates' Court on 28 November and were remanded to reappear in January 1998.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of damage to Campsfield Detention Centre following incidents in August. [18077]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The insurance assessors have estimated the total cost of the damage to Campsfield House to be £175,000.

Immigration (English Channel)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department has issued to *(a)* ferry and *(b)* Channel Tunnel Operators concerning the stamping of passports of passengers; and if he will make a statement. [18075]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No official written guidance has been provided by the United Kingdom Passport Agency on the practice of stamping passengers' passports. I fully support the ferry and Channel Tunnel operators in their efforts to deal effectively with the unacceptable behaviour of certain passengers but the private stamping of passports by the ferry companies is an unorthodox approach which we have not sanctioned.

Immigration Detention

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is offered to security companies undertaking administration of immigration detention on behalf of the Immigration Service. [18099]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All Group 4 Total Security Ltd. and Wackenhut (United Kingdom) Ltd. staff employed under contract to provide detention management services are required to undergo a comprehensive training programme. This programme includes an immigration induction course; race awareness; self injury and suicide prevention; health and safety; control and restraint; first aid; domestic management; the welfare of and duty of care towards immigration detainees. Refresher training is provided after one year's service and at yearly intervals thereafter.

Protection from Harassment

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the rules of court to be completed for section 3 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; and if he will make a statement. [17738]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

Section 3 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 introduces, amongst other things, the power for a civil court to grant relief to a victim of harassment by way of an injunction and whereby the breach of an injunction granted by that civil court may be dealt with as a criminal offence. Subsections 3(1) and 3(2) are in force, and breach of an injunction made under those subsections may at present be punished as a contempt of court by up to two years' imprisonment. Rules and forms for subsections 3(3)–3(9) have been drafted for use by the High Court, county courts, the Crown Court and magistrates' courts to ensure that the process of treating a breach as a criminal offence works effectively. Consultation on these is under way and, as soon as it is complete, the outstanding subsections will be commenced.

WALES

Capital Expenditure (Cardiff)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of publicly funded capital expenditure in the Cardiff County Council area in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and what's the planned expenditure for 1997–98. [17575]

Mr. Ron Davies: These figures are not held centrally but the principal sums made available or committed over the past three years, totalling £376.4 million, include the following:

	£ million
CBDC	232.0
ERDF	9.5
WDA	2.5
Transport grant	10.3
Millennium Commission	73.0
SportsLot	13.9
Welsh Arts Lottery Fund	17.3
SDS/Welsh Capital Challenge	9.4
Wales Tourist Board	0.7
CADW	0.3
Heritage Lottery	0.4
Top Slice housing SCA	7.1

These figures exclude sums made available through basic credit approvals, expenditure on further and higher education and more general housing provision.

HEALTH

Appointments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* all those people he has appointed since taking office, *(b)* the offices to which he has appointed them, *(c)* the period of office for which they have each been appointed and *(d)* the political party allegiance or membership of each of their appointees and the date of appointment where this is known. [18556]

Mr. Milburn: Most of the information requested by the hon. Member is collected by the Department but it will take a little time to assemble. I will write to him immediately it is available. However, we will be unable to provide information on the political allegiance or party membership of candidates for National Health Service appointments as this is not collected by the Department. We will be able to provide information on the political activity of candidates, as defined by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Commissioner's guidance requires candidates for appointment to NHS boards to make a declaration about any significant political activity in the last 5 years. Significant political activity is defined as activities that are a matter of public record such as office holding in, public speaking in support of, or candidature on behalf of a political party (or affiliated body) which fields candidates at local or national elections.

Child Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce ILO conventions into British law in respect of child labour. [18070]

Mr. Boateng: The Government fully support the efforts of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in tackling the problem of child labour. The United Kingdom is party to a number of ILO Conventions which deal with the minimum age for admission to employment and has launched an urgent review of what is involved in order to ratify the core Convention (No. 138) in this area. The UK welcomes the discussions planned for next year's ILO Conference aimed at drawing up a new Convention specifically designed to tackle the most abhorrent forms of child labour.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning child labour legislation from local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [18078]

Mr. Boateng: We have received few representations from local authorities about the law on children's employment. We intend to announce our plans shortly.

Read Codes

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the figures for the last five financial years on capital expenditure and revenue in respect of *(a)* version 2 and *(b)* version 3 of the Read Codes. [18533]

Mr. Milburn: Version 3 of the Read Codes was developed by the Clinical Terms Projects. The relevant costs are as follows:

£ million

	Revenue	*Capital*
1992–93	1.1	Nil
1993–94	2.1	Nil
1994–95	0.5	Nil
Total	3.7	Nil

Although the Clinical Terms Projects ended in 1995, during 1994–95 and 1995–96 significant numbers of new Read Codes were added to version 3 as part of routine maintenance. The costs were as follows:

£ million

	Revenue	*Capital*
1994–95	0.7	Nil
1995–96	0.7	Nil
Total	1.4	Nil

Since 1996 maintenance of new Read Codes version 3 has stabilised. Maintenance of all versions is now part of the baseline activity of the NHS Centre for Coding and Classification. It is not possible retrospectively to break down its baseline budgets into separate capital and revenue figures for the maintenance of each version of the Read Codes.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total licence income from all NHS sources to Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. in each financial year since 1991–92; and what proportion of this income was derived from Read Codes version 3. [18534]

Mr. Milburn: The revenues for National Health Service licences paid to Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. up to 1995–96 are as follows:

	£
April 1991 to September 1992 (18 months)	1,530,900
October 1992 to September 1993	1,286,912
October 1993 to September 1994	1,572,877
October 1994 to September 1995	1,684,016
October 1995 to September 1996	1,615,189

The relevant accounts for the year 1996–97 are not yet available.

The National Health Service Read Code licence covers the use of all versions of the Read Codes and it is not possible to estimate what proportion of the above income was derived from Read Codes version 3.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from NHS clinicians in relation to Read Codes version 3; and what assessment he has made of the degree of clinician support for the viability of that version. [18535]

Mr. Milburn: In 1994 the clinical professional bodies wrote formally to the National Health Service Executive supporting the use of the Read Coded Clinical terms as recommended clinical dictionary to underpin all clinical information systems and communication in the NHS.

A review of the Information Management and Technology Strategy for the NHS is currently in progress and this will include a proposal for the future role of version 3 of the Read Codes.

Bereavement Services

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those NHS trust hospitals which employ a *(a)* full-time or *(b)* part-time bereavement officer or counsellor. [18295]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not held centrally. Bereavement counselling is undertaken by a variety of different people, depending on who within the hospital is trained to undertake the work. This may be a psychologist, a nurse trained in bereavement counselling or a counsellor called in from the community.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list *(a)* those hospitals which have contracted out their bereavement services to the private sector and *(b)* the names of the trading companies and their parent companies which have been awarded the bereavement services contracts; [18296]

(2) if he will list *(a)* those NHS hospitals whose bereavement officers are employees of funeral director companies and *(b)* trading companies and the parent companies involved. [18297]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive market testing database has a record of one NHS trust, the Central Middlesex Hospital, which has contracted out its bereavement and mortuary services (but not its bereavement counselling). This contract was awarded to

Associated Funeral Directors whose parent company is Service Corporation International plc. The bereavement officer is an employee of Associated Funeral Directors.

Mentally Ill People

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the £300 million extra funds for the National Health Service this winter will be spent on provision for the mentally ill. [18373]

Mr. Milburn: Details of the purposes to which the extra funds are to be put are contained in the Executive Letter EL(97)64, copies of which are available in the Library. Details of the amounts allocated to specific service areas are not held centrally.

Social Services (Oxfordshire)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from Oxfordshire about reductions in social services provision in the county. [18389]

Mr. Boateng: The Director of Social Services for Oxfordshire wrote on behalf of the Social Services Committee to express concern about budget reductions on the provision of Social Services on Oxfordshire. Ministers will be responding shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Wealth Warnings (Consultation)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the consultation paper on wealth warnings will be issued. [14436]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* I will publish a consultation paper on simplification and clarification of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 shortly. This will include a proposal on wealth warnings.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of how many computer systems will be made redundant by the century date change; if she has had discussions and issued guidelines on arrangements for their disposal or redeployment; and if she will make a statement. [17427]

Mrs. Roche: I have made no assessment and issued no guidelines. I understand that relatively few systems will be made redundant. Most affected systems can be upgraded, some by reworking existing software or electronic components and others by replacing inadequate software or components.

Action 2000, the new initiative set up by this Government and chaired by Don Cruickshank, Director General of OFTEL, will be signposting business to information to help them address such issues.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with relevant representative bodies on the reporting requirements for companies during the transition phase of economic and monetary union. [17141]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The question of the currency in which company accounts may be drawn up, whether or not the United Kingdom were to participate in European Monetary Union, has been discussed during the course of meetings between my officials and a range of representative bodies. The question was also touched upon by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his speech to the CBI on 10 November 1997.

Funerals

Mr. Caplin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people have brought pre-paid funerals in the last two years. [17940]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: On the basis of information obtained during consultation it is estimated that to date up to 200,000 pre-paid funerals have been sold in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *191*, if she will list the undertakings given by *(a)* the Co-operative Wholesale Society and *(b)* Service Corporation International to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, together with the dates by which (i) each undertaking was to be carried out and (ii) each undertaking was carried out. [18036]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* On 7 December 1987 the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry accepted undertakings from the Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited (CWS) that it would before 21 October 1988 (or such later date as the Secretary of State might agree) sell either all the funeral businesses acquired from House of Fraser plc, or alternatively the businesses in those areas affected by the merger, as going concerns to a person other than a CWS subsidiary or certain retail societies. CWS also undertook to keep the Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT) informed as to its progress in divesting itself of the businesses. The four businesses situated in the areas most affected by the merger (Aberdeen, Falkirk and Perth) were sold by CWS on 22 April 1988.

CWS also undertook to notify the DGFT before it acquires any enterprise carrying on the business of a funeral undertaker in Scotland; and that it will not refuse to supply coffins on normal commercial terms to any funeral undertaker in Scotland. These undertakings are on-going.

On 18 December 1996, the then Minister for Corporate and Consumer Affairs accepted undertakings given by Service Corporation International (SCI). SCI undertook, within six months of the date of the undertaking:

(a) to reduce its market share to no more than 25 per cent. by selling funeral directors' businesses in Brighton and Hove, Camberwell, Chiswick, Eastbourne and Sidcup (in relation to Chiswick, the sale of either of two specified SCI branches in that locality would be deemed to comply with this undertaking);

(b) where it had a market share of more than 25 per cent. before the merger, to sell the funeral directors' businesses it acquired from Plantsbrook Group plc in Battersea, Bromley, Crawley, Fulham and Putney;

The divestment required under *(a)* and *(b)* took place on 4 April 1997.

SCI further undertook:

(c) not to acquire any further funeral directing businesses within the ten localities without the DGFT's prior approval;

(d) to disclose its ownership of funeral directing businesses prominently at the premises, in documentation given to customers, and in all advertisements or other promotional material used in connection with those businesses (for those SCI funeral businesses situated in the area examined by the MMC);

(e) to display prominently details of competing crematoria at every SCI funeral directing branch in the area of an SCI crematorium;

(f) not to discriminate in the prices charged for crematorium services between its own and other funeral directing businesses; and

(g) to provide customers with a list of prices of competing crematoria where, in the area examined by the MMC, an SCI funeral directing business is situated within 20 miles of an SCI crematorium.

Undertakings *(c)* to *(g)* are on-going.

On 3 November 1997 I accepted a variation to the undertakings given by SCI to allow it to acquire Birkbeck Securities Ltd. (Birkbeck) on condition that SCI disposed of the funeral directing business of Birbeck's subsidiary, H. Copeland & Son Ltd., within six months. That business has now been sold by SCI.

I have placed copies of the relevant press notices with undertakings attached in the Library of the House.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *192*, if she will list the representations she has received relating to the marketing and selling of pre-paid funeral plans and place copies in the Library. [18043]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* I have received representation on the marketing and selling of pre-paid funerals from:

Scottish Consumer Council;

Service Corporation International;

Federation of Small Businesses;

Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors;

National Association for Pre-Paid Funeral Plans.

I am still receiving representations. When the process is complete, I will publish a list of these in the Library.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will *(a)* establish a funeral services ombudsman, *(b)* establish a single code of practice for the supply of funeral services and *(c)* introduce statutory regulation of pre-paid funeral plans. [18049]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) today. I am considering a number of possible options for the regulation of pre-paid funerals as a priority. I shall consider options for improved consumer protection more generally.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *192*, (1) if she will list the trading companies that are subsidiaries of registered charities and the registered charities concerned about which she has received representations; [18046]

(2) if she will list the representations she has received relating to links between providers of funeral services and subsidiaries of registered charities and place copies of these representations in the Library. [18044]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* I have received one representation on this. However, since the representation was made on the understanding that it would be treated in confidence, the name of the complainant is not being made public.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *191*, if she will list the individual funeral directors' businesses that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission recommended Service Corporation International divest, and the dates on which divestment took place in each case. [18037]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The MMC did not specify all the individual funeral directors' businesses that Service Corporation International (SCI) should be required to divest.

Divestment in accordance with the undertakings given by SCI took place on 4 April 1997.

The individual funeral directing businesses sold were:

Francis Chappell and E.L. Wickes (Camberwell);

Ashtons (Brighton and Hove);

Frederick W. Paine (Chiswick);

Adela (Eastbourne);

Mannerings (Sidcup);

W. H. Wigley (Battersea);

W. S. Bond (Fulham);

Ashton and Matthias (Putney);

Mannerings (Bromley);

Peter A. Martin (Crawley);

Colin Bennett Funeral Services (Woodingdean); and

E. Carter and Sons (Rottingdean).

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases for unfair dismissal *(a)* have been brought by employees of funeral director firms over the past five years and *(b)* are currently pending; if she will list the names of the parties to the actions; and if she will indicate the names of the employers' ultimate parent companies [18298]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have consulted the Chief Executive of the Employment Tribunals Service on this matter, and he informs me that no information is held on an employee's occupation or on the category of business the employee was working in. Details of tribunal applications, the tribunal's decision and the names of respondents in particular cases can be found on the Public Register at Bury St. Edmunds, unless the case involves an allegation of a sexual offence.

Mr. Caplin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will set up an independent ombudsman to oversee the funeral industry. [16863]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: There are a number of schemes for consumer redress in the funeral industry. A substantial minority of funeral directors recognise the present Funeral Ombudsman Scheme. The largest trade association, the National Association of Funerals Directors operates a separate scheme. I would welcome the emergence of a single independent scheme to protect consumers.

Turkey (Military Equipment)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what export credits have been made to Turkey in each of the last three years for the sale of military equipment to Turkey; and if she will make a statement. [17859]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 26 November 1997]:* From data readily available, the information that my hon. Friend requests is as follows:

	£ million
1994–95	90
1995–96	268
1996–97	none
1997–98 (to October 1997)	none

These figures include all ECGD supported business with defence buyers in Turkey, including sales of non-lethal equipment.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy of her Department in respect of the closure of *(a)* main and *(b)* sub-post offices. [18163]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices. We cannot guarantee that no post office will ever close or relocate for operational or other reasons, as over 95 per cent. of the network is made up of small businesses. At my request, the Post Office, in May, suspended its programme of converting Crown post offices to agency status until the review of the Post Office is complete and we are in a position to make informed decisions.

Employment Appeal Tribunal

Mr. Dismore: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many appeals there have been to the Employment Appeal Tribunal where the applicant did not have two years' continuous employment prior to dismissal; how many of these cases have been (i) stayed and (ii) struck out by industrial tribunals subsequent to the case of Seymour-Smith and Perez; and for (i) and (ii) what are the figures by industrial tribunal region. [18327]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Since the decision in the case of R *v.* Secretary of State for Employment ex parte Seymour-Smith and Perez was referred to the European Court of Justice, 182 cases have been stayed at the Employment Appeal Tribunal. The Chief Executive of the Employment Tribunals Service informs me that the industrial tribunal offices do not record separately cases that have been struck out or stayed because the applicant could not demonstrate two years' continuous service.

Duty Free Trade

Mr. Gale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with Treasury ministers in respect of obtaining from the European Union a material damage derogation to permit the cross-Channel duty-free trade to continue in perpetuity. [18060]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* None. The decision to allow intra-EU duty free sales to continue until 30 June 1999 was taken by the Council of Finance Ministers in 1991 so as to allow the economic sectors concerned time in which to adapt gradually to the new situation.

Coal

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will require coal to be the main fuel for base load generating stations. [16438]

Mr. Battle: The choice of baseload generation should be determined on the basis of cost as assessed in a market which is fair. In the review of the Electricity Trading Arrangements (including the Pool), which I announced on 23 October 1997, the Government will examine whether the market is tilted against coal, and, if so, what changes are needed to level the playing field.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 11 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *646*, how many *(a)* customers and *(b)* others were sent the letter regarding the Export Credits Guarantee Department's policy on disclosure of business information; what were the results of the Export Credits Guarantee Department's consultation exercise; and if the Export Credits Guarantee Department has drawn up new guidelines on the disclosure of information. [15621]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD's letter was sent to 11 exporters, 11 banks and five trade associations. A number of other Government Departments were also consulted. It emerged that while some customers were generally content with ECGD's guideline proposals, there was still a serious concern that the confidential nature of their business relationship with ECGD should be maintained. No new guidelines have since been drawn up by ECGD and it would be premature for work on this to be completed in advance of the publication of the Government's White Paper on freedom of information. ECGD is currently abiding by the spirit of the Open Government Code of Practise on Access to Government Information which encourages information to be disclosed unless it is judged that, on a case by case basis, such disclosure would be

harmful either to the competitive position of a company or the work of ECGD as insurer.

Departmental Information

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will place in the Library a copy of the internal departmental guidance on the dissemination of information; and if she will make a statement. [16310]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My Department provides a considerable amount of internal guidance to staff on administering the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. This includes guidance on the proactive dissemination of information as required by the Code. I will be placing copies of my Department's general internal guidance on the Code of Practice in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Office

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make available the study of the impact on traffic of moving a large part of the Scottish Office from New St. Andrew's House to Victoria Quay. [17626]

Mr. Dewar: Research was conducted prior to the move of Scottish Office staff to Victoria Quay into the travel to work intentions of these staff. A summary of the research report "Future Travel to Work Patterns of Scottish Office Staff—Relocation to Victoria Quay", drawn up in 1995, has been placed in the Library of the House. A copy of the full report is available on loan from my Department's library at Victoria Quay.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to move Ministers' offices from St. Andrew's House to the Scottish Office building at Victoria Quay. [17627]

Mr. McLeish: The issue of future accommodation arrangements for Scottish Office Ministers will be addressed when a decision on the site of the Scottish Parliament building has been taken. Ministers regularly use accommodation at Victoria Quay at present.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those organisations which have expressed to the Scottish Office their views on where the Scottish Parliament should be sited, indicating which support *(a)* Leith, *(b)* Calton Hill, *(c)* Haymarket and *(d)* a city centre site. [17628]

Mr. McLeish: We have received letters from the following:

(a) List of organisations in favour of Leith

Forth Ports Plc

Dunfermline Forum on Disability

Leith Chamber of Commerce

James Clydesdale and Associates

The High Constabulary of the Port of Leith

(b) List of organisations in favour of Calton Hill/Regent Road

Edinburgh Development and investment

Old Town Renewal Trust

Princes Street Association

Celtic League

The St. Andrew Society

The City of Edinburgh Labour Party

Simpson and Brown

Musselburgh Labour Party

Althelstane Developments Ltd.

Cin La Salle Investment Management

Capital Rail Group

Wilkies

Jenners

Old Waverley Hotel

Drummond Civic Association

Regent Royal and Calton Terraces Association

Campaign for a Scottish Parliament

A. C. Wolfe and Partners

Boots the Chemist

Edinburgh Central Liberal Democrats

Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee

Dunard Fund

The Lord Provost's Commission on Sustainable Development for the City of Edinburgh

(c) List of organisations in favour of Haymarket

Kantel Macdonald Orr

(d) List of organisations in favour of a city centre location

Joint Landlords of Waverley Shopping Centre

Waverley Tenants Association

John Lewis Plc

The Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland

Clydesdale Constituency Labour Party

D. M. Hall Chartered Surveyors

Sheeps Clothing for Ewe

George Street Association of Edinburgh

Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Transport Group

100 Burghs Group

Tollcross Traders' Association

Edinburgh and Lothian Tourist Board

James Gray and Sons

The Project Management Partnership

Phyllis International

IFP Consulting Engineers

William Wilson Ltd.

The City of Edinburgh Council

Hurd Rolland Partnership

Department of Architecture, University of Edinburgh

Railtrack Property

Euroscope

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individual representations the Scottish Office has received, *(a)* from residents in Edinburgh and *(b)* from those living elsewhere in Scotland, on the proposed site

for the Scottish Parliament; and how many have supported (i) each of the three specific sites and (ii) a city centre site. [17629]

Mr. McLeish: A total of 150 representations have been received, of which 91 have come from people living in Edinburgh and 59 from people who live elsewhere in Scotland. 44 of these representations were in support of a city centre location but did not mention any preferred site. The remainder supported the following:

	Number
Calton Hill/Regent Road	89
Leith	11
Haymarket	6

SOCIAL SECURITY

Sensory Impairments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps her Department plans to take to ensure that people with sensory impairments are not disproportionately affected by the proposed changes to the backdating of benefits. [16124]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The proposed rules will provide for up to one month's automatic backdating for non-income-related benefits and up to one month's backdating of claims for income-related benefits in specified situations. This will include circumstances where the person is deaf and/or blind and has no relative, friend or adviser to assist them in making a claim.

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost of allowing students to claim *(a)* income support during the summer months and *(b)* housing benefit; what plans she has to introduce income support and housing benefit for students; and if she will make a statement. [18549]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information required on which to base a reliable estimate of the cost is not available.

The primary source of financial support for full-time students is the student support system, which is specifically designed to meet their needs. Social Security is not. Certain students in prescribed vulnerable groups (including lone parents and students with disabilities) are entitled to benefits in recognition of the additional difficulties they may face in continuing with their studies. The majority of full-time students are not entitled to benefits and we have no plans to alter those arrangements.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 2 December 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the consultation procedures for the inter-departmental review of asylum; which organisations have been invited to comment; and which organisations or individuals have made submissions. [17418]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: When the Comprehensive Review of asylum was announced, those interested were invited to comment direct to the Study Team. The following individuals and organisations have made submissions:

London Borough of Merton
Westminster City Council
The Progressive League
The Central London Interfaith Refugee Network
Praxis
Michael Symth Esq.
The Churches Commission for Racial Justice
The Housing Associations Charitable Trust
Hackney Community Law Centre
UNLEASH (Church Action on Homelessness in London)
The Disability Alliance
Newham Council Anti-Poverty and Welfare Rights Unit
The London Advice Services Alliance
The Hackney Refugee Training Consortium
Turkish Speaking People's Culture Centre
The Independent Immigration Support Agency
The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Housing and Social Services Department.

In addition, the Team has held discussions with:

Refugee Legal Centre
Refugee Council
Association of London Government
Refugee Action
Immigration Appeals Authority
Hammersmith Social Services Department
Housing Corporation
Australian High Commission
Local Government Association
Amnesty International
Justice
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
Immigration Law Practitioners' Association Centrepoint
Commission for Racial Equality
Camden Social Services
Refugee Arrivals Project
The Churches Interfaith Refugee Network
The International Organisation on Migration.

National Stud

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future ownership of the National Stud. [18141]

Mr. George Howarth: The National Stud is the responsibility of the Horserace Betting Levy Board. There are no current plans to change its ownership.

Smoke Alarms

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of instigating a publicity campaign to raise public awareness of the benefits of installing smoke alarms in homes. [18483]

Mr. George Howarth: I am well aware that publicity campaigns offer the potential for achieving wider installation of smoke alarms in homes. The Community Fire Safety Task Force have recently reported with a strategy and recommendations to secure significant reductions in the number of fires, deaths and casualties in homes. We are consulting widely on their proposals and will assess carefully the responses we receive.

Smuggling

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of illegal immigrants who have been smuggled into Britain by criminal gangs in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [18819]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No reliable estimate can be made of the number of illegal immigrants smuggled into Britain by criminal gangs.

Police Grant

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the allocations of police grant for individual police authorities in 1998–99. [19097]

Mr. Straw: I have today put a copy of my proposals for the allocation of police grant for 1998–99 in the Library. I intend to implement these proposals subject to consideration of any representations I receive about them.

The police service has indicated its support in principle for the continued distribution of police grant in accordance with a needs-based formula, and I am therefore proposing to continue to allocate the greater part of police grant according to the police funding formula.

I am however proposing several changes to the formula to reflect the latest data now available, and in response to the representations I have received. The principle changes I propose are: to reduce from 30 per cent. to 20 per cent. the share of funding allocated on the basis of forces' past establishments: and to increase from 12.9 per cent. to 13.2 per cent. the proportion of funding allocated on the basis of forces' pensions commitments.

I have also set the amount of the special payment to the Metropolitan Police, in recognition of its national and capital city functions, at £151 million in 1998–99.

An additional £40 million of police grant has been made available in 1998–99. This allocation is to ensure that police authorities and the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District have funds available which

would allow them to increase spending on meeting the key objectives for the police in 1998–99 over and above that available through the principal formula.

Other police funding proposals within the local government finance system are being announced today by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and for Wales. These proposals and mine would increase the total spending power of police authorities in England and Wales by 3.7 per cent. or around £258 million over 1997–98.

The table below shows, by police authority, the effect of my proposals for 1998–99. It also shows the allocations approved by Parliament for 1997–98.

£ million

Police Authority	1997–98 [1]funding	1998–99 [1]funding
English Shire forces		
Avon and Somerset	158.7	164.2
Bedfordshire	58.9	60.9
Cambridgeshire	68.2	72.0
Cheshire	101.1	104.7
Cleveland	75.2	80.4
Cumbria	58.6	59.0
Derbyshire	95.3	97.7
Devon and Cornwall	158.6	167.5
Dorset	66.6	67.8
Durham	73.3	78.1
Essex	155.9	158.4
Gloucestershire	60.1	61.5
Hampshire	180.0	189.2
Hertfordshire	92.4	94.1
Humberside	105.9	110.6
Kent	168.5	179.0
Lancashire	167.7	175.0
Leicestershire	97.3	99.1
Lincolnshire	61.5	60.7
Norfolk	78.1	80.9
North Yorkshire	71.9	75.7
Northamptonshire	60.0	62.9
Nottinghamshire	119.3	123.0
Staffordshire	111.8	111.1
Suffolk	63.4	66.0
Surrey	91.8	84.2
Sussex	155.2	162.6
Thames Valley	208.2	219.3
Warwickshire	50.6	51.1
West Mercia	106.3	110.0
Wiltshire	62.2	63.4
English Metropolitan forces		
Greater Manchester	351.2	364.9
Merseyside	227.3	233.3
Northumbria	193.4	205.4
South Yorkshire	158.8	165.4
West Midlands	353.4	372.0
West Yorkshire	267.5	279.6
London forces		
Metropolitan Police[2]	1,688.0	1,715.6
City of London[3]	61.6	57.1
English Total	6,483.9	6,683.4
Welsh forces		
Dyfed-Powys	49.9	51.1
Gwent	64.5	67.3
North Wales	71.2	73.2
South Wales	155.1	161.3
Welsh total	340.8	353.0
Total	6,824.7	7,036.3

[1] Rounded to the nearest £100,000. Funding is the sum of all police grant, SSAs and damping grant.

[2] Figure for the Metropolitan Police does not include funding allocated to the Receiver under the Other Services Block SSA for school crossing patrols, Magistrates' Courts and the Probation Service.

[3] Figure for the City includes Police SSA and Grant, but excludes other SSAs e.g. Capital Financing which are allocated to the Common Council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions.

Youth Justice

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the advice he received from the Task Force on Youth Justice and the responses to his consultation papers on youth justice. [19126]

Mr. Straw: Yes. Copies of the two reports submitted by the Task Force on Youth Justice, in August and October, have been placed in the Library.

Several hundred responses have been received to my consultation paper on youth justice and these are currently being assessed. We will provide Parliament with a report as soon as practicable.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18113]

Mr. Straw: Information in respect of *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* is given in the attached table and covers the Home Office and its agencies. Information in respect of *(d)* is not available; figures could be provided only if all our contractors were prepared to waive commercial confidentiality considerations so as to allow disclosure.

Region	Category	Job title	Hourly rate
London	(a)	Administrative Assistant	4.61
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	4.61
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	4.61
East Midlands	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84

Region	Category	Job title	Hourly rate
Eastern Region	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
Merseyside	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
North East	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
North west	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
South east	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
South west	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.82
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
West Midlands	(a)	Sandwich course Student	3.77
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
Yorkshire and the Humberside	(a)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(b)	Administrative Assistant	3.84
	(c)	Administrative Assistant	3.84

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his Answer of 13 November 1977, *Official Report*, column *654*, if he will provide a further breakdown, by grade, of the ethnic origin and gender of employees in the Immigration and Nationalities Department. [18627]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Details of the ethnic origin of Immigration and Nationality Directorate staff by gender and grade are set out in the following table. In some cases, grades have been amalgamated in order to avoid disclosure of individual ethnic origin.

The breakdown refers to staff figures as at 28 November 1997. These differ slightly from the figure provided in my answer to my hon. Friend's question on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *654*, due to staff changes in the intervening period.

	Gender	White	Black	Asian	Other	Not provided	Total male and female	Total ethnic minority male and female
Industrial	F	0	0	0	0	0	—	—
	M	7	0	0	0	3	10	0
Support Grades	F	62	8	3	0	5	0	—
	M	68	6	5	0	14	171	22
Secretarial Grades	F	90	7	12	0	5	—	—
	M	—	—	—	—	—	114	19
Administrative Assistant	F	277	57	91	10	67	—	—
	M	126	22	43	3	30	726	226
Administrative Officer and Assistant immigration Officer	F	387	57	164	6	43	—	—
	M	163	27	50	4	29	930	308
Executive Officer and Immigration Officer	F	922	36	77	13	161	—	—
	M	1,168	21	44	24	282	2,748	215
Higher Executive Officer and Chief Immigration Officer	F	227	2	5	2	29	—	—
	M	369	4	6	5	69	718	24
Senior Executive Officer and Inspector	F	30	0	0	0	0	—	—
	M	107	1	0	0	8	146	1
Grade 7 and above	F	11	0	1	0	0	—	—
	M	45	0	0	0	1	58	1
Overall totals							5,621	816

PRIME MINISTER

Humphrey the Cat

Mr. Alan Clark: To ask the Prime Minister what steps were taken by Cabinet Office staff to establish the state of health of Humphrey the cat, prior to his departure from Downing Street; on what dates; and if he will make a statement. [18675]

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Office staff have always taken excellent care of Humphrey the cat. He was taken to a Veterinary Clinic at least every six months for

the last five years where his kidney complaint was treated and his inoculations were kept up to date. His last visit was on 6 August 1997.

In the weeks prior to his retirement from the Cabinet Office, the staff who looked after him were concerned about his loss of appetite and the general deterioration in his condition.

Since retiring to a home environment it is reported that he has responded very well and put on weight.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the locations of the successful outline bids for round 4 SRBs, indicating the names and political control of those local authorities concerned; and if he will make a statement. [17311]

Mr. Caborn: Bids for round 4 of the SRB Challenge Fund are not defined at the outline stage as successful or unsuccessful. I have placed a table which contains details of all 371 outline bids received by Government Offices for the Regions in the House Libraries.

Government Offices for the Regions currently are considering outline bids, to determine the extent to which these meet the objectives and criteria for the Challenge Fund and merit working up into final bids.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many local authorities submitted bids for each round of *(a)* the Single Regeneration Budget and *(b)* Capital Challenge; and how many were successful in each round. [18740]

Angela Eagle: The information is as follows:

Single Regeneration Budget

The numbers of bids for support from the four rounds of the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund submitted by local authorities, either individually or as partners, are as follows:

	Round 1	*Round 2*	*Round 3*	*Round 4*[1]
Total number of final bids received	469	329	310	371
Number of final bids received from local authorities[2]	235	171	186	167
Number of successful bids from local authorities[2]	108	93	109	—

[1] All bids are currently at the outline stage only.

[2] Where the local authority is the lead partner.

Capital Challenge

There has been only one round of Capital Challenge. There were 330 local authorities, acting jointly or separately, which submitted a total of 326 bids. Of these, 189 bids, involving 217 authorities, were successful either in full or in part.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates he has made of the costs incurred by local authorities in preparing and submitting bids in each round of *(a)* the Single Regeneration Budget and *(b)* Capital Challenge. [18739]

Angela Eagle: For the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund, my Department commissioned the Department of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge to evaluate rounds 1 and 2. An interim report explored the level of resources committed by ten local partnerships, including those with local authority partners, which submitted unsuccessful bids. The average time committed by each partnership to the bidding process was 16 weeks, at a cost of £10,000.

None of the unsuccessful bidders regarded the bidding process as a waste of resources, nor did they regard it as more costly than preparing proposals under other funding regimes. The benefits of the bidding process were recognised, particularly in improving inter-agency partnership working.

For Capital Challenge, the Local Government Research Programme Report "Evaluation of the Experience of Authorities during the Capital Challenge Pilot Scheme Bidding Round" estimated that the average value of resources used in the preparation of bids was £14,000.

London Underground

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which organisations he has met in the last six months to discuss the future of *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* the Piccadilly Line; and if he will make a statement. [17527]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My colleagues and I have discussed the future of the Underground with a number of organisations, including London Transport, representatives of Transport Unions, and organisations representing business and other interests in London. No meetings have been held specifically on the future of the Piccadilly Line.

We are urgently considering a range of options for public—private partnerships to improve the Underground.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library responses to his consultation paper on RDAs. [17890]

Mr. Caborn: In accordance with guidelines on deposited papers issued to Government Departments by the House of Commons Library, I placed in the Library on 18 November a list of the responses to the Department's Issues Paper on Regional Development Agencies. The guidelines say that, for reasons of space, consultation paper responses should not be deposited in the Library. Consistent with the guidelines, copies of the responses to the RDAs consultation paper are deposited in the Department's library, and can be made available to Members there.

Travellers

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will seek to amend section 77(3)(b) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 so as to make it a criminal offence for travellers having been evicted to return to any land in the same district within three months; [18214]

(2) if he will seek to amend the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to enable agents acting for local authorities to confiscate property belonging to travellers subject to eviction orders as compensation for damage done to public land and legal costs incurred in securing evictions. [18215]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no plans to amend the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

The 1994 Act already makes it a criminal offence for unauthorised campers who have been directed to leave land, to return to the same land with a vehicle within three months of the date of the direction. We do not think it would be reasonable to make the whole of a local authority's area out of bounds to campers, because they have been evicted from one site in that area. The stronger the powers, the more difficult it would be for a local authority to persuade the courts that it was acting reasonably in seeking an eviction order.

Consultation preceding the introduction of the 1994 Act powers revealed a majority of respondents, including local authorities, opposed to local authority powers to seize vehicles belonging to unauthorised campers. This was thought to be unreasonable and impracticable, and the proposal was dropped.

The Government considers that the 1994 Act powers strike a reasonable balance between the need to control what can be a public nuisance and the rights of the campers concerned, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights. We have commissioned research to look at how local authorities deal with unauthorised camping in their areas, and will be issuing good practice advice based on that research in Spring next year.

Residential Development

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on which dates since 1 May was *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials met representatives of the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development to discuss increasing the Government's target of new residential development to be built on previously used land. [18319]

Angela Eagle: Neither Ministers nor officials have met representatives of the UK Round Table specifically to discuss the Government's target of new residential development to be built on previously used land. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has, however, had general discussions with the Chairman about Round Table recommendations.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of new homes provided in each year since 1981 through *(a)* urban infill and *(b)* house conversions. [18302]

Mr. Raynsford: Estimates of the number of dwellings provided through conversions are shown below.

Net gain in dwellings from conversions and changes of use

England

	Thousands of dwellings
1981	14.6
1982	17.6
1983	16.2
1984	17.3
1985	16.6
1986	17.1
1987	17.3
1988	14.8
1989	14.6
1990	12.4
1991	13.1
1992	10.1
1993	7.7
1994	9.3
1995	9.2
1996	8.9

Estimates of number dwellings through urban infill are currently not available, but should be available soon.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what in each of the last three years for which information is available, was the proportion in each region of the amount of new residential development built on previously used land; and what *(a)* meetings he has had and *(b)* other actions he has taken in respect of these regions where the proportion was under 50 per cent. [18321]

Mr. Raynsford: The table below shows the percentage of new residential development that is on land previously developed for urban uses, by Government Office Region, for the latest three years for which reliable estimates can be made.

The Government has held a number of meetings at which the issue of land recycling and other household growth matters have been discussed. The Government has also made it clear that, in making their housing land allocations, local authorities should make the best possible use of previously used sites for new housing. This applies in particular to those authorities who are achieving low levels of land recycling. The Government is considering these and other issues, taking into account the public consultation earlier this year, and will announce decisions in due course.

Per cent.

Government Office Region	*1991*	*1992*	*1993 (provisional)*
North East	43	46	40
North West and Merseyside	49	56	59
North West	49	54	55
Merseyside	48	65	76
Yorkshire and the Humber	38	42	48
East Midlands	33	34	33
West Midlands	44	46	49
Eastern	41	46	49

Per cent.

Government Office Region	*1991*	*1992*	*1993 (provisional)*
London	83	84	83
South East	50	49	49
South West	30	35	32
England	44	47	48

Source:
Land Use Change in England No. 12 (Table 8.5), Statistical Bulletin.

Household Growth White Paper

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the seminars which his Department *(a)* has held since 1 May and *(b)* plans to hold to debate the issues raised in the Green Paper "Household Growth: Where Shall We Live" (Cm 3471). [18318]

Mr. Raynsford: No public seminars have been held by the Government specifically on this subject since 1 May, nor do we have any current plans to hold such seminars in the near future. Officials attend independently arranged seminars on this subject as appropriate.

Planning Appeals (Redundant Farm Buildings)

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many appeals his Department has received in each year since 1988 involving the refusal of planning consent for the conversion of redundant farm buildings into *(a)* houses and *(b)* other uses; when the Department last issued new guidance on this subject; and what plans he has to issue revised guidance. [18301]

Mr. Raynsford: The following information has been provided by the Planning Inspectorate. Information is not available for the period before 1990. The data do not reveal whether the appeals related to redundant farm buildings. The number of unsuccessful appeals against refusal of planning permission for conversion of farm buildings to residential use was as follows:

	Number
1 January to 31 December	
1990	523
1991	419
1992	298
1993	194
1994	198
1995	196
1996	188
1 January to 1 November	
1997	88

In 1990 there were 3 unsuccessful appeals against refusal of planning permission for conversion of farm buildings to industrial use. There have been none since.

The Government's guidance on the conversion of redundant farm buildings is contained in Planning Policy Guidance note 7 "The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development", which was revised in February 1997. This allows greater discrimination than formerly in favour of re-use for business rather than residential use. There are at present no plans to issue revised guidance.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the report "Options for the Future Development of Energy Efficiency Standards of Performance", prepared for him and the President of the Board of Trade OXERA Consultants. [18271]

Angela Eagle: I have placed a copy of the report in the Library. The analysis of options provided by the report will be taking into account in the Government's consideration of future regulation of the energy industry and of the achievement of energy efficiency climate change targets. There will be consultation on both issues.

Organophosphates

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will empower the Health and Safety Executive to examine with the permission of the patient the medical records of any person who suffers accidental exposure to organophosphates and other chemicals which results in admission to hospital or consultation with a doctor. [18162]

Angela Eagle: HSE may already examine medical records when it investigates reports of ill-health because of exposure to chemicals if the sufferer gives permission, except in special cases where the doctor judges that disclosure would itself put the patient at risk. Reported incidents of ill-health resulting from exposure to pesticides, veterinary and human medicines (including organophosphates) are assessed by expert panels who routinely examine medical records on this basis.

Trees

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage tree planting and the conservation of mature trees in urban areas to reduce storm water run-off. [18479]

Angela Eagle: My Department encourages local authorities to develop long term strategies to guide the planting, maintenance, conservation and replacement of all trees in their area. Such strategies should contain an appraisal of how trees might contribute to the local environment, taking account of local circumstances and conditions. This might include their role in reducing storm water run-off.

Railway Lines (Trespass)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the duty to fence off railway lines with a view to requiring Railtrack plc to prevent trespass on railway lines. [18372]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Following a recommendation by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC), a review of railway safety legislation was completed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 1996. As a result, the

Railway Safety (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1997, which came into force on 10 May, place a new duty on Railtrack to take reasonably practicable measures to prevent unauthorised access by trespassers. Guidance on these Regulations, issued by the HSE, gives advice on the type of fencing or other physical barriers that should be provided.

Rat Control

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the legal responsibilities of water and sewerage companies in respect of the control of rats. [18501]

Angela Eagle: There is no specific duty on water and sewerage undertakers in relation to the control of rats in sewers. However, all sewerage undertakers have programmes to control and reduce the number of rats in their systems. This includes the use of baits in pumping stations and air vents to stop rats entering the system and within sewers. In addition, I understand that the water industry will be undertaking some research into the issue of rats in sewers early next year. Finally, under Section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities have a duty to inspect their area for statutory nuisances such as

"any premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance."

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people were living in bed and breakfast accommodation in each of the London boroughs on 1 November. [18582]

Mr. Raynsford: Information is published on households accommodated under statutory homelessness provisions in a quarterly Information Bulletin, "Statistics of local authority activities under the homelessness legislation: England". The Bulletin includes a table on homeless households temporarily accommodated and this identifies those in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Copies of the Bulletin are in the Library and the latest provides statistics for the second quarter of 1997.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18115]

Angela Eagle: In London, the lowest rate paid by the Department to full-time employees is £4.39 an hour. £3.17 per hour is the lowest hourly rate paid in the English regions, by a Departmental Agency.

Part-time and full-time staff are paid the same hourly rates.

The Department employs relatively few people who are on personal contracts. The lowest rate is £3.25 an hour, in an English region.

The Department does not hold information on the rates of pay for persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services. This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list (1) for each class of authority and (2) for each individual local authority and Police authority in England *(a)* 1998–99 standard spending assessments in total and by major service block, *(b)* changes in standard spending assessments in total and by major service block, between 1997–98 and 1998–99, expressed in (i) monetary and (ii) percentage terms, *(c)* changes in standard spending assessments in total and by major service block, between 1997–98 and 1998–99, expressed (i) in monetary and (ii) percentage terms and adjusted to take account of changes in local authority functions and responsibilities *(d)* resident population, *(e)* tax base, *(f)* standard spending assessment, *(g)* standard tax income, *(h)* business rate income, *(i)* revenue support grant, *(j)* standard spending assessment reduction grant and *(k)* total external support, for 1998–99; [18632]

(2) what is the *(a)* total standard spending assessment and Police grant and *(b)* total external support including revenue support, non-domestic rates, standard spending assessment reduction grant and police grants to be received by (i) all local authorities, (ii) each class of local authority, (iii) education authorities, (iv) authorities other than Police authorities and (v) all authorities, in (1) 1998–99 and (2) 1997–98 indicating (A) the change over 1997–98 in pounds and percentages, (B) adjustments for 1997–98 for local government reorganisation and for changed local authority functions and responsibilities in 1998–99; and if he will list each such adjustment and its monetary value; [18633]

(3) what is the *(a)* total standard spending and *(b)* total aggregate external finance for (i) all local authorities and (ii) all local authorities other than Police authorities in England in (1) 1998–99 and (2) 1997–98, giving in each case (A) the change over 1997–98 in pounds and percentages and (B) adjusting 1997–98 totals for changed local authority functions and responsibilities in 1998–99, listing each adjustment and its monetary value. [18634]

Mr. Raynsford: This information will be available in the Library following my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Region statement on local government finance.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Régions if he will set out the basis of his calculations of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 1998–99. [18804]

Mr. Armstrong: The distributable amount of non-domestic rates in England for 1998–99 will be £12,524 million. This is based on a non-domestic rate multiplier of 0.474 and includes an allowance of £360 million for an Exchequer payment to the non-domestic rates pool, to compensate for the shortfall which would otherwise occur as a result of the regulations

under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to phase in the effects of the 1995 revaluation on rate bills.

The calculation for 1998–99, and the prior-year figures on which this is based, are set out in the following table:

National non-domestic rates—Calculation of distributable amount

£ million

	1995–96 final outturn	*1996–97 provisional outturn*	*1997–98 provisional outturn*	*1998–99 estimated in-year contribution*
1. Income from local lists				
Multiplier (p)	43.2	44.9	45.8	47.4
Gross rate yield	12,781	13,369	13,518	13,843
(i) Reliefs				
(a) Net transitional relief	–731	–546	–497	–616
(b) Empty properties	–1,054	–1,014	–1,098	–1,137
(c) Charitable	–445	–482	–535	–535
(d) Discretionary	–26	–77	–181	–50
Net yield after reliefs	10,524	11,251	11,207	11,504
(ii) Collection costs/reductions to contributions				
(a) Costs of collection	–75	–76	–79	–79
(b) Losses on collection	–144	–148	–154	–160
c) City of London offset	–7	–7	–7	–7
Total contribution in respect of year	10,299	11,020	10,968	11,259
(iii) Adjustments				
Repayments/interest payments	–1,005	–363	–350	–426
Total adjustments	–1,005	–363	–350	–426
Net local yield	9,294	10,657	10,618	10,833
2. Income from central list				
Net central list yield	1,192	1,221	1,200	1,211
3. Income from crown contributions in aid				
Net crown yield	481	487	485	445
Total NDR yield	10,967	12,365	12,303	12,489
4. Exchequer contributions				
Total exchequer contributions	505	429	400	360
Total NNDR pool payments (1+2+3+4)	11,472	12,794	12,703	12,849
5. Adjustments				
Surplus brought forward	–1,177	–1,059	–1,002	–326
Combined total	10,295	11,734	11,701	12,524
Distributable amount	11,354	12,736	12,027	12,524
Surplus carried forward	–1,059	–1,002	–326	—

The amounts shown are those recorded in the post end-year (NNDR3) returns. For 1997–98 the amounts shown are the estimated outturn for the year based mainly upon authorities' provisional contributions to the non-domestic rating pool.

1. Item 1: The gross calculated rate yield represents the total value of non-domestic hereditaments on local rating lists times the multiplier.

2. Item 1(i)(a): The Transitional decrease adjustment includes the estimated amount of rates that will not be recouped from local list ratepayers under the transitional arrangements made by regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

3. Item 1(i)(b): the empty property relief adjustments include voids and partially occupied hereditaments. The 1998–99 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rates yield.

4. Item 1(i)(c): Charitable rate relief. The 1998–99 figure includes mandatory relief for village shops under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. As for empty property relief.

5. Item 1(i)(d): Discretionary relief granted to charities, non-profit making organisations and for other reasons including, for 1998–99, discretionary relief for village shops and other rural businesses granted under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. As for charitable rate relief.

6. Item 1(ii)(a)&(b): The allowances for the costs and losses incurred by local authorities in collecting non-domestic rates from ratepayers.

7. Item 1(ii)(c): City Offset—the amount which the City of London will not be required to pay into the non-domestic rating pool. It is the amount which will be retained by the authority to meet its own expenditure.

8. Item 1(iii): net adjustment in respect of appeals and other amendments to the rating list affecting liability for previous years rates settled in that year.

9. Item 2: the rateable value of non-domestic hereditaments on the central rating list times the multiplier, less the net effect of transitional arrangements, and adjusted for appeals and other changes in respect of previous years.

10. Item 3: the 1998–99 figure for crown properties includes an allowance for the effect of transition.

11. Item 4: the contribution from central government to offset the amount of the Secretary of State's estimate of income forgone as a result of transitional arrangements established by regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

European Charter on Self-Government

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to ratify the European Charter on Local Self-Government. [18865]

Mr. Raynsford: Subject to the views of this House and those of Another Place, the Government intends to ratify the European Charter on Local Self-Government as soon as practicable in the new year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Conditional Fees

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research he has undertaken to discover *(a)* the number of people, who since their introduction, wanted to pursue civil claims on a conditional fee arrangement but whose cases were not accepted by solicitors and *(b)* the reasons for which those cases were not accepted by solicitors. [18733]

Mr. Hoon: None. Lawyers decline to accept cases from clients for many reasons whether the client wishes to fund these through conditional fee agreements or otherwise.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research he has undertaken to discover the suitability of conditional fee arrangements in *(a)* medical negligence, *(b)* breach of contract, *(c)* professional negligence, *(d)* defamation and malicious falsehood and *(e)* false imprisonment and malicious prosecution cases; and if he will publish it. [18732]

Mr. Hoon: None. The suitability of conditional fee arrangements in any given case must be a matter for the client and their lawyers. Our proposals to extend the availability of conditional fee agreements simply widen the options available to lawyers and their clients and thus increase the ways in which people can obtain access, to justice, even when they are unable to bear the costs of lawyers' fees but do not qualify for legal aid.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of the damages awarded to plaintiffs in cases brought under a conditional fee arrangement were paid to *(a)* solicitors and *(b)* barristers as success fees in each year since their introduction. [18734]

Mr. Hoon: The information the hon. and learned Member seeks is not available. No arrangements were put in place by the hon. and learned Member's party when in Government to monitor this, which is, in fairness, dependent on the private contractual arrangements clients make with their lawyers. The PSI research did, however, show that in 97 per cent. of the agreements under study the solicitors had applied the voluntary cap of 25 per cent. of damages on their success fee.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research he has undertaken into the public's attitude to conditional fee arrangements; and if he will publish it. [18735]

Mr. Hoon: Over 28,000 cases in just over two years and new agreements being made at a rate of 1,500 a month appear to me substantial proof that the public have welcomed conditional fees and have made considerable use of them.

Plaintiff Liability Insurance

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of insurance available *(a)* between 1995 and 1997 inclusive and *(b)* from 1 April 1998 to cover plaintiffs' liabilities for (i) their own costs and disbursements and (ii) defendants' costs and disbursements. [18736]

Mr. Hoon: There are a considerable number of legal expenses insurance products available to protect against one's own costs of going to law. Many people have them added to their household or motor car insurance policies at very modest cost. I have no reason to believe these are likely to reduce from 1 April 1998. There clearly has been sufficient availability of insurance to allow over 28,000 claims to be brought in a little over two years. New products are still being launched. I see no reason why other insurance products should not become available on or after 1 April 1998.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18226]

Mr. Hoon: This answer covers the Headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department (with Associated Offices), the Court Service, Public Trust Office, Land Registry, Public Record Officer and Northern Ireland Court Service. Minimum salaries currently payable to full-time staff, expressed as minimum hourly rates, are shown in the tables below. Part-time salaries are pro rata those of full-time staff. Staff are categorised by current grade. Information as to location is not held in the form requested, but separate details are given—where applicable—for staff in London and elsewhere.

Details of the range of pay of staff employed by firms undertaking contracted out services are not held and could be provided only if contractors were prepared to waive commercial confidentiality considerations.

LCD HQ (with Associated Offices)

£4.51 (London)

£3.44 (elsewhere)

The above rates relate to staff in the grade of Administrative Assistant. They also represent the minimum payable to individuals employed on personal contracts (casual Administrative Assistants).

Court Service

£4.45 (Inner London)

£4.08 (Intermediate London zone)

£3.96 (Outer London)

£3.30 (elsewhere)

The above rates relate to staff in the grade of Administrative Assistant and also represent the minimum payable to individuals on personal contracts (casual Administrative Assistants). The rates do not include a negotiated uplift due to take effect for permanent staff in April 1998.

Public Trust Office

£4.53 (Administrative Assistant)

Staff on personal contract: as above (casual Administrative Assistant)

All staff are in London

Land Registry

£5.06 (London)
£3.50 (elsewhere) } Registration Assistant 2

Staff on personal contract: none outside Senior Civil Service.

Public Record Office

£4.27 (Junior Print Operator)

Staff on personal contract: none

All staff are employed in offices in the Greater London area.

Northern Ireland Court Service

£4.10 (Typist)

Staff on personal contract: none outside Senior Civil Service.

WALES

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Chairman of Cardiff Bay Development Corporation about progress relative to the contract on the Barrage lock gate contract awarded to Messrs Noell of Würzburg, Germany. [18212]

Mr. Ron Davies: None. Responsibility for monitoring progress on the Barrage lock gate contract is an operational matter for the Corporation. It would not be appropriate for the Department or the Corporation to get involved or indeed to comment on sub-contractual arrangements.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for local government revenue spending and grant support in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [19122]

Mr. Ron Davies: Following consultation with representatives of local government in Wales, I propose that the provision for local authority revenue expenditure (total standard spending) in 1998–99 should be £3,090.5 million. This represents an increase of £120 million, or 4 per cent. on the comparable level of funding for 1997–98. The provision includes £190.2 million for care in the community, the additional £50.3 million revenue spending for schools I announced on 2 July, and extra provision to help local authorities achieve the Government's policy objectives for nursery education.

For local authorities, I intend to set provisional capping principles which will allow, on average, for a basic increase of 3 per cent. on 1997–98 budgets, an average of 4.6 per cent. when a number of capping disregards and the passporting of standard spending assessment increases in full are taken into account. The provisional capping principles allow local authorities further headroom for expenditure in addition to that provided by total standard spending.

I propose to set central government support for total standard spending through aggregate external finance at £2,702 million. Within this support, I propose to make available £1,831.1 million in revenue support grant/council tax reduction grant (includes an extra £6 million to help limit council tax increases); £612 million in distributable non-domestic rates; and £258.9 million in specific grants.

If local authorities spend in line with the proposed capping principles, council tax bills for band D properties should, on average, increase by about £1.20 a week. However, if councils use only a small part of planned efficiency savings to keep council tax bills down, or draw from reserves, I believe that average increases in council tax bills next year for band D properties should not exceed about £50 a year or £1 a week. The council tax reduction scheme is designed to limit the maximum increase in any authority for spending at the capped level to under £1 a week for band A properties to around £2.50 a week for band H properties.

Looking further ahead, the Welsh Local Government Association has sought stability for the next two or three years and asked for a fundamental review of the system for distributing grant in readiness for the National Assembly for Wales. I have agreed to both these requests and plan to commission jointly with the Association an independent assessment of the current arrangements for calculating standard spending assessments. I hope that an interim report will be available next summer.

Further information on the proposed settlement, including details for individual authorities, will be announced next week.

I am making a separate announcement today giving details of the settlement for police authorities.

My Department has written today to the Welsh Local Government Association and all local authorities in Wales to initiate a consultation on my proposals for next year's settlement. Copies of the consultation letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Police Expenditure

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for police authority revenue spending in 1998–99. [19123]

Mr. Ron Davies: I propose to make £353 million available from total standard spending in Wales to fund police services in 1998–99. This sum comprises £179.6 million in cash-limited police grant, to be paid by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and

£173.4 million in standard spending assessments (SSA). It represents an overall increase of £12.4 million, or 3.6 per cent. on 1997–98.

The sums for each police authority are set out in the following table:

£ million

	Police grant	*SSA*	*Total*
Dyfed-Powys	26.0	25.1	51.1
Gwent	34.3	33.0	67.3
North Wales	37.4	35.8	73.2
South Wales	81.8	79.5	161.3

My Department is today writing to each police authority in Wales consulting them on their provisional standard spending assessment for 1998–99. The figures may alter slightly if the balance of funding between English and Welsh police authorities, which is determined by a joint formula, changes as a result of consultation.

My provisional capping principles for police authorities allow for an increase in spending power of 3.7 per cent. I will make my final decisions on capping principles in the light of budgets set by police authorities.

Copies of the consultation letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the Welsh non-domestic rate poundage for the next financial year. [19124]

Mr. Ron Davies: I propose that the national non-domestic rate poundage for Wales should rise to 42.9 pence to reflect the annual increase in the retail prices index to September 1997.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18108]

Mr. Ron Davies: *(a)* Full-time casual administrative assistants earn the hourly equivalent of £3.30 per hour.

(b) Part-time casual administrative assistants earn the hourly equivalent of £3.75 per hour.

(c) There are no staff employed on personal contracts in the Welsh Office.

(d) Information of this nature is commercial in confidence.

Brecon Beacons National Park

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the future management of the Brecon Beacons National Park. [18836]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have received representations from a number of members of the Park Authority. On 20 November, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) requested a report from the Chairman.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

India (Entry Clearance)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many entry clearance officers there are in *(a)* Bombay and *(b)* New Delhi. [18308]

Mr. Fatchett: Bombay currently has 10 Entry Clearance officers (ECOs) and 2 Entry Clearance Managers (ECMs). New Delhi has 12 ECOs, 2 ECMs and a full time Head of Immigration (who is also the Consul).

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the application for admission of Mr. Sayed Muhamed Azim Nazis in Bombay (reference E/97/3255). [18311]

Mr. Fatchett: We have asked our High Commission in Bombay to provide a detailed account of the position. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will write to the hon. Member within one week of receiving that account.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average length of time taken in *(a)* Bombay and *(b)* New Delhi to dispatch an explanatory statement followed a refusal of entry clearance in 1997. [18309]

Mr. Fatchett: In 1997 the average time taken to despatch an explanatory statement following a refusal of entry clearance in Bombay and New Delhi are two months in both cases.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others concerning the operation of the entry clearance office in (i) Bombay and (ii) New Delhi. [18307]

Mr. Fatchett: Our correspondence statistics are not broken down in such a way as to be able to give precise figures of representations on the operation of the entry clearance offices in Bombay and New Delhi.

South Africa (Murders)

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were murdered in South Africa in the last 12 months; and what measures he plans to take to promote the protection of British nationals resident in or visiting South Africa. [18216]

Mr. Fatchett: Eight British citizens have been reported to British missions in South Africa as murdered in the last 12 months. There are approximately 1.2 million Britons living in South Africa; and some 200,000 Britons visit each year. This Department has a duty to protect their interests and to provide them with relevant information about threats to their personal safety. In South Africa this is undertaken by consular staff at the six British missions

there and by the provision of Travel Advice. Since February 1997 Travel Advice on South Africa has been warning potential visitors about the high level of violent crime there. It also advises against visiting isolated areas throughout South Africa and names specific locations in the major cities where care should be taken.

World Summit for Children

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the World Summit for Children project; and if he will make a statement. [18482]

Mr. Fatchett: The 1990 Summit focused international attention on the plight of millions of children who are victims of poverty, neglect, cruelty and exploitation. Implementation of the Summit Plan of Action requires a universal effort by governments, the United Nations, other international and regional organisations and all sectors of civil society. We support the follow up work of the United Nations, including to promote implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the action Her Majesty's Government has taken to implement Clause 22 of the Declaration of the United Nations World Summit for Children 1990. [18481]

Mr. Fatchett: We fully support implementation of paragraph 22 of the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Summit Declaration. The United Kingdom makes a major contribution to promoting the rights of children in especially difficult circumstances. This includes support for UN organisations such as the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

EU Delegations

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *704–05*, what were the total costs of European Commission delegations to third countries for 1996. [18500]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In 1996, the total expenditure of Commission Delegations in third countries was 194,558,200 ecu (£132.8 million—November 1997 exchange rate).

Republic of Slovakia

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on human rights in the Republic of Slovakia. [18576]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Slovakia is party to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and has ratified the Framework Convention on National Minorities. We expect Slovakia to abide by its commitments under these instruments. We are also encouraging the Slovak Government to address the shortcomings in democratic standards identified in the Commission's Opinion on Slovakia's application for EU membership.

Nuclear Materials (Transport)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the proliferation risks posed by the use of mixed oxide fuel by European Union countries and its transport from European Union suppliers to Japan. [18491]

Mr. Fatchett: The proliferation risks posed by the use of Mixed Oxide Fuel (MOX) by European Union countries and its transport from EU suppliers to Japan are assessed as being extremely low. Indeed, the use of MOX fuel reduces proliferation risks by gradually reducing plutonium stockpiles.

Albania

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each planned visit *(a)* by British Ministers to Albania and *(b)* by Albanian Ministers to the United Kingdom. [18475]

Mr. Fatchett: There will be an opportunity for substantial discussion at Ministerial level when the Albanian Prime Minister, Fatos Nano, visits Britain from 14 to 17 December. We intend to continue regular Ministerial contacts but no dates have been fixed either for visits by British Ministers to Albania or further visits by Albanian Ministers to the UK.

Immigration

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision will be made on the visa application by Abdul Rehman, Islamabad High Commission ref. IMM/E2002. [18832]

Mr. Fatchett: We have asked our High Commission in Islamabad to provide a detailed account of the position. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will write to the hon. Member within one week of receiving that account.

EU Agreements

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the precedents for bilateral agreements between an EU member state and the EU Presidency being concluded after the hearings at a summit. [18671]

Mr. Doug Henderson: At negotiations such as the IGC, it is not unusual for the Presidency to reach tentative understandings with a Member State on how to handle a point of key concern to them. But such understandings would normally be considered subsequently by the full meeting.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 754, when he was first informed of the bilateral agreement between Spain and the Dutch Presidency. [18669]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We first learned of the change to the text when we received a revised Treaty text after the Amsterdam summit on 19 June.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral statement

of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 754, when the bilateral agreement between Spain and the Dutch Presidency of the EU was concluded. [18668]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We believe that the text reflected discussions in the margins of the Amsterdam European Council on 16–17 June.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if another EU member state can block the UK acceding to the Schengen Acquis. [18672]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Unanimity is required where the UK and Ireland apply to take part in a measure within the existing Schengen Acquis. The Declaration on Article 4 of the Protocol, integrating the Schengen Acquis, makes provision for the Council to seek the opinion of the Commission before it decides on a request from the UK or Ireland to take part in some or all of the provisions of the Schengen Acquis. Other Member States also undertake to make their best efforts to allow the UK or Ireland to participate. The UK cannot be blocked from opting into proposals and initiatives which build upon the Schengen Acquis.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral statement of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 754, what representations he made to the Presidency of the European Union about the bilateral agreement between Spain and the Dutch Presidency; and when. [18670]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The UK made a number of representations on this matter at Ministerial and official level.

Council of Europe

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take in response to Recommendation 1335 (1997) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [18366]

Mr. Foulkes: I have been asked to reply.

We are closely monitoring the situation of displaced persons in the Transcaucasus. United Kingdom assistance has concentrated on promoting livelihood security through strengthened co-ordination of humanitarian aid, improved targeting of vulnerable groups and stronger dissemination of international humanitarian law. The Department for International Development has also funded quick impact income generation projects as well as relief items. The total value of UK humanitarian aid since the beginning of 1996 has exceeded £4.3 million.

A UK assessment mission to the Transcaucasian countries is due within the next couple of months and Recommendation 1335 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be taken into consideration when drawing up our strategy.

European Voluntary Service For Young People

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with national youth organisations in the United Kingdom over the European Voluntary Service for Young People as set out in Com (97) 347; what his Department's policy is in respect of Article 1(2) as modified by the European Parliament; to what extent personal security will be taken into account as concerns article 2(1a); what is entailed in the reference to analysis and dissemination of data in article 5.3(2); and if he will make a statement. [18094]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

I attended the European Council of Youth Ministers in Luxembourg on 28 October, at which a common position was reached on the Commission's draft proposal for a European Voluntary Service for Young People, subject to a UK Parliamentary Scrutiny Reserve. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) on 19 November, *Official Report*, column *186*.

The Commission's proposal states specifically that the activities undertaken by young people under this programme will no way replace potential or existing paid jobs; the other points of detail raised will be addressed with other Member States when the precise arrangements for the Programme are being discussed over the next few months.

The Government are committed to seeing this programme under way as early as possible. The Government agree with Article 1(2) of the draft proposal.

Officers of the Department have had general discussions with the British Youth Council about this programme, and we will draw on our experience of the pilot phase in determining the exact arrangements for the new EVS Programme.

Arms Export Licences (Indonesia)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arms have been licensed for export to Indonesia since 1 May; which arms have been denied such a licence; and on what grounds. [16076]

Mrs. Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results obtained.

Between 2 May and 13 November, decisions were taken on 27 applications for standard or open individual licences to export to Indonesia goods controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule I to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (the so-called "Military List"). The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating.

Decisions on applications for standard individual export licences during the period

Rating	*Number of licences granted covering goods with this rating*	*Number of applications refused covering goods with this rating*
ML1	0	2
ML4	2	0
ML5	1	0
ML6	0	1
ML7	1	0
ML10	5	0
ML11	11	0
ML13	1	0
ML14	1	1
Total	22	4

Decisions on applications for open individual export licences (OIELs) during the period

Rating	*Number of licences granted covering goods with this rating*	*Number of applications refused covering goods with this rating*
ML13	[1]1	0

[1] This OIEL was issued for the export to any destination, including Indonesia, of certain goods for use by specified persons working in the media.

However, this information should be considered in light of the answer given on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *256–58*, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint).

In addition to the above, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Indonesia during the period concerned under the following Open General Export Licences (OGELs): OGEL (technology for military goods), OGEL (military surplus vehicles), OGEL (export after repair: military goods) and OGEL (export after exhibition: military goods). I am arranging for copies of all current OGELs to be placed in the Library of the House.

The decision to refuse the applications listed above were made after careful consideration of each case against the criteria announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tax Advice

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the policy of her Department on the purchase of tax avoidance advice; and if she will make a statement. [13272]

Mr. Murphy *[holding answer 5 November 1997]:* The policy is that when tax advisers are used it should only be to enable Northern Ireland departments to fulfil their statutory tax obligations rather than for tax avoidance purposes.

Parades and Marches

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the total cost of policing the marches, demonstrations and associated disturbances during July and August; [15046]

(2) what was the total cost of policing the parades which took place in Northern Ireland from 1 April to 30 September. [15052]

Mr. Ingram: Policing marches and demonstrations is part of normal police duties and as such separate costings for these activities are not held centrally.

Terrorist Offences

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been charged with terrorist offences other than those in connection with paramilitary beatings in 1997. [16032]

Mr. Ingram: Between 1 January 1997 and 2 December 1997, a total of 334 persons were charged with terrorist type and Serious Public Order offences within Northern Ireland.

Glassdrummond Band

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to her Answer of 7 November, *Official Report,* column *692,* what was the rank of the officer to whom notice was given by the Glassdrummond Band on 2 November. [17031]

Mr. Ingram: The rank of the officer to whom notice was initially given by the Glassdrummond Band on 2 November 1997 was Reserve Constable. The Constable consulted with his Sergeant who granted permission.

Appointments

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list *(a)* those public bodies to which she makes appointments, *(b)* the number of persons whom she appoints and the total number of the members of each body, *(c)* the period of each appointment, *(d)* the remuneration of each appointment and *(e)* the sums of public money available to each body in the last year for which figures are available. [17321]

Mr. Murphy: Information relating to parts *(a), (b), (d)* and *(e)* of the question can be found in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1996". The 1997 version of this document will be available on 16 December 1997. Information in the form requested at *(c)* is currently being assembled, and will be made available as soon as that exercise has been completed.

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to her answer of 20 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *272,* who made the decision not to fly the Union flag at the Southern Area Health and Social Services Board, Tower Hill, Armagh, on 9 November; and if she will make a statement. [17820]

Mr. Worthington: A letter was sent to all Health and Social Services Boards on 1 May 1997 advising them of the days in 1997 on which the Union Flag should be flown on Central Government Buildings. There is, however no requirement for the Boards to fly the Union flag on these dates. It is at the discretion of each organisation whether the flag should be flown on those buildings occupied by their staff.

There was no specific decision made to fly or not to fly the Union Flag at the Southern Health and Social Services Board Tower Hill, Armagh on 9 November 1997.

District Cancer Centres

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans are in place to train the skilled staff required for the district cancer centres. [17765]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* The Cancer Working Group (CWG) Report "Cancer Services—Investing for the Future" recommended a minimum target of 13 consultants in non-surgical oncology by the year 2005. Currently there are eight consultant clinical oncologists in post. To move towards the recommended target the number of trainees in Clinical Oncology has been increased from four to five in 1997–98. Also, a new training post in Medical Oncology is planned for next year.

Prostheses

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the shortest period spent on a waiting list for *(a)* non-fundholder and *(b)* fundholder patients for the fitting of a prosthesis following the amputation of an arm in the last year for which figures are available. [17896]

Mr. Worthington: No one has had to wait longer than the three week timescale for the fitting of a prosthesis during the past 12 months.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prostheses the Eastern Health and Social Services Board has contracted for in the current financial year; and what funds have been committed to purchase these services. [17903]

Mr. Worthington: The information is not available in the form requested. The Eastern Health and Social Services Board's contract with Green Park Healthcare

Trust is for prosthetic services not the provision of a specified number of prostheses. The value of the contract in the current financial year is £1,005 million.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the longest current waiting time for *(a)* non-fundholder and *(b)* fundholder patients for the fitting of a prosthesis following the amputation of (i) an arm and (ii) a leg. [17898]

Mr. Worthington: No one is currently waiting outside the three week timescale for the fitting of a prosthesis.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the allocation of resources of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board for the purchase of clinical procedures for *(a)* the fitting of a prosthesis following the amputation of a leg and *(b)* breast reconstruction following a mastectomy; and what account was taken of policy appraisal and fair treatment guidelines in determining these allocations. [17895]

Mr. Worthington: It is for the Eastern Health and Social Services Board to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to purchase the level of services necessary to meet the needs of its population. The Board requires that all patients are treated on the basis of clinical priority.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account the Eastern Health and Social Services Board took of the Government's Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment Guidelines in deciding on the allocation of resources for the purchase of procedures for the fitting of a prosthesis following the amputation of a leg; and what steps were taken to ensure that women and men were treated equally in the purchase of these services. [17911]

Mr. Worthington: When allocating resources for the fitting of prostheses, the Board requires that all patients are treated on the basis of clinical priority.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Drugs Tsar

39. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement on the recent appointment of a drugs tsar. [17131]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Keith Hellawell will take up his post early in the New Year. His immediate priorities will be to review existing action against drug misuse across the board and to submit proposals to Ministers for a new strategy as quickly as possible, aimed at tackling drug problems through effective enforcement, treatment and education.

40. **Mrs. Ballard:** To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement on the current programme of work being undertaken by her Inter-Departmental Committee on Drugs. [17132]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: It is not normal practice to give details of the work of Cabinet Committees, but the Committee will in due course be considering plans for a new anti-drugs strategy, on the advice of the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the President of the Council what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the budget proposed for the office of Drugs Tsar in relation to the purposes intended; and if she will make a statement about how that money will be spent. [18218]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator and his Deputy are special advisers to the Government. Accordingly they have no direct responsibility over any budget. The issue of resources for the Co-ordinator's work will be examined further as the Government consider plans for the next phase of the anti-drugs strategy.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Council how many public appointments she has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* received remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16784]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: My Department is responsible for the formal procedures leading to a large number of appointments by the Crown, the Privy Council and myself, the majority of which are part-time and unpaid. Since 1 May I have made nine appointments to the governing bodies of Higher Education institutions and have been involved in a further six such appointments. All of these appointments are unpaid. Additionally I have been involved in six unpaid appointments to statutory medical and similar bodies. Information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all departments in an aggregated form.

Prayers

41. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Council if she will meet the Speaker's Chaplain to discuss Prayers preceding the day's business. [17133]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: While I would be happy to meet the Speaker's Chaplain to discuss the temporal aspects of modernisation of the House, the content of Prayers is a matter for Madam Speaker.

Sitting Hours

42. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the President of the Council what plans she has for reform of the hours which the House sits; and if she will make a statement. [17134]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The hon. Member will be aware of the significant change to sitting hours achieved since the Jopling report was implemented in 1994. The Modernisation Committee is looking again at this matter.

Special Standing Committees

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Council what representations she has received concerning increasing the use of Special Standing Committees. [17121]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The use of Special Standing Committees was mentioned in the debate on modernisation on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *1061–1129*. I have not received any more recent representations.

Chamber Modernisation

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Council what plans she has relating to the redesign of the Chamber. [17126]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: None. I told the House on 15 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *152* that I did not think the House would be willing to change its layout unless there was a broad measure of agreement to do so.

Passive Smoking

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of the Commission in relation to passive smoking; and what actions are being taken in consequence. [17125]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission is responsible for the terms and conditions of the staff of the House and their working environment. Currently individual heads of the six House departments seek to agree an acceptable smoking policy, including passive smoking, with staff. The Board of Management is carrying out a review of this policy, at the request of the Commission.

A policy on smoking in shared areas of the parliamentary estate, such as corridors and lifts, is a matter primarily for the Administration Committee. Smoking policy in restaurants is a matter for the Catering Committee. Smoking in the offices of hon. Members and their staff is a matter for Members themselves.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15265]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 12 November 1997]:* The amount spent on publicity by the Department for International Development (DFID) (ODA in previous years) was:

1993–94: £1.20 million

1994–95: £1.35 million

1995–96: £1.27 million

1996–97: £1.30 million

1997–98 to date: £0.62 million

1997–98 full year estimate: £1.30 million

1998–99 planned expenditure has not yet been agreed

DFID does not carry out any advertising for publicity purposes. Recruitment advertising in these years amounted to:

1993–94: £472,263.37

1994–95: £727,707.66

1995–96: £625,928.42

1996–97: £665,276.68

1997–98 to date: £815,093.77

1997–98 full year estimate: £1.40 million

1998–99 planned expenditure has not yet been agreed

The amount spent on NRI publicity expenditure is as follows:

1994–95: £56,000

1995–96: £56,000

The figures for 1993–94 are not available.

On 1 May 1996 ownership of NRI was transferred to the University of Greenwich.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many public appointments she has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16787]

Mr. Foulkes: One unremunerated appointment has been made since 1 May.

The information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all departments in an aggregated form.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list each of the overseas trips made by herself and other members of her ministerial team since 2 May, specifying in each case *(a)* the participating Minister or Ministers, *(b)* the destination of the trip, *(c)* the purpose of the trip and *(d)* the cost of the trip; and if she will make a statement. [15264]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 12 November 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and I have made a total of 20 trips overseas since 2 May. A breakdown is shown in the attached tables. The precise cost of each trip is not identifiable separately except at disproportionate cost. The total cost of the Secretary of State's trips is £53,845 (this will not include all the costs of the Ottawa visit). The total cost of my overseas visits is £31,802 (this does not include all the costs of my trip to Ukraine).

Overseas trips made by Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development since 2 May 1997

Date	*Country*	*Purpose*
4–5 June	Luxembourg	EU Development Council
8–10 June	Switzerland	Humanitarian Forum
22–24 June	USA (New York)	UN General Assembly Special Session
1 July	France	Bilateral discussions with French Government; Ceremony to mark UK rejoining UNESCO
15–19 September	Bangladesh	Review DFID Programmes
19–23 September	Hong Kong	Attend IMF/IBRD Annual Meetings
23–25 September	Japan	Bilateral discussions with Japanese Government
6–10 October	Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda	Review DFID Programmes
21 October	Brussels	Bilateral discussions with Belgian Government
22 October	Paris	Attend UNESCO Conference
27–29 October	Sweden and Norway	Attend Seminar on International Solidarity and Globalisation (Stockholm) and International Conference on Child Labour (Oslo).
9–10 November	Brussels	Attend General Affairs Committee
19–20 November	Strasbourg	Attend European Parliament
27–28 November	Brussels	Attend Development Council
2 December	Ottawa	To sign the Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines

Overseas trips made by George Foulkes, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development since 2 May 1997

Date	*Country*	*Purpose*
20 to 22 May	Canada	Caribbean Development Bank Annual Meeting
4 to 5 June	Luxembourg	EU Development Council
26 to 31 July	Botswana and South Africa	Commonwealth Education Ministers Conference; visits to UK-funded development projects and bilaterals with Botswana and South African Government Ministers
31 August to 2 September	Montserrat and Antigua	Official talks with Government of Montserrat and Antigua
6 to 7 October	Italy	UN Conference on Convention to Combat Desertification, Rome
12 to 13 October	Switzerland	UNHCR Executive Committee, Geneva
23 to 26 November	Ukraine	Visit to Know-How Fund Project and bilaterals with Ministers

Former Soviet Union (Aid)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the level of *(a)* UK bi-lateral aid and *(b)* multi-lateral aid funded in part by Her Majesty's Government in each of the last two years to (i) Armenia, (ii) Azerbaijan and (iii) Georgia. [18361]

Mr. Foulkes: The levels of bilateral and estimated multilateral aid to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia during the last two years are as set out below:

(a) Total bilateral aid

	1995–96	*£ thousand 1996–97*
Armenia	546	1,122
Azerbaijan	1,651	1,093
Georgia	1,517	1,851

(b) UK share of net Multilateral disbursements.

Net Official Development Assistance (oda) is an internationally comparable aid statistics and it is available only by calendar year. Multilateral figures are estimates of the UK share through multilateral agencies.

Latest available information is for 1995.

	£ million
Armenia	6.1
Azerbaijan	4.6
Georgia	6.2

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Museums (Lottery Grants)

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list *(a)* the number of grant applications received for museums, *(b)* the number of museums which have been awarded Lottery grants, *(c)* the amount each successful museum has received and *(d)* the ratio of successful/unsuccessful applications regions by region since the commencement of the National Lottery. [17155]

Mr. Banks: As at 21 November the National Lottery distributing bodies have announced awards worth almost £311 million to 225 museum projects throughout the UK. The following table 1 provides a breakdown, by distributing body, of applications and awards to museums. Table 2 shows the regional success rate to applications from museums. I have arranged for a full list of awards to museums to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information on Lottery awards is now available on the Department's website www.lottery.gov.uk.

Table 1

Distributing body	*A Number of applications for museums*	*B Number of museums awarded Lottery grants*
Arts: England	65	24
Arts: Scotland	12	12
Arts: Northern Ireland	1	1
Arts: Wales	8	5

Table 1

Distributing body	*A Number of applications for museums*	*B Number of museums awarded Lottery grants*
Sports: England	—	—
Sports: Scotland	—	—
Sports: Northern Ireland	—	—
Sports: Wales	—	—
Heritage Lottery Fund	770	180
Charities Board	—	—
Millennium Commission	[1]—	3
Total	856	225

[1] The Millennium Commission does not keep information on unsuccessful applications by project type.

Table 2

Per cent.

Region	*Arts Success rate*	*Heritage Success rate*
London	44.44	59.52
North West	50.00	68.00
North East	—	58.33
Yorkshire and Humberside	57.14	57.58
Eastern	28.57	50.00
East Midlands	100.00	25.00
West Midlands	66.67	33.33
South West	75.00	61.90
South East	0.00	48.00
Merseyside	—	33.33
England total	53.19	53.26
Scotland	100.00	53.19
Wales	62.50	75.00
Northern Ireland	100.00	70.00

Green Belt (Carrington Moss)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what discussions he has had with directors of Manchester United regarding its application to build on green belt land at Carrington Moss; [17328]

(2) what representations he has received regarding Manchester United's application for planning permission to build on green belt land at Carrington Moss; [17326]

(3) if he will list those organisations and individuals who have made representations to him *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against Manchester United's planning application to build on green belt land at Carrington Moss. [17327]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* My Department has received no representations about Manchester United's planning application, and I have had no discussions with the Directors of the club on this subject. The planning application itself is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to consider.

Cricket

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals he has to establish a network of centres of excellence for cricket. [17937]

Mr. Banks: We announced our proposals for the United Kingdom Sports Institute on 14 November. The headquarters will be part of a network of facilities throughout the United Kingdom. Many sports, including cricket, have indicated their desire to establish their own sports specific academies, as part of the Institute network. We are keen to see good proposals come forward for Lottery funding.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what data he has collated on the percentage of total employment accounted for by the tourism industry. [18170]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The latest available figures show that tourism accounts for approximately 7 per cent. of total employment in Great Britain.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his Department is doing to encourage the provision of training for employees in the tourist industry. [18166]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department is already working with the industry, and the Department for Education and Employment, to encourage employee training in the tourism, hospitality and leisure industries. Training is essential if these sectors are to have a world class work force of skilled individuals who can provide excellent service to meet consumer expectations. A working group of the Tourism Forum will be developing further ideas to promote training in the industry.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what data he has collected on Britain's international ranking in terms of international tourism earnings. [18169]

Mr. Tom Clarke: World Tourism Organisation figures show the United Kingdom as fifth in the world in terms of tourism earnings in 1996.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if darts will be treated as a recognised sport for the purposes of the tobacco advertising ban. [18153]

Mr. Banks: The proposed EU Directive would ban all advertising through sponsorship, including darts events. It also proposes a phase-out period to allow alternative sponsors to be found. The Government will actively support efforts to secure alternative sponsors.

Visitors (London)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what data he has collated on the number of United Kingdom visitors to London in the most recent available year. [18165]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The UK Tourism Survey indicated that in 1996, there were 12.2 million visits to London by UK residents who stayed at least one night.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list, by regions defined by the

boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by her Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18112]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has no offices outside central London.

The lowest hourly rate paid to full-time or part-time staff is £4.78p. This is paid to staff in grade D (Lower) (equivalent Administrative Assistant) who are mainly employed on administrative support activities.

The only persons employed under personal contracts in this Department are senior staff, the lowest hourly rate being £18.69.

The rates of pay of staff employed by firms undertaking contracted out services for the Department is a matter for the companies concerned.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take to inform prospective students of the changes in student and higher education financing. [17589]

Dr. Howells: We have sent leaflets on the new student support arrangements to all schools with sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further and higher education institutions, careers services and student unions. We are running a free telephone helpline to handle enquiries about the arrangements and to respond to requests for further copies of the leaflets. To date, over half a million leaflets have been requested. For mature students, parents and others who might not be aware of our leaflets, we are running national adverts in the press and on the radio to publicise the freephone number. Also, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to sixth formers and college students to encourage them to consider higher education in the future and to clear up any misunderstanding that they may have about what we are proposing. In the new year, we shall be issuing the annual student grants and loans booklet, which, amongst other things, will set out the grant and loan rates for 1998–99 and will give more details about the financial contribution expected from parents at differing levels of income.

Home-School Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses were received to the home-school contracts proposals in the White Paper "Excellence in Schools" and the consultation letter dated 8 August; how many *(a)* teacher organisations and *(b)* organisations representing the views of parents supported the introduction of home-school contracts; and if he will make a statement. [17763]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* Some 650 of the 3,500 respondents to the White Paper commented on our proposals for home-school agreements; 73 organisations commented on the details given in the Department's letter of 8 August. Taking the responses as a whole, four out of the six teacher associations supported the proposal that all schools should have written home school agreements. Of the six parent organisations who commented, three were opposed to home-school agreements and three expressed support for the principle but did not feel they should be made a requirement. 148 of the parents who returned the tear-off section in the White Paper summary leaflet indicated their support for home-school agreements.

Cerebral Palsy

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what special educational and welfare assistance is available to children suffering from cerebral palsy. [18147]

Ms Estelle Morris: It is the responsibility of local education authorities, schools and other local agencies (including health authorities and social services departments) to determine the support needed for individual children, in accordance with the guidance in the Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs. The Green Paper on Special Educational Needs, "Excellence for all children", published in October, seeks views on ways in which the present arrangements might be improved for children with all types of special educational needs.

Cycling

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those local education authorities which have ceased to provide cycling proficiency courses. [18175]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)*, part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, listing the job title in each case. [18116]

Dr. Howells: In London, the lowest rate paid by the Department is £4.91 an hour; £3.59 per hour is the lowest hourly rate paid by the Department in all other regions.

These rates apply to all staff directly employed by the Department. Staff at this level do a variety of jobs including filing, photocopying and processing correspondence.

Rates of pay for people employed by firms undertaking contracted out services are a matter for the companies concerned.

Waiver Clauses

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy

that fixed-term contract research staff *(a)* employed and *(b)* funded by his Department will not be required to sign waiver clauses in their employment contract. [18629]

Dr. Howells: There are no research staff currently employed on fixed term contracts by my Department. However, for fixed term contracts of one year or more, the standard DfEE terms includes a waiver to exclude claims for unfair dismissal on expiry of the contract. The Department has no plans to remove this waiver.

The terms and conditions of staff employed by organisations funded by the Department are the responsibility of the individual employer.

Class Sizes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage and how many primary school pupils were in classes of over (i) 30, (ii) 36 and (iii) 40 in January in each local education authority and in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers compared with January 1996 in each local authority and in total. [18807]

Mr. Byers: The available information is shown in the following table.

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes by size taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position in January each year

	1996					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]
City of London	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Camden	447	5.2	37	0.4	0	0.0
Greenwich	1,412	8.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hackney	664	4.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith	1,036	13.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Islington	982	7.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	187	3.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	837	5.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lewisham	917	5.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Southwark	2,051	10.7	72	0.4	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	859	5.8	37	0.2	0	0.0
Wandsworth	2,383	16.5	404	2.8	62	0.4
Westminster	544	7.9	36	0.5	0	0.0
Barking	1,603	10.6	272	1.8	0	0.0
Barnet	1,848	8.8	200	1.0	48	0.2
Bexley	8,821	42.7	148	0.7	0	0.0
Brent	2,259	12.0	206	1.1	95	0.5
Bromley	11,850	50.6	186	0.8	0	0.0
Croydon	6,341	24.4	258	1.0	0	0.0
Ealing	5,508	24.5	262	1.2	44	0.2
Enfield	8,840	41.0	36	0.2	0	0.0
Haringey	948	5.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Harrow	3,833	24.3	36	0.2	0	0.0
Havering	5,678	28.7	235	1.2	50	0.3
Hillingdon	4,820	25.8	459	2.5	41	0.2
Hounslow	5,674	34.4	678	4.1	41	0.2
Kingston upon Thames	7,095	70.1	485	4.8	47	0.5
Merton	3,955	30.9	395	3.1	51	0.4
Newham	2,381	9.8	204	0.8	52	0.2
Redbridge	9,060	52.7	542	3.2	0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	2,309	22.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sutton	4,235	32.8	367	2.8	0	0.0
Waltham Forest	3,282	18.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Birmingham	25,642	26.3	1,601	1.6	157	0.2
Coventry	7,638	28.3	530	2.0	0	0.0
Dudley	6,618	26.9	1,229	5.0	775	3.2
Sandwell	11,812	41.5	1,543	5.4	83	0.3
Solihull	8,403	44.0	915	4.8	0	0.0
Walsall	7,241	31.1	890	3.8	45	0.2
Wolverhampton	6,762	30.9	1,078	4.9	233	1.1
Knowsley	5,254	29.2	655	3.6	52	0.3
Liverpool	12,051	26.0	590	1.3	0	0.0
St. Helens	5,563	37.7	1,203	8.1	83	0.6
Sefton	10,670	42.5	993	4.0	0	0.0
Wirral	6,987	23.7	482	1.6	0	0.0
Bolton	11,719	49.7	2,795	11.8	535	2.3
Bury	6,968	43.4	843	5.3	0	0.0
Manchester	9,687	22.8	1,719	4.0	582	1.4
Oldham	9,434	43.5	994	4.6	178	0.8
Rochdale	8,316	43.0	629	3.3	41	0.2
Salford	6,997	30.6	1,247	5.5	314	1.4
Stockport	8,247	32.8	1,202	4.8	117	0.5
Tameside	11,508	53.0	956	4.4	0	0.0
Trafford	9,389	48.9	1,103	5.7	0	0.0
Wigan	11,087	42.5	2,385	9.2	127	0.5
Barnsley	8,677	42.3	751	3.7	152	0.7
Doncaster	9,609	35.1	1,739	6.4	0	0.0
Rotherham	5,732	24.6	422	1.8	0	0.0
Sheffield	11,181	28.0	1,497	3.7	229	0.6
Bradford	11,449	34.3	1,597	4.8	43	0.1
Calderdale	6,331	34.3	341	1.8	45	0.2
Kirklees	14,395	44.3	1,993	6.1	139	0.4
Leeds	21,455	33.3	3,110	5.1	244	0.4
Wakefield	10,673	37.7	1,602	5.7	52	0.2
Gateshead	2,443	14.4	116	0.7	0	0.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	6,792	33.1	1,055	5.1	49	0.2
North Tyneside	4,897	31.7	575	3.7	50	0.3
South Tyneside	4,067	27.6	736	5.0	99	0.7
Sunderland	4,148	15.1	185	0.7	0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	26,647	34.4	1,587	2.0	44	0.1
Bath and NE Somerset[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
City of Bristol[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Somerset[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Gloucestershire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	11,867	30.4	2,598	6.7	482	1.2
Berkshire	18,309	30.5	1,414	2.4	46	0.1
Buckinghamshire	22,753	37.6	3,772	6.2	372	0.6
Cambridgeshire	18,065	31.8	1,026	1.8	0	0.0
Cheshire	32,225	37.3	4,051	4.7	142	0.2
Cleveland	13,869	23.6	2,630	4.5	0	0.0
Hartlepool[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesborough[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockton on Tees[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	14,936	37.5	1,325	3.3	41	0.1
Cumbria	11,382	28.2	1,332	3.3	111	0.3
Derbyshire	41,217	52.0	10,344	13.0	722	0.9
Devon	28,078	34.8	3,032	3.8	128	0.2
Dorset	19,654	44.5	1,360	3.1	86	0.2
Durham	19,881	38.0	1,987	3.8	167	0.3
East Sussex	20,971	42.4	1,056	2.1	0	0.0
Essex	34,741	27.6	804	0.6	109	0.1
Gloucestershire	14,246	32.1	630	1.4	0	0.0
Hampshire	44,938	34.5	2,532	1.9	47	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	13,225	27.2	1,138	2.3	150	0.3
Hertfordshire	23,396	29.0	729	0.9	0	0.0
Humberside	27,832	35.0	4,410	5.5	229	0.3
East Riding of Yorkshire[1]	[4]—	[4]—	—	—	—	—
City of Kingston Upon Hull	—	—	—	—	—	—
North East Lincolnshire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Lincolnshire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	2,243	31.1	115	1.6	0	0.0

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes by size taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position in January each year

	1996					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]
Kent	44,212	33.8	1,012	0.8	89	0.1
Lancashire	54,099	44.5	7,918	6.5	41	0.0
Leicestershire	21,784	28.8	2,546	3.4	224	0.3
Lincolnshire	13,962	27.9	1,184	2.4	42	0.1
Norfolk	13,224	22.0	780	1.3	43	0.1
Northamptonshire	11,089	22.4	612	1.2	42	0.1
Northumberland	8,478	43.3	1,445	7.4	0	0.0
North Yorkshire	18,663	32.1	2,120	3.6	140	0.2
York	[4]—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	32,931	38.9	4,733	5.6	212	0.3
Oxfordshire	10,608	25.7	1,207	2.9	0	0.0
Shropshire	13,425	38.2	1,308	3.7	102	0.3
Somerset	13,649	37.3	809	2.2	41	0.1
Staffordshire	32,163	35.7	5,891	6.5	539	0.6
Suffolk	7,940	18.2	472	1.1	0	0.0
Surrey	14,197	19.9	360	0.5	45	0.1
Warwickshire	17,566	40.7	1,558	3.6	44	0.1
West Sussex	14,447	26.7	333	0.6	0	0.0
Wiltshire	15,128	30.8	773	1.6	0	0.0
England	1,260,551	31.8	1E+05	3.3	9,435	0.2

Position in January each year

	1997					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]
City of London	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Camden	698	8.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Greenwich	2,126	12.0	111	0.6	0	0.0
Hackney	824	5.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith	1,106	14.5	37	0.5	0	0.0
Islington	702	5.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	219	4.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	1,192	7.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lewisham	1,207	6.7	36	0.2	0	0.0
Southwark	1,748	8.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	1,047	6.3	40	0.2	0	0.0
Wandsworth	2,299	15.3	503	3.4	49	0.3
Westminster	479	7.1	38	0.6	0	0.0
Barking	2,022	12.8	347	2.2	0	0.0
Barnet	2,456	11.3	232	1.1	0	0.0
Bexley	9,314	44.6	145	0.7	0	0.0
Brent	2,383	12.6	251	1.3	95	0.5
Bromley	13,110	55.3	289	1.2	0	0.0
Croydon	7,042	26.1	556	2.1	0	0.0
Ealing	5,258	22.4	148	0.6	0	0.0
Enfield	9,965	46.0	72	0.3	0	0.0
Haringey	851	4.9	38	0.2	0	0.0
Harrow	3,663	22.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Havering	5,763	28.9	393	2.0	137	0.7
Hillingdon	5,212	28.1	320	1.7	45	0.2
Hounslow	4,907	29.1	456	2.7	0	0.0
Kingston upon Thames	6,682	66.2	75	0.7	0	0.0
Merton	3,676	28.5	279	2.2	89	0.7
Newham	3,021	12.5	151	0.6	0	0.0
Redbridge	8,074	45.7	361	2.0	0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	2,671	24.7	36	0.3	0	0.0
Sutton	5,222	40.3	222	1.7	0	0.0
Waltham Forest	2,639	14.8	36	0.2	0	0.0
Birmingham	24,848	25.7	1,389	1.4	206	0.2
Coventry	8,641	31.4	679	2.5	0	0.0
Dudley	6,904	27.1	1,215	4.8	466	1.8
Sandwell	12,606	44.1	1,129	3.9	186	0.7
Solihull	8,478	43.3	954	4.9	0	0.0
Walsall	7,527	31.6	557	2.3	0	0.0
Wolverhampton	8,169	37.9	859	4.0	0	0.0

Position in January each year

	1997					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]
Knowsley	5,820	32.6	663	3.7	171	1.0
Liverpool	12,581	27.3	1,036	2.3	44	0.1
St. Helens	6,270	40.8	1,420	9.3	43	0.3
Sefton	9,634	38.2	511	2.0	0	0.0
Wirral	6,747	23.1	555	1.9	0	0.0
Bolton	11,422	49.0	2,449	10.5	372	1.6
Bury	7,178	44.3	844	5.2	0	0.0
Manchester	10,615	25.1	1,719	4.1	896	2.1
Oldham	10,645	48.3	1,343	6.1	169	0.8
Rochdale	9,004	45.5	1,176	5.9	42	0.2
Salford	7,043	30.8	829	3.6	232	1.0
Stockport	9,446	37.0	1,324	5.2	0	0.0
Tameside	11,566	53.4	868	4.0	50	0.2
Trafford	9,693	49.8	1,020	5.2	0	0.0
Wigan	11,098	42.3	2,397	9.1	45	0.2
Barnsley	9,082	43.9	1,035	5.0	104	0.5
Doncaster	10,052	35.0	1,505	5.2	0	0.0
Rotherham	8,094	34.2	712	3.0	0	0.0
Sheffield	11,261	27.6	1,762	4.3	47	0.1
Bradford	13,443	39.4	2,101	6.2	224	0.7
Calderdale	6,185	33.2	330	1.8	0	0.0
Kirklees	15,730	47.7	2,942	8.9	137	0.4
Leeds	22,031	35.0	2,529	4.0	0	0.0
Wakefield	12,198	41.2	1,978	6.7	52	0.2
Gateshead	2,112	12.5	185	1.1	0	0.0
Newcastle Upon Tyne	6,904	33.6	925	4.5	146	0.7
North Tyneside	4,779	30.7	655	4.2	101	0.6
South Tyneside	3,996	27.8	725	5.0	52	0.4
Sunderland	5,023	18.4	375	1.4	0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	33	21.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Bath and North East Somerset[3]	3,579	28.5	313	2.5	60	0.5
City of Bristol[3]	9,905	31.8	635	2.0	84	0.3
North Somerset[3]	4,675	33.0	148	1.0	0	0.0
South Gloucestershire[3]	9,563	45.1	694	3.3	0	0.0
Bedfordshire	12,890	33.4	2,461	6.4	382	1.0
Berkshire	18,680	31.6	1,462	2.5	88	0.1
Buckinghamshire	23,085	37.9	3,537	5.8	240	0.4
Cambridgeshire	20,831	36.2	1,643	2.9	0	0.0
Cheshire	33,630	38.7	4,217	4.8	87	0.1
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hartlepool[3]	2,833	29.5	418	4.4	0	0.0
Middlesbrough[3]	3,700	24.1	822	5.4	0	0.0
Redcar and Cleveland[3]	4,576	30.7	720	4.8	0	0.0
Stockton-on-Tees[3]	4,507	24.1	984	5.3	0	0.0
Cornwall	16,082	40.2	1,587	4.0	0	0.0
Cumbria	11,984	29.4	1,133	2.8	180	0.4
Derbyshire	44,864	55.2	12,889	15.9	651	0.8
Devon	31,181	38.1	2,898	3.5	86	0.1
Dorset	22,462	50.2	1,089	2.4	0	0.0
Durham	21,429	40.7	2,212	4.2	127	0.2
East Sussex	23,330	45.7	756	1.5	0	0.0
Essex	38,831	29.9	1,566	1.2	214	0.2
Gloucestershire	15,280	33.9	896	2.0	45	0.1
Hampshire	47,671	35.8	2,527	1.9	44	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	12,527	24.9	981	1.9	139	0.3
Hertfordshire	27,264	32.6	1,204	1.4	0	0.0
Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Riding of Yorkshire[3]	10,254	40.1	2,288	9.0	133	0.5
City of Kingston upon Hull	10,164	39.5	1,829	7.1	0	0.0
North East Lincolnshire[3]	6,228	39.6	732	4.6	99	0.6
North Lincolnshire[3]	4,932	36.2	821	6.0	104	0.8
Isle of Wight	1,639	22.5	220	3.0	0	0.0
Kent	47,339	35.7	757	0.6	106	0.1
Lancashire	58,388	47.3	10,409	8.4	99	0.1
Leicestershire	22,862	29.8	3,254	4.2	408	0.5
Lincolnshire	14,644	28.6	1,667	3.3	0	0.0
Norfolk	13,402	21.6	256	0.4	0	0.0
Northamptonshire	13,015	25.7	855	1.7	41	0.1
Northumberland	8,314	42.7	1,747	9.0	0	0.0

Position in January each year

	1997					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]	Pupils	Per cent.[1]
North Yorkshire	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
York[3]	4,961	35.5	412	2.9	0	0.0
North Yorkshire[3]	15,129	33.7	1,470	3.3	133	0.3
Nottinghamshire	38,340	44.5	7,160	8.3	583	0.7
Oxfordshire	13,090	31.3	1,158	2.8	0	0.0
Shropshire	13,545	37.8	1,804	5.0	0	0.0
Somerset	14,096	37.8	1,653	4.4	0	0.0
Staffordshire	31,492	34.8	5,481	6.1	437	0.5
Suffolk	8,520	19.3	257	0.6	0	0.0
Surrey	15,007	20.5	893	1.2	0	0.0
Warwickshire	17,493	42.9	1,738	4.3	43	0.1
West Sussex	15,337	27.4	403	0.7	0	0.0
Wiltshire	16,245	32.5	988	2.0	0	0.0
England	1,344,231	33.4	1E+05	3.6	8,813	0.2

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes by size taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position in January each year

	Change					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[2]	Pupils	Per cent.[2]	Pupils	Per cent.[2]
City of London	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Camden	251	2.8	–37	–0.4	0	0.0
Greenwich	714	4.0	111	0.6	0	0.0
Hackney	160	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith	70	1.3	37	0.5	0	0.0
Islington	–280	–2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	32	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	335	2.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lewisham	290	1.5	36	0.2	0	0.0
Southwark	–303	–1.8	–72	–0.4	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	188	0.6	3	0.0	0	0.0
Wandsworth	–74	–1.1	99	0.5	–13	–0.1
Westminster	–65	–0.9	2	0.0	0	0.0
Barking	419	2.2	75	0.4	0	0.0
Barnet	608	2.5	32	0.1	–48	–0.2
Bexley	493	1.9	–3	0.0	0	0.0
Brent	124	0.6	45	0.2	0	0.0
Bromley	1,260	4.6	103	0.4	0	0.0
Croydon	701	1.7	298	1.1	0	0.0
Ealing	–250	–2.1	–114	–0.5	–44	–0.2
Enfield	1,125	5.0	36	0.2	0	0.0
Haringey	–97	–0.7	38	0.2	0	0.0
Harrow	–170	–2.0	–36	–0.2	0	0.0
Havering	85	0.2	158	0.8	87	0.4
Hillingdon	392	2.3	–139	–0.7	4	0.0
Hounslow	–767	–5.3	–222	–1.4	–41	–0.2
Kingston Upon Thames	–413	–3.9	–410	–4.0	–4.7	–0.5
Merton	–279	–2.3	–116	–0.9	38	0.3
Newham	640	2.7	–53	–0.2	–5.2	–0.2
Redbridge	–986	–7.0	–181	–1.1	0	0.0
Richmond Upon Thames	362	2.5	36	0.3	0	0.0
Sutton	987	7.6	–145	–1.1	0	0.0
Waltham Forest	–643	–3.6	36	0.2	0	0.0
Birmingham	–794	–0.6	–212	–0.2	49	0.1
Coventry	1,003	3.0	149	0.5	0	0.0
Dudley	286	0.1	–14	–0.2	–309	–1.3
Sandwell	794	2.6	–414	–1.5	103	0.4
Solihull	75	–0.7	39	0.1	0	0.0
Walsall	286	0.4	–333	–1.5	–4.5	–0.2
Wolverhampton	1,407	7.0	–219	–0.9	–233	–1.1
Knowsley	566	3.3	8	0.1	119	0.7
Liverpool	530	1.3	446	1.0	44	0.1
St. Helens	707	3.2	217	1.1	–4.0	–0.3
Sefton	–1,036	–4.3	–482	–1.9	0	0.0
Wirral	–240	–0.6	73	0.3	0	0.0
Bolton	–297	–0.7	–346	–1.4	–163	–0.7
Bury	210	0.9	1	0.0	0	0.0

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes by size taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position in January each year

	Change					
	31 or more		36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[2]	Pupils	Per cent.[2]	Pupils	Per cent.[2]
Manchester	928	2.3	0	0.0	314	0.8
Oldham	1,211	4.8	349	1.5	–9	–0.1
Rochdale	688	2.5	547	2.7	1	0.0
Salford	46	0.1	–418	–1.8	–82	–0.4
Stockport	1,199	4.3	122	0.4	–117	–0.5
Tameside	58	0.4	–88	–0.4	50	0.2
Trafford	304	0.9	–8.3	–0.5	0	0.0
Wigan	11	–0.2	12	0.0	–8.2	–0.3
Barnsley	405	1.6	284	1.3	–4.8	–0.2
Doncaster	443	–0.1	–234	–1.1	0	0.0
Rotherham	2,362	9.7	290	1.2	0	0.0
Sheffield	80	–0.4	265	0.6	–182	–0.5
Bradford	1,994	5.1	504	1.4	181	0.5
Calderdale	–146	–1.1	–11	–0.1	–45	–0.2
Kirklees	1,335	3.3	949	2.8	–2	0.0
Leeds	576	–0.3	–581	–1.1	–244	–0.4
Wakefield	1,525	3.5	376	1.0	0	0.0
Gateshead	–331	–1.8	69	0.4	0	0.0
Newcastle Upon Tyne	112	0.4	–130	–0.7	97	0.5
North Tyneside	–18	–1.0	80	0.5	51	0.3
South Tyneside	–7.1	0.1	–11	0.0	–4.7	–0.3
Sunderland	875	3.3	190	0.7	0	0.0
Isle of Scilly	33	21.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Bath and North East Somerset[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
City of Bristol[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
North Somerset[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
South Gloucestershire[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Bedfordshire	1,023	3.0	–137	–0.3	–100	–0.2
Berkshire	371	1.0	48	0.1	42	0.1
Buckinghamshire	332	0.3	–235	–0.4	–132	–0.2
Cambridgeshire	2,766	4.4	617	1.1	0	0.0
Cheshire	1,405	1.4	166	0.2	–55	–0.1
Cleveland	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Hartlepool[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Middlesborough[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Redcar and Cleveland[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Stockton-on-Tees[3]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]	[4]
Cornwall	1,146	2.7	262	0.6	–41	–0.1
Cumbria	602	1.2	–199	–0.5	69	0.2
Derbyshire	3,647	3.3	2,545	2.8	–71	–0.1
Devon	3,103	3.3	–134	–0.2	–42	–0.1
Dorset	2,808	5.7	–271	–0.6	–86	–0.2
Durham	1,548	2.7	225	0.4	–40	–0.1
East Sussex	2,359	3.3	–300	–0.7	0	0.0
Essex	4,090	2.3	762	0.6	105	0.1
Gloucestershire	1,034	1.7	266	0.6	45	0.1
Hampshire	2,733	1.3	–5	0.0	–3	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	–698	–2.3	–157	–0.4	–11	0.0
Hertfordshire	3,868	3.6	475	0.5	0	0.0
Humberside	–	–	–	–	–	–
East Riding of Yorkshire[3]	–	–	–	–	–	–
City of Kingston Upon Hull	–	–	–	–	–	–
North East Lincolnshire[3]	–	–	–	–	–	–
North Lincolnshire[3]	–	–	–	–	–	–
Isle of Wight	–604	–8.6	105	1.4	0	0.0
Kent	3,127	1.9	–255	–0.2	17	0.0
Lancashire	4,289	2.8	2,491	1.9	58	0.0
Leicestershire	1,078	0.9	708	0.9	184	0.2
Lincolnshire	682	0.7	483	0.9	–42	–0.1
Norfolk	178	–0.4	–524	–0.9	–43	–0.1
Northamptonshire	1,926	3.2	243	0.4	–1	0.0
Northumberland	–164	–0.6	302	1.6	0	0.0
North Yorkshire	–	–	–	–	–	–
York[3]	–	–	–	–	–	–
North Yorkshire[3]	–	–	–	–	–	–
Nottingham	5,409	5.6	2,427	2.7	371	0.4

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes by size taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position in January each year

	31 or more		Change 36 or more		41 or more	
	Pupils	Per cent.[2]	Pupils	Per cent.[2]	Pupils	Per cent.[2]
Oxfordshire	2,482	5.6	–49	–0.2	0	0.0
Shropshire	120	–0.5	496	1.3	–102	–0.3
Somerset	447	0.5	844	2.2	–41	–0.1
Staffordshire	–671	–0.9	–410	–0.5	–102	–0.1
Suffolk	580	1.1	–215	–0.5	0	0.0
Surrey	810	0.6	533	0.7	–45	–0.1
Warwickshire	–73	2.2	180	0.7	–1	0.0
West Sussex	890	0.7	70	0.1	0	0.0
Wiltshire	1,117	1.7	215	0.4	0	0.0
England	83,680	1.6	14,122	0.3	–622	0.0

[1] Number of pupils in classes taught by one teacher expressed as a percentage of all pupils in classes taught by one teacher.
[2] Percentage of pupils in 1997 minus percentage of pupils in 1996.
[3] No comparable data for new Unitary authorities.
[4] Not applicable.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average size of single teacher classes in primary schools in January in each local education authority and in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers compared with January 1996 in each local education authority and in total. [18869]

Mr. Byers: The information is shown in the following table.

Average size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position as at January each year

	1996	1997	Change[1] Number 1996–97	Change[1] Percentage 1996–97
City of London	26.8	26.0	–0.8	–2.8
Camden	27.3	27.1	–0.1	–0.5
Greenwich	25.5	26.0	0.4	1.7
Hackney	26.1	26.1	–0.1	–0.2
Hammersmith	26.1	25.3	–0.8	–2.9
Islington	26.2	26.6	0.3	1.2
Kensington and Chelsea	24.4	25.3	0.9	3.7
Lambeth	24.6	25.2	0.6	2.5
Lewisham	25.7	26.1	0.3	1.3
Southwark	26.2	26.4	0.3	1.0
Tower Hamlets	25.8	26.2	0.4	1.7
Wandsworth	25.4	25.8	0.4	1.4
Westminster	24.9	24.2	–0.7	–3.0
Barking	26.7	27.0	0.3	1.3
Barnet	26.3	26.2	–0.1	–0.3
Bexley	28.6	28.8	0.1	0.5
Brent	26.7	26.5	–0.2	–0.7
Bromley	28.7	28.5	–0.2	–0.8
Croydon	28.3	28.3	0.0	0.0
Ealing	27.2	27.1	–0.1	–0.5
Enfield	28.5	29.1	0.6	1.9
Haringey	27.0	26.9	–0.1	–0.4
Harrow	27.8	27.5	–0.3	–1.0
Havering	27.9	27.9	0.0	0.0
Hillingdon	26.6	27.2	0.6	2.2
Hounslow	27.3	26.8	–0.5	–1.7
Kingston upon Thames	30.0	29.4	–0.7	–2.3
Merton	28.1	27.3	–0.8	–2.8

Average size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position as at January each year

	1996	1997	Change[1] Number 1996–97	Change[1] Percentage 1996–97
Newham	27.9	27.9	0.1	0.3
Redbridge	29.0	28.4	–0.6	–2.1
Richmond upon Thames	26.7	27.2	0.6	2.1
Sutton	27.3	28.1	0.8	2.8
Waltham Forest	26.4	26.6	0.2	0.7
Birmingham	27.8	27.7	0.0	–0.1
Coventry	27.2	27.6	0.4	1.3
Dudley	26.9	26.5	–0.4	–1.4
Sandwell	28.6	28.9	0.3	1.0
Solihull	28.2	27.9	–0.3	–1.0
Walsall	26.0	26.2	0.2	0.8
Wolverhampton	26.5	26.9	0.4	1.6
Knowsley	27.6	27.7	0.1	0.3
Liverpool	26.8	26.8	0.0	0.0
St. Helens	27.5	27.8	0.3	0.9
Sefton	27.5	27.6	0.1	0.3
Wirral	26.4	26.3	–0.1	–0.4
Bolton	28.5	28.9	0.4	1.5
Bury	28.3	28.3	0.0	–0.1
Manchester	27.0	27.2	0.2	0.9
Oldham	28.6	29.3	0.6	2.2
Rochdale	29.2	29.6	0.5	1.6
Salford	27.4	27.3	–0.1	–0.4
Stockport	27.7	27.8	0.1	0.3
Tameside	29.3	29.3	0.0	0.0
Trafford	28.7	28.9	0.3	1.0
Wigan	28.2	28.5	0.3	1.0
Barnsley	28.2	28.9	0.6	2.2
Doncaster	28.2	28.1	–0.1	–0.5
Rotherham	26.9	27.7	0.8	3.0
Sheffield	26.8	26.9	0.1	0.5
Bradford	27.9	28.3	0.4	1.3
Calderdale	27.7	28.0	0.2	0.8
Kirklees	28.7	29.0	0.3	1.2
Leeds	28.1	28.3	0.2	0.6
Wakefield	28.0	28.2	0.2	0.7
Gateshead	25.9	25.8	–0.1	–0.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	27.7	27.6	–0.1	–0.3
North Tyneside	27.0	27.1	0.0	0.1
South Tyneside	26.8	27.0	0.2	0.8
Sunderland	25.6	26.0	0.3	1.3
Isles of Scilly	13.7	17.3	3.6	26.3
Avon	27.7	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Bath and North east Somerset[3]	[3]—	27.0	[3]—	[3]—
City of Bristol[3]	[3]—	27.2	[3]—	[3]—
North Somerset[3]	[3]—	27.8	[3]—	[3]—
South Gloucestershire[3]	[3]—	28.5	[3]—	[3]—
Bedfordshire	27.1	27.4	0.3	1.2
Berkshire	27.3	27.5	0.2	0.6
Buckinghamshire	27.8	27.9	0.1	0.3
Cambridgeshire	27.8	28.2	0.4	1.4
Cheshire	27.4	27.5	0.0	0.0
Cleveland	26.9	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Hartlepool[3]	[3]—	28.0	[3]—	[3]—
Middlesbrough[3]	[3]—	26.5	[3]—	[3]—
Redcar and Cleveland[3]	[3]—	27.4	[3]—	[3]—
Stockton on Tees[3]	[3]—	26.8	[3]—	[3]—
Cornwall	27.3	27.3	0.0	0.0
Cumbria	26.0	26.3	0.2	0.9
Derbyshire	28.9	29.3	0.3	1.1
Devon	27.2	27.4	0.2	0.9
Dorset	27.7	28.2	0.5	1.7

Average size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1996 and 1997

Position as at January each year

	1996	1997	Change[1] Number 1996–97	Change[1] Percentage 1996–97
Durham[3]	28.4	28.5	0.0	0.1
East Sussex	27.7	28.2	0.5	1.8
Essex	26.9	27.3	0.4	1.6
Gloucestershire	27.2	27.4	0.2	0.8
Hampshire	27.8	27.9	0.1	0.3
Hereford and Worcester	25.9	26.0	0.2	0.6
Hertfordshire	26.7	27.1	0.4	1.5
Humberside	27.9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
East Riding of Yorkshire[3]	[2]—	28.3	[2]—	[2]—
City of Kingston Upon Hull[3]	[2]—	28.8	[2]—	[2]—
North East Lincolnshire[3]	[2]—	28.1	[2]—	[2]—
North Lincolnshire[3]	[2]—	27.7	[2]—	[2]—
Isle of Wight	26.9	25.9	-1.0	-3.9
Kent	27.7	28.0	0.2	0.9
Lancashire	28.4	28.8	0.3	1.2
Leicestershire	26.7	26.7	0.0	-0.1
Lincolnshire	26.7	26.9	0.1	0.5
Norfolk	26.0	25.9	-0.1	-0.3
Northamptonshire	26.5	27.0	0.4	1.6
Northumberland	27.1	27.0	-0.1	-0.5
North Yorkshire	26.3	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
York[3]	[2]—	27.6	[2]—	[2]—
North Yorkshire[3]	[2]—	26.3	[2]—	[2]—
Nottinghamshire	28.3	28.7	0.4	1.5
Oxfordshire	26.8	27.2	0.3	1.2
Shropshire	27.3	27.4	0.1	0.4
Somerset	27.3	27.6	0.3	1.1
Staffordshire	27.7	27.5	-0.2	-0.8
Suffolk	25.1	25.0	-0.1	-0.4
Surrey	25.8	26.2	0.4	1.6
Warwickshire	27.9	28.5	0.6	2.3
West Sussex	26.8	26.8	0.0	0.2
Wiltshire	27.1	27.2	0.1	0.4
England	27.3	27.5	0.2	0.6

[1] Rounding of components may cause discrepancies in number and percentage changes.

[2] Not applicable.

[3] No comparable data for new unitary authorities.

European Voluntary Service for Young People

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what study his Department has undertaken of possible promotional usage of the European Voluntary Service for Young People; what steps his Department will take to ensure that the activities involved do not substitute for existing paid jobs; and if the minimum wage will apply to the service. [18835]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply. I attended the European Council of Youth Ministers in Luxembourg on 28 October, at which a common position was reached on the Commission's draft proposal for a European Voluntary Service for Young People, subject to a UK Parliamentary Scrutiny Reserve. I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) on 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *186*.

The Commission's proposal states specifically that the activities undertaken by young people under this programme will in no way replace potential or existing paid jobs; the other points of detail raised will be addressed with other Member States when the precise arrangements for the Programme are being discussed over the next few months.

The Government is committed to seeing this programme under way as early as possible. The Government agrees with Article 1(2) of the draft proposal.

Officers of the Department have had general discussions with the British Youth Council about this programme, and we will draw on our experience of the pilot phase in determining the exact arrangements for the new EVS Programme.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he had with right hon. and hon. Members prior to taking the decision to introduce restrictions on the retail sale of higher dose vitamin B6 supplements; and what plans he has to meet right hon. and hon. Members to discuss the decision prior to laying the necessary statutory instrument. [17818]

Mr. Rooker: There was no consultation with right hon. and hon. Members prior to the Government taking the decision to introduce restrictions on the sale of dietary supplements containing vitamin B6. I have responded to each and every right hon. and hon. Member who has contacted me. Every request for a meeting has been agreed to.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to promote consumers' rights of access to safe vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements of their choice, *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in the European Union and *(c)* elsewhere; and what plans he has to meet representatives of (i) Consumers for Health Choice and (ii) the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy to discuss these matters. [18081]

Mr. Rooker: The Government believes that consumers' access to supplements should only be restricted where this is necessary on safety grounds. This view has been made clear in the UK's formal response to the EU Commission discussion document on the addition of vitamins and minerals to food and food supplements and in discussions on the draft Codex guidelines for supplements containing vitamins and minerals.

I have no plans to meet representatives of either Consumers for Health Choice or the Society for the Promotion for Nutritional Therapy to discuss these matters, nor have I received any request from these bodies for such meetings.

Big Cats

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has

responsibility for co-ordinating government responsibility for big cats. [17871]

Mr. Morley: A number of Departments have responsibilities in relation to "big cats". This Department is concerned with the safety of livestock, the Home Office for the safety of people and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for the legal keeping of such animals by, for example, zoos and circuses. These Departments co-ordinate their actions according to the circumstances of the case.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sightings of big cats in Norfolk have been reported to his Department since 1993. [17872]

Mr. Morley: I am aware that, in common with several other areas, there have been a number of alleged sightings of "big cats" in the Norfolk area. However, I am not aware of any attacks on farm livestock attributed to "big cats" in the Norfolk area being reported to this Department.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what compensation is available to farmers in the event of livestock being killed or injured by "big cats". [17873]

Mr. Morley: There are no funds available to pay compensation to farmers in the event of livestock being killed or injured by "big cats".

Set-aside

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the amount of public funding in 1997 for land put into set-aside. [18142]

Mr. Morley: Payments for land set aside under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) are funded from the European Community Budget. Based on provisional figures for claims under the 1997 Scheme, payments for land set aside in England are expected to be about £80 million. Land entered into certain environmental schemes can also be set aside for the purposes of the Scheme but does not attract any payment under the AAPS; farmers do, however, receive payments for meeting the conditions of the environmental scheme concerned.

Cattle Tagging

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures have been taken with regard to the new system for cattle tagging to be introduced in 1998; what assistance has been offered to farmers; and if he will make a statement. [18138]

Mr. Rooker: Double tagging of all cattle born or imported into the UK will become mandatory from 1 January 1998. The Department's officials issued an information note on this to farmers in August 1997, and are in close touch with representatives of the livestock industry and eartag manufacturers about the new arrangements.

Flooding

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance is available to farmers for change of agricultural use where current practices may give rise to flooding of adjoining residential areas. [18139]

Mr. Morley: There are schemes available to encourage farmers to convert arable land to grassland which may help to ameliorate run off from agricultural land; for example farmers can choose to enter eligible land into set-aside. Additional incentives may be available to farmers in Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) to convert arable fields into permanent grass. The ESA scheme also provides capital grants for the creation or re-instatement of dykes and ditches and for the construction of water penning structures.

Ministry grant aid might be available towards the cost of flood alleviation works undertaken by the Environment Agency or local authorities if those bodies could devise an engineered solution to the flooding problem which met established criteria.

Vacant Farm Buildings

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* empty and *(b)* unused farm buildings. [18322]

Mr. Morley: The Department collects no information on the number of empty or unused farm buildings.

Farming (Young People)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage young people to enter farming. [18529]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *230*.

Cattle Passport Scheme

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department's policy is towards passports for calves, in respect of *(a)* charges and *(b)* the timescale of registration; what changes his Department is planning to the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [18393]

Mr. Rooker: I announced on 12 November that the Government had decided to charge for the new computerised cattle tracing system via cattle passports. However decisions have yet to be taken about whether to charge for the temporary calf passport as well as the full cattle passport and as to how the movements of animals with temporary calf passports will be recorded on the cattle tracing system.

SCOTLAND

NHS White Paper

9. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the White Paper on the national health service. [17098]

Mr. Galbraith: Our White Paper on the future of the NHS in Scotland will be published shortly.

12. **Ms Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has held with professional health staff regarding the forthcoming White Paper on the NHS. [17101]

16. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has held with the health professionals regarding the forthcoming White Paper on the NHS. [17106]

Mr. Galbraith: I have had discussions with the Scottish Council of the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the STUC and with Scottish representatives of the NHS Confederation on the future of the NHS in Scotland. I also received a number of written representations from health professionals and associations. Their views were taken into account when preparing the White Paper.

Scottish Parliament

11. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with Edinburgh district council on the site of the proposed Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Office is working closely with the City of Edinburgh Council in considering the location of the Scottish Parliament.

13. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the cost implications of each of the potential locations for a Scottish Assembly. [17102]

Mr. McLeish: The estimated costs of providing a building for the Scottish Parliament at three potential locations in Edinburgh are being drawn up at present by independent consultants. The transport and environmental impacts are also being assessed.

18. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the location of the Scottish Parliament. [17109]

Mr. McLeish: My right hon. Friend hopes to announce his decision on the location of the Scottish Parliament building around the turn of the year.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current estimate for the cost of the proposed Scottish Parliament building. [18157]

Mr. McLeish: As is explained in the White Paper "Scotland's Parliament", the cost is dependent upon the site that is eventually chosen. The estimated costs of providing a building for the Scottish Parliament at locations in Regent Road, Leith and Haymarket are presently being drawn up by independent consultants.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library representations made to him by Historic Scotland about the siting of the Scottish Parliament on Calton Hill. [17630]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* No such representations have been made. Historic Scotland, as an executive agency within The Scottish Office, is fully and directly involved in the process of advising Ministers on the selection of a location for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the date of the first Scottish Parliamentary election. [17103]

Mr. Dewar: The timing of elections is being considered. I will make a further statement in due course.

Public Transport

14. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for increasing the role of public transport in urban and rural areas. [17104]

Mr. Chisholm: We intend to publish a White Paper in the spring setting out an effective, integrated and environmentally sustainable transport policy appropriate to the needs of Scotland. This will take account of the responses to the consultation document issued last August. Our proposals, which will recognise the important role of improved public transport will be published in the White Paper.

Inward Investment

15. **Mr. Alasdair Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had recently with the President of the Board of Trade concerning inward investment policy. [17105]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave earlier to the hon. Members for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) and for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Land Reform

17. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for land reform in Scotland. [17108]

Mr. Dewar: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart), on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *875*.

Household Incomes

19. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what adjustments he will make within the Scottish block to reflect the level of household income in Scotland. [17110]

Mr. Dewar: None.

Glasgow City Council

20. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Glasgow city council to discuss its economic situation; and if he will make a statement. [17111]

Mr. Chisholm: My right hon. Friend and I met the Leader of Glasgow city council on 18 November and had a useful discussion on the economic situation and a range of other matters.

NHS Bureaucracy

21. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in reducing bureaucracy int he NHS in Scotland. [17112]

Mr. Galbraith: Health Boards and Trusts were recently instructed to submit action plans for reducing further the costs of bureaucracy. The plans have still to be fully evaluated and the likely savings and administrative improvements determined.

Trunk Road Improvements

22. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his review of trunk road improvement projects. [17113]

Mr. Chisholm: The Strategic Review of the Trunk Road network, which I announced on 19 July this year, is a key part of our overall review of transport in Scotland, the results of which we intend to publish next year as a White Paper. The review is developing a revised framework for the appraisal of new trunk road schemes consistent with the integrated transport strategy to be set out in the White Paper.

The revised appraisal system will allow schemes to be assessed against the criteria of integration, accessibility, economy, safety and environmental impacts. Public transport solutions will be fully considered alongside new road building proposals. Scottish Office officials are currently developing the assessment criteria in parallel with colleagues from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The roads review is taking into account the full range of factors, including traffic growth, which will give rise to pressure for further major improvements over the trunk road network in Scotland.

We shall undertake public consultation early next year on the emerging findings of the review and it is expected that the outcome of the review will be announced in the Summer of 1998.

Public Expenditure

22. **Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on per capita spending levels in Scotland. [17114]

Mr. Dewar: Identifiable General Government Expenditure in Scotland was £4,614 per head in 1995–96, the last year for which complete figures are available.

Higher Education

24. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students there were in higher education in Scotland in each of the past five years; and what estimate he has made of the number for the academic year 1998–99. [17115]

Mr. Wilson: The total number of students (full-time and part-time) in Higher Education in Scotland, for the last five years available, is provided in the following table. The latest published projections for 1998–99 are also included.

Number of students in higher education by year, mode and level

Year	Full-time			Part-time		
	Total	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Total	Postgraduate	Undergraduate
1992–93	120,483	13,095	107,388	46,700	8,638	38,062
1993–94	132,509	13,848	118,661	47,220	9,918	37,302
1994–95	142,722	15,428	127,294	59,158	17,701	41,457
1995–96	145,634	16,127	129,507	69,570	21,089	48,481
1996–97[1]	148,380	14,512	133,868	60,179	18,050	42,129
Projection 1998–99[2]	163,140	14,372	148,768	60,183	18,926	41,257

[1] Figures for 1996–97 are provisional.
[2] Projections submitted to the Garrick Committee.

Regional Policy

25. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to attend an EC Council of Ministers meeting to discuss policy towards the regions. [17116]

Mr. Dewar: There is no formal Council devoted to regional policy. I plan to attend an Informal meeting of Regional Policy and Spatial Planning Ministers in Glasgow on 8–9 June as part of the UK Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers.

School Buildings

26. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new resources are being provided to improve the fabric of Scotland's schools in the current financial year. [17117]

Mr. Wilson: £8.9 million.

Secondary Education

27. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve secondary school education in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [17118]

Mr. Wilson: Education is at the heart of this Government and raising standards is the key priority. Under our initiative to raise standards in Scottish schools, each school will have clear, realistic and achievable targets for improvement. Implementation will be overseen by my Action Group on Standards in Scottish Schools, membership of which is widely drawn from within and beyond education.

In September, with the endorsement of the Action Group, we issued for consultation a strategy paper for the development of a framework of school targets in key areas with national introduction in the school year 1998–99.

The outcome of consultation will be discussed at the next meeting of the Action Group on 15 December.

In addition, full implementation of the 5–14 curriculum development programme, including national testing, in the first two years of secondary school will contribute to improvement. The programme should be in place by 1999.

Higher Still—a new system of qualifications and assessment—will also contribute to improvement. Higher Still will be introduced in Scottish secondary schools and in further education colleges in 1999. It will replace the existing system of Highers, National Certificates, GSVQs and Certificates of Sixth Year Studies with a single system covering vocational and general education and offering courses at five different levels. This will provide better continuity and progression for all students and will play an important role in raising standards. Group awards will be available to encourage coherent programmes of study and set benchmarks for overall attainment and competence in the core skills—information technology, numeracy, communication, problem solving skills and working with others.

Local Enterprise Agencies

28. **Mr Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to change the role of local enterprise agencies. [17119]

Mr. Wilson: The role of the local enterprise companies will take account of the strategies of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The local enterprise companies will also have a major role to play in the delivery of the New Deal.

Further Education

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students from Argyll and Bute *(a)* attended full-time undergraduate education at universities or equivalent bodies, *(b)* attended full-time education as mature students and *(c)* were in receipt of further education awards in the last year for which figures are available. [17599]

Mr. Wilson: Data on the number of undergraduates studying full-time in Scottish Higher Education Institutions are available only on the basis of the Old Regional Council boundaries and are therefore not available for Argyll and Bute. In 1995–96 there were 28,860 full-time undergraduate students in Scottish Higher Education Institutions from the Strathclyde Region.

The number of mature entrants studying full-time in Scottish Higher Education Institutions from Argyll and bute in 1995–96 is also not available. The number of mature entrants from the Strathclyde Region in 1995–96 was 2,491.

The number of mature entrants studying full-time in Scottish Further Education Colleges is set out in the table.

Mature [1] entrants studying full-time in Scotland

	Argyll and Bute	*Strathclyde*
Higher Education Undergraduate[2] Entrants in Further Education Colleges	45	3,920
Further Education Entrants in Further Education Colleges	61	4,298

[1] Mature entrants are aged 21 years and over.

[2] Undergraduate includes first degree and other higher education qualifications.

Around 150 students from Argyll and Bute (around 8,500 from Strathclyde) received local authority bursaries for further education courses in 1995–96.

University Students

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland starting undergraduate courses at Scottish universities for each of the last four years were given direct entry into the second year. [17844]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* Figures for the last three years are shown in the table below. Figures on a consistent basis are not available for 1993–94.

Proportion of all undergraduate entrants to Scottish Higher Education Institutions entering directly to the second year of their course

Per cent.

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*[1]1996–97*
Students from:			
England	11	8	6
Wales	14	7	7
Northern Ireland	12	11	7

[1] Figures for 1996–97 are provisional.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of degree courses at Scottish universities allow for direct entry for *(a)* A-level, *(b)* CSYS and *(c)* HNC/HND students to the second year of the course. [17845]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* This information is not held centrally. The report of the Scottish Standing Committee of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education noted that this was a matter for individual institutions, and recommended that Scottish Higher Education Institutions examine the scope for a greater proportion of students to enter directly into the second year.

Student Tuition Fees

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance will be given to students beginning courses in 1998 lasting longer than four years towards their tuition fees for the additional years. [17846]

Mr. Wilson: *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* Eligible Scottish domiciled students will not be required to pay the £1,000 tuition fee for the final year of any degree course where that course is one year longer than the comparable course offered at institutions in England and Wales.

In addition, eligible Scottish domiciled medical and dental students will be relieved of paying the £1,000 tuition fee for the fifth and subsequent years of their courses. They will thus be on equal footing with their counterparts domiciled elsewhere in the UK.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that the means test level for the payment of full tuition fees is the same in Scotland as in England. [17851]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* Yes.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to offer loans to students to cover the cost of their tuition fees; and if he will make a statement. [17852]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* On 23 July, the Government announced that new students commencing higher education from 1998–99 onwards will be liable to contribute up to £1,000 towards their tuition, and that maintenance grants and the current loan arrangements will be replaced by loans on income contingent repayment terms. Loans will not be available specifically to cover tuition fees. However, for those students who are liable to contribute toward the costs of tuition, their entitlement to loans will be increased to ensure that no student has access to less funds for maintenance under the new system than they would have had under the existing system. This arrangement is the same in Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK.

School Transport

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he has recently issued to Scottish local authorities regarding their duties to provide school transport for pupils under the Education Acts; and what plans he has to review that guidance. [17205]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* Guidance on the statutory duties and powers of local authorities on the provision of school transport was contained in The Scottish Office Education Department Circular No. 5/95, issued on 24 May 1995; The Scottish Office Development Department Circular No. 17/1996, issued on 30 April 1996 and The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department Circular No. 8/96, issued on 19 September 1996. My right hon. Friend has no plans to review that guidance.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those Scottish local authorities which currently provide a level of school transportation beyond that required in the Education Acts. [17207]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* Education authorities have a statutory duty under section 51 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to provide school transport as they consider necessary. This gives them wide discretion to take account of individual circumstances in each case. The Table below indicates the criteria used by each education authority in school session 1996–97 in determining provision of free transport or transport facilities. Information for 1997–98 school session is not yet available. In addition, all authorities provided free transport for children with special educational needs, and almost all authorities took account of medical and personal circumstances or hazardous road conditions to provide transport in individual cases.

Education authority	*Distance criteria applied*
Aberdeen City	2 miles (Primary) 3 miles (Secondary)
Aberdeenshire	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
Angus	2 miles (Primary) 3 miles (Secondary)
Argyll and Bute	Statutory walking distance
Clackmannanshire	1 mile (under 8) 2 miles (8 and over)
Dumfries and Galloway	Statutory walking distance
Dundee City	Statutory walking distance
East Ayrshire	Statutory walking distance
East Dunbartonshire	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
East Lothian	2 miles all pupils
East Renfrewshire	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
Edinburgh City	Statutory walking distance
Falkirk	1 mile (under 8) 2 miles (8 and over)
Fife	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
Glasgow City	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
Highland	Statutory walking distance
Inverclyde	Statutory walking distance
Midlothian	Statutory walking distance
Moray	2 miles all pupils
North Ayrshire	Statutory walking distance
North Lanarkshire	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
Orkney Islands	1 mile all pupils in Winter and Easter terms
Perth and Kinross	Statutory walking distance
Renfrewshire	Less than the statutory walking distance (but not specified)
Scottish Borders	2 miles (Primary) 3 miles (Secondary)
Shetland Islands	1½ miles in Winter months
South Ayrshire	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
South Lanarkshire	1 mile (Primary) 2 miles (Secondary)
Stirling	1 mile (under 8) 2 miles (8 and over)
West Dunbartonshire	Less than the statutory walking distance (but not specified)
West Lothian	2 miles (Primary) 3 miles (Secondary)
Western Isles	1 mile all pupils

The statutory walking distance is defined under section 42(4) of The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 as being two miles for pupils under eight years of age and three miles for all other pupils. The statutory walking distance is defined for the purposes of reasonable excuse, i.e., it is considered a reasonable excuse for parents not to send their children to their designated school if no arrangements are made for them under section 51 of the 1980 Act. Section 51 does not itself set any distance beyond which transport should be provided.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the non-domestic rate poundage for Scotland will be in 1998–99. [19209]

Mr. Dewar: It will be 47.4p, the same as in England.

New Deal

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow local flexibility in the implementation of the New Deal. [17107]

Mr. Wilson: There will be significant flexibility within the overall national New Deal framework which allows for local solutions and partnerships which reflect local circumstances. Flexibility is therefore a prominent feature of the process.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Licences

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licence applications are currently awaiting determination at the Department of Trade and Industry. [16142]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 14 November 1997]:* Licences to export strategic goods are issued by the President of the Board of Trade and the Export Control Organisation (ECO) of my department is the licensing authority. The ECO circulates all relevant individual licence applications to other Government Departments with an interest, as determined by them in line with their policy responsibilities. The Departments from which advice is sought include the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

ECO management data on the processing of licence applications are compiled on the basis of four-week periods. At 17 October 1997, a total of 2,184 applications were awaiting a decision; these applications comprised applications for new standard or open individual licences to export strategic goods and applications for the renewal or amendment of existing individual licences. This compares with 2,085 outstanding applications at the end of October 1996. ECO is also the licensing authority for goods whose export is only controlled because of UN trade sanctions but data on the number of applications awaiting a decision are not compiled as most decisions are subject to UN authorisation, which can take some time.

Recommended Retail Prices

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her Department's policy on the recommended retail prices for *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* books and *(c)* pharmaceutical products. [17558]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* Recommended retail prices are not contrary to competition law unless specifically proscribed. They have not been proscribed for these products.

Amsterdam Treaty

Mr. Streeter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if her Department will undertake a study of potential costs to business of proposals contained in the final text of the Treaty of Amsterdam as concerns the *(a)* competitiveness of British industry and *(b)* foreign inward investment; and if she will make a statement. [17079]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* The Amsterdam Treaty represents a very satisfactory outcome for the UK. My Department will not undertake a separate study of potential costs of the Treaty but of course any legislative proposals consequential of the adoption of the treaty will be assessed carefully in terms of costs and benefits to business.

Power Generation

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many new *(a)* gas-fired power stations and *(b)* other types of power station are awaiting licence determination at her Department; and what total capacity they represent. [18324]

Mrs. Beckett: Of the 28 applications currently before the Department;

(i) 22 relate to new gas fired stations (CCGT and CHP) totalling 8.2 GW of new capacity;

(ii) 5 relate to dual firing with gas of existing coal or oil power stations using 5.9 GW of existing capacity;

(iii) 1 relates to a windfarm.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plan she has to increase regional aid in areas affected by coal closures. [17957]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The Government recognise that communities hit by pit closures face distinctive problems. We have therefore established a Coalfield Task Force which will identify and develop a programme of action to assist coal closure areas.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tonnage of coal she estimates is displaced by a 1,200 MW gas-fired power station. [18042]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The impact of a new gas fire station will depend on its mode of operation, the competitive position of other stations and the level of demand that is required to be met. If run at baseload a 1,200 MW station might generate some 8-9 TWh of electricity per year. If it were fully to displace a coal fired station also running at baseload, as would have been the case for new plant five years ago when a substantial amount of coal fired plant ran at baseload, it would be likely to displace about 3.5 million tonnes of coal per year.

In today's market place displacement may be less than this if, as is possible, the new plant now displaces other plant rather than coal. Such impacts are complex and cannot now be more precisely assessed.

Funeral Industry

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her Answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *192*, if she will list *(a)* the possible options for consumer protection which the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs has discussed with the Director General of Fair Trading regarding pre-paid funerals and *(b)* the actions further to protect consumers which she is discussing with Treasury ministers; and if she will make a statement. [18038]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* I have discussed a number of options with the Director-General of Fair Trading, and with Treasury Ministers.

There are two possible approaches to this issue. One would be to introduce a completely new regulatory regime, for the pre-paid funerals sector. The other involves bringing pre-paid funerals under an existing regulatory regime. Whichever approach is chosen, our objectives are to ensure that there will be sufficient financial provision available so that those consumers who have purchased their funerals in advance get the funerals for which they have paid, and to address the questions of transparency in marketing practices. Consideration of the various options is continuing at official level. It would be premature to make any further statement at this stage.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* main post offices and *(b)* sub-post offices have been closed in each of the last three years in the United Kingdom. [18167]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I understand from the Post Office that closures of post offices in the United Kingdom in the last three financial years have been as follows:

	Main post offices closed	*Main post offices converted to agency status*	*Sub-post offices closed*
1994–95	—	101	115
1995–96	—	46	193
1996–97	—	47	163

The numbers of sub-post offices closed are net of new openings.

Toys (Safety)

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of *(a)* the levels of phthalates present in children's toys on sale in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the level of danger these may present to children; and if she will make a statement. [17781]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The DTI is at present carrying out research to develop procedures for testing the levels of exposure to phthalates from PVC toys in the light of criticism of current European guidance test methods, which show no evidence that Tolerable Daily Intakes (TDIs) are being exceeded. I am advised that the concentration of phthalates in children's toys is not a satisfactory indication of the exposure of children to these chemicals. This can be assessed by determining the migration of phthalates from these products. The Department of Health has advised, in the light of the most recent research conducted on phthalates, that there are unlikely to be any health risks to children from phthalates in toys and teething rings provided that exposure does not exceed the relevant TDIs for phthalates set by the EC Scientific Committee for Food. This advice takes account of all available information on the possible effects of phthalates, including recent studies concerning oestrogenic activity.

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will ban the sale of toys containing cyclobutanone. [17920]

Mr Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* I have no plans to do so. I am advised that cyclobutanone does not appear to be used to any great extent, if at all, in toy production. The essential safety requirements in the Toy (Safety) Regulations 1989 requires toy manufactures to supply toys that are safe when used as intended to be used or in a foreseeable way. Any chemical used in toys must comply with this requirement.

Minimum Wage

Jacqui Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of the minimum wage in EU countries, the USA and Japan in pounds sterling per hour, calculated in current exchange rates. [18567]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department does not systematically collect information on all countries. What information is available, is set out in the following table:

1997 local currency minimum wages in selected countries and their pounds sterling hourly equivaent converted at current exchange rates

Country	*Local currency rate*[1]	*£ equivalent at 31 October 1997 current rate*
Belgium	44,185 Belgian Francs per month	[2]4.61
France	39.43 French Francs per hour	4.02
Greece	5,746–6,321 Drachma per day	[3]1.61–1.77
Luxembourg	46,275–55,520 Luxembourg Francs per month	[2]4.33–5.79
Netherlands	2,243 Guilders per month	[2]4.29
Portugal	56,700 Escudo per month	[2]1.20
Spain	2,221 Pesetas per day	[3]1.16
USA	5.15 Dollars per hour	3.17
Japan	4,521–5,252 Yen per day	[3]2.99–3.48

[1] Local currency minimum wages as known at 28 July 1997. The definition of the minimum wage varies across countries. Also, exemptions may apply for some workers and different rates may apply for youth workers.

[2] Monthly rate converted to hourly rate assuming employees work 39 hour week for 49 weeks in the year.

[3] Daily rate converted to hourly rate assuming employees work 7¾ hours per day.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received on the potential for a national minimum wage to result in wage inflation. [18104]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have received a number of representations which referred to the possible effects of the National Minimum Wage, including the impact on wage inflation.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice she has sought and from whom on the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a regionally varied minimum wage based on the precedents established by the wages councils. [18103]

Mr. Ian McCartney: From 1986 to their abolition in 1993 each Wages Council, in fact, set a single minimum basic hourly rate, which applied to all adult workers covered. The Low Pay Commission will take into account regional concerns expressed in the evidence it receives when formulating its recommendation on a single national minimum rate.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations have been made to the Low Pay Commission calling for the introduction of a regionally varied minimum wage; and how many of these called for a regionally varied minimum wage based on precedents established by the wages councils. [18102]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Low Pay Commission is an independent body. The representations it receives are a matter for the Commission.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes she has introduced to the conditions governing part-time workers in the United Kingdom since May; and if she will make a statement. [18409]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government have accepted the Social Chapter which will mean that part time and full time workers in the UK will be able to benefit from its measures. We have undertaken to implement the Part Time Work Directive once it has been agreed by the other member states. This will prohibit less favourable treatment of part-timers and promote part-time job opportunities. It will thus contribute to the flexible organisation of work while at the same time ensuring that part-timers receive the same contractual and statutory benefits as full-timers.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by her Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18110]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In London, the lowest rate paid by the Department is £5.16 an hour. £3.84 per hour is the lowest hourly rate paid by the Department in all other English regions and Scotland. In Wales, the lowest hourly rate of pay is £3.70 in a Departmental Agency where a pay award is pending.

These rates apply to all staff at the relevant level directly employed by the Department. Staff at this level do a variety of jobs including filing and photocopying.

Rates of pay for persons employed by firms undertaking contracted out services are a matter for the companies concerned.

Plutonium

Mr. Coaker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will published the international guidelines on the management of civil plutonium. [19121]

Mr. Battle: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a document recently agreed among an informal group of nine countries, including the United Kingdom, entitled "Guidelines for the Management of Civil Plutonium". The UK has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency of its intention to adopt these guidelines.

The background to the guidelines has been a general wish by some countries to improve transparency and public confidence in the management of national holdings of civil plutonium. Agreement was reached in the informal group, comprising the United Kingdom, the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany, Japan, Belgium and Switzerland, to publish guidelines that would provide an internationally-accepted framework for the management of civil plutonium. Under the guidelines, participating countries accept a new commitment to publish occasional statements explaining their national strategies for nuclear power and the nuclear fuel cycle, and, against that background, their general plans for managing national holdings of plutonium, together with annual figures for their holdings of unirradiated plutonium and of plutonium contained in spent fuel as at the end of each calendar year.

The UK has for the past 11 years published information on its national holdings of civil plutonium annually as at 31 March. In keeping with the guidelines, the UK will in future be publishing such information annually as at 31 December, as this will facilitate international comparisons on a consistent basis.

I have also today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the first set of figures for the UK under the new format showing national holdings as at 31 December 1996. Figures for our holdings as at 31 December 1997 will be published in June 1998.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are taken to ensure that money intended for training which is routed through TECs is used for the correct purposes. [16529]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The primary responsibility for ensuring that public money is properly protected rests with TECs. The Permanent Secretary wrote on 23 October to all TEC Chairs to emphasise the importance of good financial controls between TECs and their training providers. Additionally the newly established Training Inspectorate will assess the quality of training provision right at the point of delivery.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Information

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the library a copy of the internal departmental guidance on the dissemination of information; and if he will make a statement. [16294]

Mr. Kilfoyle: A revised version of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information was published by the Office of Public Service in January 1997.

I have made arrangements for copies of internal departmental guidance issued in February 1997 to the members of staff within the Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service to be placed in the libraries of the House.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the role of Sir Cameron Mackintosh in the Millennium Experience exhibition, indicating his remuneration. [16766]

Mr. Mandelson: Sir Cameron Mackintosh agreed, in June 1997, to advise the New Millennium Experience Company in respect of the arena show. He agreed to do this without remuneration.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will ensure that no *(a)* members of the Board and *(b)* other employees of the New Millennium Experience Company benefit financially from contracts made by the company. [16765]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company is incorporated under the Companies Act and its Board members are subject to the duties of directors under company law. Additionally, all Chairman and Members of the Boards of non-departmental public bodies, a status applying to the NMEC, are required to comply with the requirements of the "Code of Best Practice for Board Members of Public Bodies" which was published following the 1992 Cadbury Report.

The NMEC Board operates under statutory requirements and best practice in respect of all its business, including contract decisions. I am confident that the individuals involved and the systems in place ensure that there is no room for personal financial benefit from the award of contracts.

As regards employees, the NMEC's Employee Handbook is an extension of terms and conditions of employment and precludes any financial gain of this kind. Contravention of these provisions would represent gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if the Advisory Committee on Advertising was consulted over the appointment of M and C Saatchi in respect of the Millennium Experience. [16764]

Mr. Mandelson: No.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio how long advertising agencies were given to tender for the New Millennium Experience Company contract; and what factors governed the length of the consultation period. [16763]

Mr. Mandelson: There were 43 calendar days between the date of the advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* and the submission of bids. Interested companies were given 10 days within which to submit a request to pre-qualify. This request had only to contain standard corporate information—company profile, management structure and responsibilities, CVs for lead personnel and other staff, case histories of three projects of similar or analogous nature, scope of services, turnover and billings for the previous three years and the forecast for 1997, and experience of previous work for Government and other public sector bodies.

Following six days of consideration of the requests to pre-qualify, NMEC shortlisted those companies it considered should be invited to tender (ITT) and invitations were issued. The shortlisted companies were required to respond to the ITT with bids within 27 days.

These procedures were pursued in accordance with domestic and European regulations governing open competitive tendering. Under European procurement rules accelerated procedures can be undertaken. With the agreement of Treasury Solicitor the NMEC adopted accelerated procedures for the communications contract because of the urgency arising from need to prepare for the launch of the Millennium Experience's National Programme.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio when the New Millennium Experience Company appointed M and C Saatchi to conduct its advertising. [16762]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company announced the appointment of M and C Saatchi on 22 August to develop and implement an integrated communications campaign including advertising, having received approval from the Millennium Commission on 21 August.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what is the role of *(a)* Mr. Bill Muirhead and *(b)* Mr. Jeremy Sinclair in the New Millennium Experience Company; what is their remuneration; when each was appointed; and what role they played in the appointment of M and C Saatchi as the advertising agency for the company. [16761]

Mr. Mandelson: Neither Bill Muirhead nor Jeremy Sinclair has a role in the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC). They currently receive not remuneration from NMEC nor have they received any in the past. Mr. Muirhead and Mr. Sinclair assisted the Company (then called Millennium Central Ltd.) on a part-time basis as acting, unpaid communications advisers until June 1997 when they stood down from the role. Neither took any part in the competitive tendering process—from drawing up and preparing the brief, to selecting a communications advertising agency.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister without Portfolio when the Millennium Dome is scheduled for completion; and when the Millennium Experience will be fully operational. [16971]

Mr. Mandelson: The construction of the Millennium Dome is scheduled for completion in September 1998. The Experience will open on 31 December 1999.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what compensation has been paid to the original contractor for the supply of the covering of the Millennium Dome. [17525]

Mr. Mandelson: None. Negotiations between the New Millennium Company and the contractor under the terms of the original contract are continuing.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what contingency plans he has made in respect of the Millennium Experience for the possibility that the Jubilee Line might not be fully operational by January 2000. [17590]

Mr. Mandelson: London Underground Ltd. have assured me that the Jubilee Line Extension will be able to cope with the number of visitors anticipated by the New Millennium Experience and that it will be open in good time to do so.

TREASURY

Tax and National Insurance Revenue

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the average tax and national insurance revenue generated each year by *(a)* a full-time job and *(b)* a part-time job. [16895]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 November 1997]:* In 1995–96, the latest financial year for which final receipts are available, the total revenue for income tax was £68,049 million and the total number of income tax payers was 25.8 million, giving an average income tax contribution of £2,640 per annum. The total revenue from national insurance contributions in 1994–95, the latest year for which the number of people paying contributions is available, was £37,863 million and the total number of people who paid contributions was 24.2 million, giving an average national insurance contribution of £1,565. It is not recorded whether these contributions were for full or part-time work.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *620–21*, what would be the effect on the number of people of working age who face combined marginal rates of withdrawal of tax, national insurance contributions and means-tested benefits of *(a)* under 50 per cent., *(b)* 50 to 59 per cent., *(c)* 60 to 69 per cent., *(d)* 70 to 79 per cent., *(e)* 80 to 89 per cent. and *(f)* 90 per cent. or above of introducing a 10 pence starting rate of income tax on (i) the first £1,000, (ii) the first £1,500 and (iii) the first £2,000 of taxable income if no other changes were made to the tax and benefit system. [16900]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 November 1997]:* As the Chancellor has made clear, the Government are determined that the working poor should benefit from any move to a 10p income tax rate. They are therefore considering what action is necessary on tapers and other features of the benefit system to ensure that a lower starting rate of income tax benefits all the low-paid.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if tax payers on the basic or higher rates of tax will benefit fully from the reduction in tax to be paid upon the introduction of a 10p starting rate of tax. [18412]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* When the Chancellor introduces a 10p rate of tax, anyone whose starting rate of tax becomes 10p will benefit from its introduction.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the regulatory authorities responsible for the licensing and operation of banks and credit institutions in the even of UK entry to EMU. [17523]

Mrs. Liddell: The regulatory authorities responsible for authorising banks and other credit institutions would not change in the event of the UK joining the single currency.

Harmful Tax Competition

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *235*, what his policy on the use of the veto on the EU Commission's proposals on "A Package to Tackle Harmful Tax Competition" (COM (97) 564). [17584]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* Direct taxation is primarily a matter for Member States at national level. Proposals for action at the Community level, including those in the Commission's Communication on harmful Tax Competition (COM (97) 564) are considered on their own merits, but must respect the principles of subsidiarity and unanimity.

Labour Market Statistics

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what conclusions the Office for National Statistics has reached on the presentation of labour market statistics. [18027]

Mrs. Liddell: The information falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Jackie Ballard, dated December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question on the presentation of labour market statistics.

In the summer, ONS launched a wide-ranging public consultation about the future of labour market statistics. The results of the consultation were published in October's edition of the ONS publication *Labour Market Trends*, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

As the Director of ONS I am responsible for deciding the form, coverage and timing of release of ONS statistics. I expect to make an announcement about ONS proposals for labour market statistics early in the New Year.

Pension Funds

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the use of interest on European Community pension funds to finance Community activities. [18490]

Mrs. Liddell: None. The pension scheme for staff of the Community Institutions is unfunded, so there is no accumulated fund earning interest. Payments are charged against the Community Budget, and contributions are treated as revenue, as they occur.

Unemployment

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the 20 per cent. of working age households who are not working into households made up of *(a)* students and trainees, *(b)* disabled people, *(c)* couples where one person is a pensioner, *(d)* single parents and *(e)* others. [18513]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Hill to Mr. David Willetts, dated 2 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question asking for a breakdown of workless households into various categories including disabled people.

Regrettably, I am unable to reply immediately because the data concerning disabled people are not yet available.

The focus and number of questions in the health and disability module of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) questionnaire changed in spring 1997 to reflect the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. As with any significant change in a part of the survey, the results needed to be evaluated before the data could be released. This review is now complete and the data will be publicly available from 17 December.

The new module has introduced a sizeable discontinuity which makes comparisons with earlier periods unsuitable. This is why it would not be appropriate to answer the question with data from the previous quarter (Winter 1996–97).

I will write to you again after these data are publicly released.

Funeral Industry

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of permanent jobs in the United Kingdom that are *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly related to the funeral industry. [18294]

Mrs Liddell *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 2 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on direct and indirect employment in the funeral industry.

Information from the Annual Employment Survey show there were 15,200 employees in funeral and related activities in Great Britain at September 1996.

No information is available identifying the number of these jobs which are permanent, nor other jobs indirectly related to the funeral industry.

Low Pay

Mr. Pond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for April 1997 the number and proportion of manual, non-manual and all full-time employees on adult rates earning less than *(a)* £174.85, *(b)* £233.13 and *(c)* £249.97 per week excluding overtime for (i) men, (ii) women and (iii) both sexes for (1) each county and unitary authority in England, (2) each unitary authority in Wales, (3) each London borough, (4) each unitary authority in Scotland, (5) Great Britain as a whole, (6) England as a whole and (7) each Government office region. [18277]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Pond, dated 2 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on earnings.

The available information, from the New Earnings Survey April 1997, is given in the attached tables. These tables are voluminous and copies of them are being placed in the Library of the House rather than reproduced in *Hansard.*

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18109]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury has no offices outside central London. The lowest hourly rates paid to full-time, part-time and short-term appointment employees are as follows:

	Lowest hourly rates in £s
Full-time employees	5.47
Part-time employees	5.95
Short-term appointments[1]	4.34

[1] Staff on fixed-term appointments and casual staff who are appointed on short-term contracts for periods of up to 12 months.

The rates above are paid to a small number of staff most of whom are engaged on clerical and administrative support work.

The hourly rates for staff employed by firms undertaking contracted out services for the department are a matter for the companies concerned.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in each of the regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices are paid an hourly rate of *(a)* less than £1.50, *(b)* between £1.50 and £2, *(c)* between £2 and £2.50, *(d)* between £2.50 and £3 and *(e)* between £3 and £3.50. [18105]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 2 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question on earnings.

The available information, from the New Earnings Survey April 1997, is given in the attached table.

Percentage of people with an hourly rate (excluding overtime)

Government Office Region	*Less than £1.50*	*Between £1.50 and £2*	*Between £2 and £2.50*	*Between £2.50 and £3*	*Between £3 and £3.50*
North East Region	0.2	0.3	0.7	1.3	5.9
North West Region	0.2	0.3	0.5	1.1	4.6
Merseyside Region	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.7	4.5
Yorkshire and The Humber Region	0.3	0.4	0.5	1.3	5.2
East Midlands Region	0.2	0.3	0.3	1.5	4.4
West Midlands Region	0.3	0.4	0.6	1.4	4.3
South West Region	0.4	0.3	0.4	1.3	4.4
Eastern Region	0.3	0.3	0.5	1.1	3.3
London	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.5	1.4
South East Region	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.8	2.8
Wales	0.3	0.3	0.5	1.3	5.1
Scotland	0.3	0.5	0.5	1.1	4.3

Notes:
Wage ranges per hour are constructed thus: between £1.50 and £2 means equal to, or greater than £1.50 but less than £2 per hour and so on throughout the distribution.
All employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence.
Source:
New Earnings Survey, April 1997 (GB).

Exchange Rate

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the benefits of linking sterling to the US dollar. [18840]

Mrs. Liddell: No.

DEFENCE

Espionage

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish an inquiry into the role of officials in advising Ministers about the use of Hull trawlers for espionage and counter-espionage. [16688]

Dr. Reid: I do not believe this is necessary.

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the use of trawlers for espionage and counter-espionage in the late 1960s and 1970s. [16690]

Dr. Reid: A very limited number of trawlers assisted the Government in specific intelligence gathering in the 1960s and early 1970s.

At the time there was also a scheme whereby Royal Navy officers gained sea going experience in merchant ships, including deep sea trawlers. All RN personnel were encouraged to report back any opportunity sightings of interest, as indeed were the trawlermen themselves.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many procedures resulting in the deaths of animals carried out *(a)* at Porton Down and *(b)* elsewhere in the last five years were undertaken on behalf of (i) other countries and (ii) other EU countries; [17618]

(2) how many procedures on animals carried out at *(a)* Porton Down and *(b)* elsewhere, have resulted in the deaths of (i) rodents, (ii) pigs and (iii) monkeys and apes in each of the last five years; and what estimate he has made of these figures for each of the next five years; [17617]

(3) what is his estimate of the numbers of procedures on animals carried out at *(a)* Porton Down and *(b)* elsewhere, that will result in the deaths of animals in each of the next 10 years. [17619]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 2 December 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your three recent questions requesting information on the numbers of procedures on animals carried out at Porton Down and elsewhere which result in the death of the animals. I am answering all three questions in this letter.

You asked how many procedures resulting in the death of animals are likely to take place in the next ten years. It is not possible to predict the number of such procedures as the size of the programme is based on MOD's research requirements which are reassessed on a yearly basis. However, as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which carries out most of this work, I can predict that procedures on animals may well increase in the short term as DERA scientists at Porton Down are involved in a continuing programme to develop more effective protection against biological weapons.

You also requested the numbers of procedures which have resulted in the deaths of rodents, pigs and monkeys for the past five years. The number of procedures involving these species carried out by DERA at Porton Down, which undertakes most of this work for the MOD, during each of the last five years are listed in the table below.

Year	*Rodents*	*Pigs*	*Monkeys*
1992	3,791	132	72
1993	5,976	109	36
1994	6,844	102	17
1995	8,112	48	17
1996	10,129	48	14

Information on the number of procedures resulting in the deaths of such animals as a result of research conducted elsewhere is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

It is not possible to predict the numbers of deaths for the next five years for the reason given above.

All animals are disposed of humanely using an approved method under Schedule 1 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 at the end of procedures in accordance with the specific Home Office licences.

Your third question asked about procedures on animals undertaken on behalf of other countries, including EU countries during the last five years. DERA has not undertaken any research projects on behalf of other countries in the last five years which have involved the use of animals.

DERA does, however, take part in collaborative research programmes which involve a sharing of data from experiments.. This can prevent the duplication of experiments and may well help reduce the numbers of animals used in defence research.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animals were used in experiments carried out at Porton Down in each year since 1967 *(a)* in total, *(b)* by species and *(c)* by category of experiments. [17919]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 2 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which has responsibility for the Chemical and Biological Defence (CBD) Sector at Porton Down, I have been asked to respond to your question about animal experiments.

CBD Sector has attempted to locate all of the information which you have requested. However, during the period from 1967 to 1980, records on the numbers and species of animals used for experimental work were returned to the Home Office by the individual Home Office project licence holders, and were not collated centrally. The information for this period could, therefore, only be provided at disproportionate cost. We can, however, provide data on the numbers and species of animals involved in experiments from 1980 to 1996, shown in the table below.

Year	*Dog*	*Guinea Pig*	*Hamster*	*Horse*	*Mouse*	*Pig*	*Rabbit*	*Rat*	*Goat*	*Sheep*	*Cattle*	*Chick*	*Non-human primate*	*Other*	*Total*
1980	49	8,012	0	0	5,318	74	469	3,619	0	28	0	0	199	3	17,771
1981	90	7,078	0	0	7,916	90	207	1,670	0	20	0	0	137	15	17,223
1982	193	7,718	0	0	3,783	71	204	1,107	0	28	0	0	145	181	13,430
1983	167	6,488	0	0	952	75	135	1,249	0	71	0	0	186	148	9,471
1984	99	4,833	0	0	2,530	93	172	2,529	0	100	0	0	277	274	10,907
1985	57	2,007	0	0	2,098	55	186	1,760	0	105	0	0	269	40	6,577
1986	31	598	0	0	1,461	40	282	3,690	0	47	0	0	249	0	6,398
1987	8	393	0	7	1,719	25	239	5,602	0	186	0	0	117	11	8,307
1988	0	1,024	0	1	962	11	194	5,681	0	87	1	0	164	6	8,131
1989	4	804	0	0	1,570	54	151	6,275	0	92	1	0	64	2	9,017
1990	0	670	0	50	2,070	86	126	4,827	70	113	0	1	80	0	8,093
1991	0	306	0	46	1,148	102	133	4,190	0	120	1	2	31	0	6,079
1992	0	231	0	44	1,319	132	132	2,472	0	105	0	1	72	0	4,506
1993	0	354	0	16	3,069	109	136	2,907	0	70	0	0	36	0	6,697
1994	0	364	0	0	4,946	102	16	1,898	0	73	0	0	17	0	7,416
1995	0	495	0	0	6,706	48	39	1,406	0	36	0	0	17	0	8,747
1996	0	792	42	0	7,701	48	19	2,428	0	53	0	0	14	0	11,097

[1] Includes animals not normally returned as species, e.g. ferrets and gerbils.

Note:

Numbers of procedures carried out on animals from 1980 to 1996, by species and year, as returned to the Home Office by CBD Sector.

The current legislative requirements governing the use of animals in scientific experiments, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, came into effect in 1986. Prior to this date all non-human primates were returned to the Home Office as "monkeys". Therefore, for the period 1986–96, we have incorporated the figures for Rhesus monkeys and marmosets into "non-human primates" for comparative purposes.

As far as the categories of experiments are concerned, it is the auspices of this Act that the categories are defined on individual project licences; prior to 1986 they were classified in a different manner. The Home Office does not require the numbers of procedures returned annually to be related to the categories stated on individual project licences. We do not, therefore, have these figures readily available and this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

I hope that the information we have been able to provide is helpful.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors underlie the increase in the numbers of animal experiments carried out at Porton Down between 1992 to 1997; and if he will make it his policy to review the range of experiments undertaken with a view to reducing their number [17921]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *500*.

Soviet Navy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when trawlers were last used by his Department to track and monitor the former Soviet Navy. [18530]

Dr. Reid: The use by the Ministry of Defence of a very limited number of fishing trawlers for specific intelligence gathering operations against the former Soviet Navy ceased in 1973.

Territorial Army

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are serving in the Territorial Army. [18168]

Dr Reid: As at 1 October 1997 *(a)* 45,867 men and *(b)* 8,386 women were serving in the TA. The figures exclude 1,394 male and 11 female Non-Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS).

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army officers there were in each of the last five years; what is the projected number for 1998; and if he will make a statement. [18364]

Dr. Reid: The number, or strength, of Territorial Army (TA) officers, as at 1 April in each of the last five years was as follows:

1993: 7,272

1994: 6,903

1995: 6,459

1996: 6,173

1997: 6,131.

The officer establishment of TA officers planned for 1 April 1998 is 6,825, but the actual strength on that date will depend largely on recruitment and retention factors.

The Department is currently reviewing the future size and shape of the Regular and Reserve Forces as part of the on-going Strategic Defence Review.

Armed Forces (Women)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many women are serving in each of the United Kingdom armed forces. [18578]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the monthly "Tri-Service Personnel Statistics", the most recent edition of which was published on 27 November 1997, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Fast Jets (Servicing)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that fast jets are serviced according to the highest standards [18531]

Dr. Reid: The RAF continually reviews its quality control and contracting processes to ensure that all of its aircraft are serviced in ways which meet the exacting quality standards which are required.

Agencies (Civilian Employees)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian employees there are within the *(a)* defence agencies and *(b)* defence executive agencies; and what is the projected number of civilian employees over the next three years. [18528]

Mr. Spellar: All defence agencies are Next Steps agencies and no distinction is now made between defence agencies and what were one defence executive agencies. At 1 October 1997 some 61,400 permanent and 1,400 casual full-time equivalent civilian personnel worked in defence agencies. This represented 58 per cent. of permanent and 52 per cent. of casual Ministry of Defence civilian personnel at that date. While it is anticipated that there will be a small reduction of about 5 per cent. in the overall number of civilian personnel employed by the Ministry over the next three years (including Defence agencies), no separate estimates are available for defence agencies.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time establishment of the Royal Irish Regiment broken down by battalion; and by how much each battalion is under establishment. [18488]

Dr. Reid: The establishment of the 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment is 611, comprising General Service soldiers only. At 31 October it was 136 under establishment.

The information requested with regard to the six Home Service Battalions is set out in the table.

	R Irish (HS FT)			*R Irish (HS PT)*		
Battalion	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Under-manning*	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Under-manning*
3 R Irish	676	555	121	563	472	91
4 R Irish	631	516	115	510	427	83
5 R Irish	419	367	52	326	221	105
7 R Irish	469	414	55	402	329	73
8 R Irish	407	365	42	320	291	29
9 R Irish	466	413	53	315	239	76
Total	3,068	2,630	438	2,436	1,979	457

Figures as at 31 October 1997.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia. [18394]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) yesterday, *Official Report*, column 6.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18117]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested in respect of civilian staff is given in the following table. Most staff employed by MOD are paid either London or national rates of pay. The table therefore gives two figures for each of *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*. We do not hold information about the pay of staff employed by companies undertaking contracts for the department.

	London (£)	National (£)
(a) Full time[1]	4.03	3.36
(b) Part time[2]	4.59	3.82
(c) Personal contract	[3]—	[3]—

[1] The figures quoted relate to administrative assistants. In London, these are paid a minimum of £8,593 a year (including £736 recruitment and retention allowance) working 41 hours gross; and £7,344 in the national area working 42 hours a week gross.

[2] Annual pay rates used for calculating part-time pay are the same as for full-time staff, but hourly rates are then calculated on net 36 (London) and 37 (national) hours a week as part-timers have no paid lunch break.

[3] "Personal contract" is taken here to mean staff on standard fixed term appointments. The minimum pay rates for such staff are the same as for full-time or part-time staff.

In the case of the Armed Forces, pay is based on recommendations made by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) and published annually. The 1997 Report (Cmnd 3537) is available in the Library of the House. There is no regional variation in the basic pay of the Armed Forces, whose pay is based on daily, not hourly rates.

General Pinochet

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings representatives of his Department have had with General Pinochet concerning sales of defence equipment to Chile in the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [17837]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 26 November 1997]:* Since 1 May 1997, no representatives of my Department have had meetings with General Pinochet concerning the sale of defence equipment to Chile. I am advised, however, that in December 1996 the then Secretary of State for Defence met General Pinochet during his official visit to Chile.

HEALTH

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public appointments he has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16775]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has made 435 public appointments since 1 May 1997. Of these, 85 per cent. are remunerated. The information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all departments in an aggregated form in his reply to my hon. Friend on 28 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *669*.

Kidderminster Hospital

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the catchment area is of Kidderminster hospital; and how many people are within it. [17181]

Mr. Milburn: The catchment area of Kidderminster hospital and how many people are within it as reported by the hospital are as follows:

	Population served (approximately)
Worcestershire	106,000
Shropshire	12,000
Other:	
South Staffordshire, Dudley, Hereford	6,000
Total	123,000

Note:
Figures do not sum due to rounding.
Source:
Kidderminster General Hospital.

Pathology Services (Kent)

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust to achieve Good Laboratory Practice accreditation in respect of pathology services. [17788]

Mr. Boateng: We understand from the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals National Health Service Trust that the departments of Haematology and Blood Transfusion, Clinical Biochemistry, Microbiology and Haemophilia applied for Clinical Pathology Accreditation in February 1997. Provisional approval was granted and a formal inspection is scheduled for January 1998. The Trust is also striving towards the attainment of the Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) standard.

Clinical laboratories generally seek accreditation by Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Limited (CPA) rather than GLP accreditation. The former was developed specifically for clinical laboratories, whereas the latter is much more relevant to laboratories involved in clinical trials work.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust to address the recommendations of the 1995 report Review of Pathology Services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust. [17787]

Mr. Boateng: We understand from Kent and Canterbury Hospitals National Health Service Trust that the report highlighted a number of specific departmental issues to be addressed:

Of the 17 general issues, 12 have been fully implemented, five partially implemented.

Of the seven Haematology issues, four have been fully implemented and three partially implemented.

Of the five Chemistry issues, two have been fully implemented and three not implemented (these require further dialogue with neighbouring Trusts).

Of the six Microbiology issues two have been fully implemented and four not implemented (these require further dialogue with neighbouring Trusts).

Of the seven Histology issues, two have been fully implemented, four partially implemented and one not implemented (this requires further work by SKHT).

The overall recommendations (options) were as follows:

1. The options of doing nothing or of sending the work out to an external agency were rejected by the trust as being impractical and not in the best interests of the trust.

This was accepted by the trust.

2. Although refurbishment of the current Pathology facility would be possible we believe that this exercise would only lead to a moderate and intermediate term improvement in Pathology services, at relatively high cost. It is also clear that it would not be possible to perform all those Pathology functions that ought to be carried out on site in the refurbished structure.

This was not implemented by the trust, as refurbishment was not a cost effective long term solution.

3. The most appropriate way of improving Pathology services is to plan and construct a new Pathology facility on site. This ensures the provision of an essential service and this development would have the potential of attracting technical and medical staff of the highest calibre. There would also be significant opportunities in marketing Pathology services externally as the development, once established, would be exceptionally competitive.

This was not implemented by the trust, for reasons outlined under 2, and demonstrated ability to recruit staff at high calibre.

4. A new development would incorporate the latest technologies in term of automated equipment and robotics, which would significantly reduce day to day costs. This would also enable a full assessment of staff functions and skill mix to be performed.

This was not implemented by the trust, for reasons outlined under 2 and 3.

The refurbishment was completed in April 1997. Refurbishment addressed outstanding Health and Safety issues and enabled the Pathology laboratories to apply for Clinical Pathology Accreditation (CPA). CPA was then considered desirable by the local purchaser and became a requirement from April 1998.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been published by the Pathology Services of the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust, other than the Haemophilia Centre, since 1995. [17790]

Mr. Boateng: We understand from Kent and Canterbury Hospitals National Health Service Trust that Medical and Scientific staff employed by the Trust Pathology Directorate have published in a variety of national and international journals since 1995.

In addition, presentations at national meetings by staff employed within the Pathology Directorate have been published in abstract form. My hon. Friend is advised to contact the Kent Postgraduate Centre at Canterbury for a complete list of current and forthcoming publications.

A full list of the recent publications will also be available in the Trust's Research and Development Annual Report, 1997.

London Strategic Review

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what period for consultation there will be between the publication of the report by the independent advisory panel of the London Strategic Review, and the publication of the Government's response to this report. [17737]

Mr. Milburn: We will be announcing details of the publication in due course.

Worthing and Southlands NHS Trust

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will name the non-executives serving the Worthing and Southlands National Health Service Trust in September and November, listing their occupations; when he intends to announce re-appointments or appointments; and for what reasons he did not make his decisions earlier. [18119]

Mr. Milburn: The non-executive members of the board in September were as follows:

Member	*Occupation*
Mr. Geoffrey Withrington (Chair)	Managing Director
Miss Thrine Hely	Project Manager and Business Consultant
Mr. Graham Hill	Former Policeman
Ms Barbara Myers	Media Specialist
Mr. Paul Savage	Retired Chartered Accountant
Professor Michael Whiting	Consultant Chiropodist and University Dean

The terms of office of Mr. Hely, Ms Myers, Mr. Savage and Professor Whiting came to an end on 31 October. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State subsequently wrote on 25 November inviting four candidates to serve on the board for terms of three and four years. All four have now accepted the invitations to serve, as a result of which the new board is as follows:

Member	*Occupation*
Mr. Geoffrey Withrington (Chair)	Managing Director
Mr. Graham Hill	Former Policeman
Mr. Paul Savage	Retired Chartered Accountant
Mrs. Lindy Stannard	Teacher
Mrs. Nicola Thompson	Financial Services Officer
Professor Michael Whiting	Consultant Chiropodist and University Dean

As a consequence of our commitment to introduce new criteria for appointments and to widen the pool of candidates, some appointments have unfortunately been delayed. We recognise the importance of giving serving and newly appointed board members advance notice of appointments and we expect to be able to achieve this in future appointment rounds.

Anaesthetists

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes are proposed in the regulations governing entry to the Specialist Register for Anaesthetists to conform with the European Specialist Medical Qualifications Order 1995; and if he will make a statement. [17951]

Mr. Milburn: Entry to the Specialists Register is governed by the European Specialist Medical Qualifications Order 1995. There are no specific or separate arrangements for Anaesthetists.

The Government are considering amendments to the Order to introduce greater flexibility in the transitional provisions for assessing doctors for entry to the Specialist Register. The proposed amendments to the Order would apply to all medical specialities.

Leukaemia

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government plan in response to the report from the Independent Advisory Committee on the Medical Aspects of Radiation concerning the incidence of leukaemia among children whose fathers have been exposed to radiation at work. [17891]

Ms Jowell: The study to consider any possible effects on the health of the offspring of parents occupationally exposed to radiation was funded by the Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive in response to recommendations from the Government's independent advisory Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). The findings of the study were referred to COMARE and their statement has been placed in the Library. COMARE agree with the authors that there is no evidence of a link between radiation dose in parents prior to conception and the incidence of leukaemia or non-Hodgkin Lymphoma in their children. COMARE will reserve further comment until the results of a further study, which is investigating the health of all the children born to workers in a large part of the nuclear industry, is completed. The study is expected to be published early next year.

The Government are committed to investigating the causes of leukaemia and will continue the programme of radiation protection research and seek guidance from COMARE about the direction of any additional future research. They will also continue to require employers to keep radiation exposures as low as reasonably practicable.

North and East Devon Health Authority

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve patient care in *(a)* North and East Devon Health Authority and *(b)* Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust. [18219]

Mr. Milburn: It is the responsibility of North and East Devon Health Authority and local National Health Service trusts, including Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust, to work together to ensure that the residents of the health authority receive the best possible patient care. Improving the overall quality of patient care will be an underpinning theme of our plans for replacing the internal market, which we shall be publishing shortly.

New Drugs

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he proposes to improve scrutiny of new drugs before their clearance for routine use in the NHS; over what timescale; and if he will make a statement. [18486]

Mr. Milburn: We are currently considering these issues.

NHS Charter

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards developing a new NHS charter. [18484]

Mr. Milburn: We announced on 8 October that Greg Dyke, chairman and chief executive of Pearson Television would lead the work to develop a new National Health Service Charter. Mr. Dyke met with his team of advisers, drawn from health professions, patient representative and user groups, trade unions, the NHS and other organisations on 10 November. The King's Fund has also been commissioned to undertake some evaluation work on the current Patient's Charter. The plan is to publish a draft Charter next summer.

Breast Cancer Treatment

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional funding is being provided for (i) breast specialist units, (ii) oncologists and (iii) breast care nurses in the NHS. [18521]

Mr. Boateng: Ten million pounds of additional money is being used specifically on breast services. The extra funding is supporting over 300 initiatives around the country to improve the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. Particular emphasis has been given to supporting projects that give rapid access to diagnostic services through the provision of "one stop" clinics, speeding access to treatment by reducing waiting times and the provision of high quality care delivered in line with published guidance by specialist multi-professional, multi-disciplinary teams.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18114]

Ms Jowell: Department of Health staff are paid within national paybands. The minimum of the lowest payband is £8,000 per annum. This represents an hourly rate of £3.74 in London, where staff work 41 hours a week and £3.65 elsewhere, where staff work 42 hours. The figures for part-time staff are £4.26 and £4.14. The Department holds no record of salaries paid to persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out work, nor is anyone employed under a personal contract.

Terminally Ill Patients

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the average number of terminally ill patients in the United Kingdom; [18676]

(2) what is the average monthly total of patient deaths in hospices; [18678]

(3) how many hospice beds for terminally ill patients are available in the United Kingdom; [18677]

(4) what is the average monthly total of deaths of patients on palliative care. [18679]

Mr. Boateng: The National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services defines as terminally ill those people

"with active and progressive disease for which curative treatment is not possible or not appropriate and from which death can reasonably be expected within twelve months".

"Ordinary and day case admissions for England" and "Outpatients and ward attenders for England" contain data on Finished Consultant Episodes and Outpatient Attendances under the main specialty function of Palliative medicine. Copies are available in the Library. These data do not include all terminally ill patients as some of these patients may be receiving treatment in a variety of settings, including the voluntary sector, and information is not collected centrally on the number of patients who are terminally ill at any one time.

There are about 60,000 admissions to hospices and palliative care units in the United Kingdom every year. There are approximately 29,000 deaths in hospice and palliative care units (both voluntary sector and NHS), giving an approximate monthly figure of 2,500 deaths. (Data provided by the Hospice Information Service). Whilst it is possible to give figures for the number of in-patient deaths in the NHS under the care of a palliative care specialist, many other patients who die under the care of the NHS will have received some palliative care. The palliative care approach should inform the care of all NHS patients. The following table shows the number of deaths for patients receiving treatment from a consultant in palliative medicine in the NHS.

Main specialty—Palliative medicine: Estimated number of episodes ending in death (discharge method = 4) by month of admission, NHS hospitals, England

	1994–95	*1995–96*[1]
April	212	241
May	219	279
June	226	259
July	161	247
August	205	279
September	228	279
October	188	273
November	212	275
December	237	298
January	256	303
February	196	268
March	218	273
Total	2,559	3,274

Notes:
[1] These figures are provisional.
Data in this table are grossed for coverage.
Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

According to information from the Hospice Information Service there were 3,134 hospice and palliative care beds (both NHS and voluntary sector) in the United Kingdom in January 1997, of these 595 were in NHS managed units.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average NHS waiting time for a wheelchair; how many applications for wheelchairs have been made for each NHS trust in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [18304]

Mr. Boateng: Information on applications or waiting times for wheelchairs is not collected centrally. Information on the number of wheelchairs issued by individual health authority Wheelchair Services is available in *"Wheelchairs and artificial limbs—England"*, copies of which are available in the Library.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what money is allocated in the Standard Spending Assessment for personal social services for 1998–99. [18866]

Mr. Dobson: £7,814.651 million will be distributed by Personal Social Services Standard Spending Assessments in 1998–99, compared with £7,392.117 million in 1997–98. Total Standard Spending on Social Services (including specific and special grants) will be £8,292.969 million in 1998–99, compared with £7,846.030 million in 1997–98 plans; an increase of 5.7 per cent.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific and special grants and what capital resources he is making available to local authorities for personal social services in 1998–99. [18867]

Mr. Dobson: The information is as follows:

	£ million
Specific grants will be available in 1998–99 for:	
AIDS and HIV services	13.7
Services for alcohol and drugs misusers	2.5
Mental illness services	73.3
Social services training	35.5
A special grant will be available in 1998–99 for:	
Community care services	350
Services for unaccompanied asylum seeking children	3

The capital grant for secure accommodation for young people will be £8.2 million in 1998–99.

Annual capital guidelines of £45 million will be notified to local authorities. Supplementary credit approvals will again be available for mental illness services (£11.6 million) and AIDS/HIV services (£3.1 million).

Special Transitional Grant

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the special transitional grant in 1998–99. [18868]

Mr. Dobson: There will be a Special Transitional Grant of £350 million in 1998–99 for community care services. Unlike previous years, councils will not be required to spend 85 per cent. of the grant in the independent sector. It will, however, have a condition requiring local authorities to work closely with the National Health Service and to spend a part of the money on preventing people being unnecessarily in hospital, or being unnecessarily in residential or nursing home care following discharge from hospital.

Departmental Report

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will update table 2.1 of his departmental report. [18626]

Mr. Milburn: Table 2.1 will be updated in the next Department of Health Departmental Report. Such information as is currently available will be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Independent Tribunal Service (Wales)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current waiting period for a hearing with the independent tribunal service in Wales; what plans she has to reduce waiting times; and if she will make a statement. [13765]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Appeals to Social Security Tribunals in Wales which were cleared in the first quarter of this year took on average 28.7 weeks to clear in the first quarter of this year took an average 28.7 weeks to clear. The comparable figure for Great Britain is 29.9 weeks.

We are determined to reduce the current delays and complexity in the appeals system. On 9 July we introduced the Social Security Bill, which paves the way for the creation of an active modern Social Security system. The Bill includes several measures which will enable us to provide a quicker, simpler and more efficient appeals service for customers.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take personal responsibility for the administration of the appeals system, set and publish demanding targets to shorten the time it takes for appeals to be heard and report on the results.

Supported Housing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to her answer of 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *456*, what assessment she has made of partial capacity benefit as a means of assisting disabled people to gain employment; [16359]

(2) pursuant to her oral Answer to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) of 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 2–3, what assessment her Department has made of the role which a partial capacity benefit could play in the New Deal for disabled people. [17540]

Mr. Denham: The Government's view is that work is the best form of welfare. Many people with disabilities or long-term health problems want to do some work and the aim of the Welfare to Work programme for sick and disabled people is to allow them to do so. We wish to develop ways to give sick and disabled people the advice, help and support they need to achieve their aspirations and to move towards financial independence.

As part of our welfare to work proposals, which will improve opportunities for sick and disabled people, we are also considering what changes might be made to the benefit system to improve work incentives and reduce disincentives.

Benefits

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social (1) what measures she proposes to take account of the gap between recent rises in benefits and the current rate of inflation; and what will be the source of any increase in funding; [16725]

(2) what will be the impact on Government spending plans of the increase in her Department's expenditure arising from increases in inflation since 1 May. [16729]

Mr. Field: I refer to the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 5 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *247*.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will set out the new rates of benefit proposed from April 1998. [19161]

Ms Harman: I have reviewed Social Security benefits in accordance with section 150 of the Administration Act 1992. My proposals for the revised rates of benefit are set out in the schedule. The new rates will take effect in week beginning 6 April 1998.

The statutory instruments to implement the changes will be laid before both Houses for debate in the new year.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland proposes to introduce similar changes for Northern Ireland.

National Insurance benefits will be uprated in line with the annual increase in the Retail Prices Index (RPI) up to September, which this year is 3.6 per cent.

Jobseeker's allowance and income-related benefits will generally rise by 2.4 per cent. in line with the increase in the Rossi index. The Rossi index is RPI less certain housing costs.

The total cost of uprating for 1998–99 will be £2.45 billion.

The key points of my review are as follows:

Retirement pension

The basic rate of retirement pension will be increased by £2.25 to £64.70 for a single person and by £3.60 to £103.40 for couples.

Child benefit

The rate for the eldest child will be increased to £11.45. The rate for each subsequent child is increased to £9.30.

Income support

The couple rate of income support for those aged 80 and over will increase by £2.75 to £117.90.

War pensions

War pensions will be increased in line with the RPI.

Earnings top-up

Benefit rates for the pilot Earnings top-up scheme will be increased by the Rossi index.

Benefits for lone parents

The higher rate for lone parents in child benefit will be £17.10, and the higher rates of family premium in income support and jobseeker's allowance will be £15.75 and in housing benefit and council tax benefit will be £22.05.

Non-dependent deductions

New rates of deduction in respect of non-dependents living in the household are shown in the schedule. The rate of deduction for housing benefit, income support and income based jobseeker's allowance in respect of those not in work, or with gross income below £78, remains unchanged.

Protecting benefits from inflation underlines our commitment to the elderly and the most vulnerable in society.

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Attendance Allowance		
higher rate	49.50	51.30
lower rate	33.10	34.30
Child Benefit		
—only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (couple)	11.05	11.45
—only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (lone parent)	17.10	17.10
—each subsequent child	9.00	9.30
Child's Special Allowance see note on Child Dependency Increase	11.20	11.30
Council Tax Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24	38.90	39.85
25 or over	49.15	50.35
lone parent—18 or over	49.15	50.35
couple—one or both over 18	77.15	79.00
Dependent Children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	16.90	17.30
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	24.75	25.35
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	29.60	30.30
Premiums		
family	10.80	11.05
family (lone parent rate)	22.05	22.05
pensioner		
single	19.65	20.10
couple	29.65	30.35
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	21.85	22.35
couple	32.75	33.55
pensioner (higher)		
single	26.55	27.20
couple	38.00	38.90
disability		
single	20.95	21.45
couple	29.90	30.60
severe disability		
single	37.15	38.50
couple (one qualifies)	37.15	38.50
couple (both qualify)	74.30	77.00
disabled child	20.95	21.45
carer	13.35	13.65
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	15.60	16.20
lower rate	12.50	12.95
Non-dependant deductions aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
—gross income: £250 or more	4.00	6.00
—gross income: £200–£249.99	3.50	5.00
—gross income: £116–£199.99	3.00	4.00
—gross income less than £116	1.50	2.00
others, aged 18 or over	1.50	2.00

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Alternative maximum Council Tax Benefit		
second adult on Income Support or income based Jobseeker's Allowance	25 per cent. of Council Tax	
second adult's gross income:		
—under £116	15 per cent. of Council Tax	
—£116 to £151.99	7.5 per cent. of Council Tax	
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for permanent resident of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded for permanent resident of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:	—	—
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus	—	—
50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hour Adult Allowance in DWA	10.55	10.80
30 Hour Adult Credit in FC	10.55	10.80
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Dependency Increases		
Adult Dependency Increases		
For spouse or person looking after children, with:		
retirement pension on own insurance, long-term incapacity benefit, unemployability supplement	37.35	38.70
severe disablement allowance	22.40	23.20
invalid care allowance	22.35	23.15
short-term incapacity benefit if beneficiary over pension age	35.90	37.20
maternity allowance/short-term incapacity benefit	29.15	30.20
Child Dependency Increases, with: short-term incapacity benefit at the higher rate and long-term incapacity benefit, invalid care allowance severe disability allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and short-term incapacity benefit if beneficiary over pension age	11.20	11.30

The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases, guardian's allowance and child special allowance to be adjusted where the increase or allowance is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom child benefit is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase or allowance is reduced by the differential (less the 75p derived from the October 1991 increase in child benefit) between the rate

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
of child benefit payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child.		
Disability Living Allowance		
Care Component		
Highest	49.50	51.30
Middle	33.10	34.30
Lowest	13.15	13.60
Mobility Component		
Higher	34.60	35.85
Lower	13.15	13.60
Disability Working Allowance		
Adult allowance		
Single people	49.55	50.75
Couples/Lone Parents	77.55	79.40
30 hours Allowance	10.55	10.80
Child allowance		
from birth	12.05	12.35
from September following 11th birthday	19.95	20.45
from September following 16th birthday	24.80	25.40
Child allowance for children with protected rates		
age 11 before 7th October 1997	19.95	20.45
age 16 before 7th October 1997	24.80	25.40
age 18 before 7th October 1997	34.70	35.55
Applicable amount (i.e. taper threshold)		
Single People	57.85	59.25
Couples/Lone Parents	77.15	79.00
Disabled Child's Allowance	20.95	21.45
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Earnings Rules		
Invalid Care Allowance	50.00	50.00
Therapeutic earnings limit	46.50	48.00
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,418.00	2,496.00
War pensioners' unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,418.00	2,496.00

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Adult dependency increases with short-term incapacity benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	29.15	30.20
(b) over pension age	35.90	37.20
maternity allowance	29.15	30.20
retirement pension, long-term incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance, unemployability supplement where dependent		
(a) is living with claimant	49.15	50.35
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45.09	45.09
retirement pension, long-term incapacity benefit and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	37.35	38.70
severe disablement allowance where dependant not living with claimant	22.40	23.20
invalid care allowance	22.35	23.15
Child dependency increases		
level at which CDIs are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner		
for first child	135.00	140.00
for each subsequent child	17.00	18.00
Family Credit		
Adult credit	47.65	48.80
30 hours credit	10.55	10.80
Child credits		
from birth	12.05	12.35
from September following 11th birthday	19.95	20.45
from September following 16th birthday	24.80	25.40
Child credits for children with protected rates		
age 11 before 7th October 1997	19.95	20.45
age 16 before 7th October 1997	24.80	25.40
age 18 before 7th October 1997	34.70	35.55
Applicable amount (i.e: threshold)	77.15	79.00
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Assumed income from capital		
£1 for every £250 or part of £250 between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Guardian's Allowance	11.20	11.30
see note on Child Dependency Increase		

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Hospital Downrating		
20 per cent. rate	12.50	12.95
40 per cent. rate	25.00	25.90
Housing benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24	38.90	39.85
25 or over	49.15	50.35
lone parent		
under 18	38.90	39.85
18 or over	49.15	50.35
couple		
both under 18	58.70	60.10
one or both over 18	77.15	79.00
Dependent children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	16.90	17.30
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	24.75	25.35
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	29.60	30.30
dependent children with protected rates age 18 before 1st/7th April 1997	38.90	39.85
Premiums		
family	10.80	11.05
family (lone parent rate)	22.05	22.05
pensioner		
single	19.65	20.10
couple	29.65	30.35
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	21.85	22.35
couple	32.75	33.55
pensioner (higher)		
single	26.55	27.20
couple	38.00	38.90
disability		
single	20.95	21.45
couple	29.90	30.60
severe disability		
single	37.15	38.50
couple (one qualifies)	37.15	38.50
couple (both qualify)	74.30	77.00
disabled child	20.95	21.45
carer	13.35	13.65
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	15.60	16.20
lower rate	12.50	12.95
Non-dependant deductions rent rebates and allowances		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seeker's Allowance		
aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or		
—gross income less than £78	7.00	7.00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
—gross income: less than £78	7.00	7.00
—gross income: £78 to £115.99	13.00	16.00
—gross income: £116 to £151.99	17.00	22.00
—gross income: £152 to £199.99	33.00	36.00
—gross income: £200.00 to £249.99	36.00	41.00
—gross income: £250.00 and above	39.00	45.00
Service charges for fuel		
heating	9.25	9.25
hot water	1.15	1.15
lighting	0.80	0.80
cooking	1.15	1.15
Amount ineligible for meals		
three or more meals a day		
single claimant	17.55	17.95
each person in family aged 16 or over	17.55	17.95
each child under 16	8.85	9.05
less than three meals a day		
single claimant	11.65	11.95
each person in family aged 16 or over	11.65	11.95
each child under 16	5.85	6.00
breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	2.10	2.15
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for permanent resident of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded for permanent resident of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	60.00	60.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 hour. adult allowance in DWA	10.55	10.80
30 hour. adult credit in FC	10.55	10.80
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Incapacity Benefit		
Long-term incapacity benefit	62.45	64.70
Short-term incapacity benefit (under pension age)		
lower rate	47.10	48.80
higher rate	55.70	57.70
Short-term incapacity benefit (over pension age)		
lower & higher rate	59.90	62.05
Increase of long-term incapacity benefit for age		
higher rate	13.15	13.60
lower rate	6.60	6.80
Invalidity Allowance (Transitional)		
higher rate	13.15	13.60
middle rate	8.30	8.60
lower rate	4.15	4.30
Income Support		
Personal Allowances		
single		
under 18—usual rate	29.60	30.30
under 18–higher rate payable in specific circumstances	38.90	39.85
18 to 24	38.90	39.85
25 or over	49.15	50.35
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	29.60	30.30
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	38.90	39.85
18 or over	49.15	50.35
couple		
both under 18	58.70	60.10
one or both 18 or over	77.15	79.00
dependent children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	16.90	17.30
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	24.75	25.35
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	29.60	30.30
Residential Allowance		
except Greater London	56.00	57.50
Greater London	62.00	64.00
Premiums		
family	10.80	11.05
family (lone parent rate)	15.75	15.75
pensioner		
single	19.65	20.10
couple	29.65	30.35
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	21.85	22.35
couple	32.75	33.55
pensioner (higher)		
single	26.55	27.20
couple	38.00	38.90
disability		
single	20.95	21.45
couple	29.90	30.60
severe disability		
single	37.15	38.50
couple (one qualifies)	37.15	38.50
couple (both qualify)	74.30	77.00
disabled child	20.95	21.45
carer	13.35	13.65

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in		
residential care homes		
old age	208.00	213.00
very dependent elderly	240.00	247.00
mental disorder (not handicap)	220.00	225.00
drug/alcohol dependence	220.00	225.00
mental handicap	250.00	257.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	285.00	292.00
(b) (over pension age)	208.00	213.00
others	208.00	213.00
maximum Greater London increase	41.00	44.00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	312.00	319.00
drug/alcohol dependence	312.00	319.00
mental handicap	318.00	325.00
terminal illness	311.00	318.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	352.00	359.00
(b) (over pension age)	311.00	318.00
others (including elderly)	311.00	318.00
maximum Greater London increase	46.00	49.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation		
(Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	14.10	14.45
dependent children		
(a) under 11	5.80	5.95
(b) 11 to 15	8.45	8.65
(c) 16 to 17	9.80	10.05
(d) age 18	14.10	14.45
hospital		
higher rate	15.60	16.20
lower rate	12.50	12.95
local authority (Pt III)		
accommodation	62.45	64.70
of which, personal expenses	14.10	14.45
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in:		
the Polish home Ilford Park		
maximum amount for accommodation and meals	352.00	359.00
personal expenses for claimant	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for partner	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for dependent children		
(a) under 11	5.80	5.95
(b) 11 to 15	8.45	8.65
(c) 16 to 17	9.80	10.05
(d) 18	15.55	15.55
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependants:		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of income support		
aged 18 or over, not in work or		
—gross income less than £78	7.00	7.00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
—gross income: £78 to £115.99	13.00	16.00
—gross income: £116 to £151.99	17.00	22.00
—gross income: £152 to £199.99	33.00	36.00
—gross income: £200.00 to £249.99	33.00	41.00
—gross income: £250.00 and above	33.00	45.00

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Deduction for direct payments arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default, and	2.50	2.55
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.00	5.10
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.50	2.55
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.50	2.55
court order against couple	3.90	3.95
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	7.50	7.65
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.00	10.00
Reduction in benefit for strikers	26.50	27.00
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for permanent resident of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded for permanent resident of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couples' earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Industrial Death Benefit		
Widow's pension		
higher rate	62.45	64.70
lower rate	18.74	19.41
Industrial Disablement Pension		
18 and over, or under 18 with dependants		
100 per cent.	101.10	104.70
90 per cent.	90.99	94.23
80 per cent.	80.88	83.76
70 per cent.	70.77	73.29
60 per cent.	60.66	62.82
50 per cent.	50.55	52.35
40 per cent.	40.44	41.88
30 per cent.	30.33	31.41
20 per cent.	20.22	20.94
Under 18		
100 per cent.	61.90	64.15
90 per cent.	55.71	57.74
80 per cent.	49.52	51.32
70 per cent.	43.33	44.91
60 per cent.	37.14	38.49
50 per cent.	30.95	32.08
40 per cent.	24.76	25.66
30 per cent.	18.57	19.25
20 per cent.	12.38	12.83

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	6,720.00	6,960.00
Unemployability Supplement	62.45	64.70
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	13.15	13.60
middle rate	8.30	8.60
lower rate	4.15	4.30
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	40.44	41.88
Maximum retirement allowance	10.11	10.47
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	81.00	84.00
intermediate rate	60.75	63.00
normal maximum rate	40.50	42.00
part-time rate	20.25	21.00
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	40.50	42.00
Invalid Care Allowance	37.35	38.70
Jobseekers Allowance		
Contribution based JSA—rates		
under 18	29.60	30.30
18 to 24	38.90	39.85
25 or over	49.15	50.35
Income-based JSA—personal allowances		
under 18	29.60	30.30
18 to 24	38.90	39.85
25 or over	49.15	50.35
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	29.60	30.30
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	38.90	39.85
18 or over	49.15	50.35
couple		
both under 18	29.60	30.30
both under 18, one disabled	38.90	39.85
both under 18, with responsibility for a child	58.70	60.10
one under 18, one 18–24	38.90	39.85
one under 18, one 25+	49.15	50.35
both 18 or over	77.15	79.00
dependent children		
birth to September following 11th birthday	16.90	17.30
from September following 11th birthday to September following 16th birthday	24.75	25.35
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	29.60	30.30
Residential Allowance		
except Greater London	56.00	57.50
Greater London	62.00	64.00
Premiums		
family	10.80	11.05
family (lone parent rate)	15.75	15.75
pensioner		
single	19.65	20.10
couple	29.65	30.35
pensioner (enhanced)		
couple	32.75	33.55
pensioner (higher)		
single	26.55	27.20
couple	38.00	38.90
disability		
single	20.95	21.45
couple	29.90	30.60

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
severe disability		
single	37.15	38.50
couple (one qualifies)	37.15	38.50
couple (both qualify)	74.30	77.00
disabled child	20.95	21.45
carer	13.35	13.65
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in		
residential care homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	220.00	225.00
drug/alcohol dependence	220.00	225.00
mental handicap	250.00	257.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	285.00	292.00
others	208.00	213.00
maximum Greater London increase	41.00	44.00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	312.00	319.00
drug/alcohol dependence	312.00	319.00
mental handicap	318.00	325.00
terminal illness	311.00	318.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	352.00	359.00
others (including elderly)	311.00	318.00
maximum Greater London increase	46.00	49.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in		
private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	14.10	14.45
dependent children		
(a) under 11	5.80	5.95
(b) 11 to 15	8.45	8.65
(c) 16 to 17	9.80	10.05
(d) age 18	14.10	14.45
hospital		
higher rate	15.60	16.20
lower rate	12.50	12.95
local authority (Pt III)		
accommodation	62.45	64.70
of which, Personal Expenses	14.10	14.45
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependents:		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of income support or income based job seekers allowance;		
aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or		
—gross income: less than £78	7.00	7.00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
—gross income: less than £78.00	7.00	7.00
—gross income: £78 to £115.99	13.00	16.00
—gross income: £116 to £151.99	17.00	22.00
—gross income: £152 to £199.99	33.00	36.00
—gross income: £200.00 to £249.99	33.00	41.00
—gross income: £250.00 and above	33.00	45.00
Deduction for direct payments		
Deductions from JSA (IB)		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default, and	2.50	2.55

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Deductions for Child Maintenance		
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.00	5.10
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.50	2.55
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.50	2.55
court order against couple	3.90	3.95
Deductions from JSA (continued)		
Arrears of Community Charge, Council Tax and fines		
Age 16–17	9.86	10.10
Age 18–24	12.96	13.28
Age 25+	16.38	16.78
Maximum deduction for arrears of Child Support Maintenance		
Age 16–17	9.86	10.10
Age 18–24	12.96	13.28
Age 25+	16.38	16.78
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	7.50	7.65
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.00	10.00
Reduction in benefit for strikers	26.50	27.00
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for permanent resident of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded for permanent resident of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couples earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Maternity Allowance		
lower rate	48.35	50.10
higher rate	55.70	57.70
Pneumoconiosis Byssinosis, Workmen's Compensation (Supplementation) and other schemes		
Total disablement allowance and major incapacity allowance (maximum)	101.10	104.70
Partial disablement allowance	37.35	38.70
Unemployability supplement plus where appropriate increases for early incapacity	62.45	64.70
higher rate	13.15	13.60
middle rate	8.30	8.60
lower rate	4.15	4.30

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	New rates 1998
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	81.00	84.00
intermediate rate	60.75	63.00
normal maximum rate	40.50	42.00
part-time rate	20.25	21.00
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	40.50	42.00
Lesser incapacity allowance		
maximum rate of allowance	37.35	38.70
based on loss of earnings over	49.50	51.30
Retirement Pension		
Category A or B	62.45	64.70
Category B(lower)—husband's insurance	37.35	38.70
Category C or D—non-contributory	37.35	38.70
Category C(lower)—non-contributory	22.35	23.15
Additional pension	Increase by: 3.60 per cent.	
Increments to:		
Basic and additional pensions	Increase by 3.60 per cent.	
Contracted out deductions (CODs) (Pre April '88 earnings)		
Graduated Retirement Benefit (GRB)		
Increments to CODs (April 1988–April 1996 earnings) [3.0 per cent. paid by schemes]	Additional increase 0.6 per cent. to that paid by schemes	
Graduated Retirement Benefit (unit) (pence)	8.11	8.40
Graduated Retirement Benefit (Inherited)	Increase by: 3.60 per cent.	
Addition at age 80	0.25	0.25
Severe Disablement Allowance		
Basic rate	37.75	39.10
Age-related addition (from December 1990)		
higher rate	13.15	13.60
middle rate	8.30	8.60
lower rate	4.15	4.30
Statutory Maternity Pay		
Earnings threshold	62.00	64.00
Lower rate	55.70	57.70
Statutory Sick Pay		
Earnings threshold	62.00	64.00
Standard rate	55.70	57.70
War Pensions		
Disablement Pension (100 per cent. rates)		
officer (£ per annum)	5,594.00	5,797.00
other ranks	107.20	111.10
Age allowances		
40 per cent.–50 per cent.	7.15	7.40
over 50 per cent. but not over 70 per cent.	11.05	11.45
over 70 per cent. but not over 90 per cent.	15.75	16.30
over 90 per cent.	22.10	22.90
Disablement gratuity		
specified minor injury (minimum)	682.00	707.00
specified minor injury (maximum)	5,100.00	5,284.00
unspecified minor injury (minimum)	284.00	294.00
unspecified minor injury (maximum)	6,632.00	6,871.00
Unemployability allowance		
personal	66.25	68.65
adult dependency increase	37.35	38.70
increase for first child	9.90	9.90
increase for subsequent children	11.20	11.30
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	13.15	13.60
middle rate	8.30	8.60
lower rate	4.15	4.30
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	81.00	84.00
intermediate rate	60.75	63.00
normal maximum rate	40.50	42.00
part-time rate	20.25	21.00
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	17.40	18.00
lower rate	8.70	9.00
Mobility supplement	38.55	39.95
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	40.44	41.88
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	40.50	42.00
Severe disablement occupational allowance	20.25	21.00
Clothing allowance (£ per annum, maximum)	137.00	142.00
Education allowance (£ per annum) (maximum)	120.00	120.00
War widow's pension		
Widow (private)	81.00	83.90
Widow (NCO)	81.25	84.20
Widow—Officer (£ per annum maximum)	5,010.00	5,190.00
Childless widow u-40 (private)	18.74	19.41
Childless widow u-40 (NCO)	19.02	19.70
Childless widow u-40 (Officer maximum £s per annum)	5,010.00	5,190.00
Supplementary Pension age allowance	52.80	54.70
(a) age 65 to 69	9.25	9.60
(b) age 70 to 79	17.75	18.40
(c) age 80 and over	26.45	27.40
children's allowance		
increase for first child (adjusted for child benefit increase)	14.15	14.25
increase for subsequent children	15.45	15.65
Orphan's pension		
increase for first child (adjusted for child benefit increase)	15.90	16.05
increase for subsequent children	17.20	17.45
Unmarried dependant living as (spouse maximum)	78.95	81.85
Rent allowance (maximum)	30.65	31.75
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	62.45	64.70
Widower's pension		
private (maximum)	81.00	83.90
officer (£ per annum) maximum	5,010.00	5,190.00
Widow's Benefit		
Widow's payment (lump sum)	1,000.00	1,000.00
Widowed mother's allowance	62.45	64.70
Widow's pension		
standard rate	62.45	64.70
age-related		
age 54 (49)	58.08	60.17
53 (48)	53.71	55.64
52 (47)	49.34	51.11
51 (46)	44.96	46.58
50 (45)	40.59	42.06
49 (44)	36.22	37.53

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates—April 1998
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old rates 1997	*New rates 1998*
48 (43)	31.85	33.00
47 (42)	27.48	28.47
46 (41)	23.11	23.94
45 (40)	18.74	19.41

Note:
For deaths occurring before 11 April 1988 refer to age-points shown in brackets.

Earnings top-up (ETU) rates

	Old rates 1997	*New rates 1998*
Scheme A		
Credit		
Couple	47.65	48.80
Single 25 and over	28.75	29.45
Single under 25	23.35	23.90
For working 30 hrs + pw	10.55	10.80
Applicable amount (i.e., taper threshold)		
Couple	77.15	79.00
Single 25 and over	59.70	61.15
Single under 25	49.45	50.65
Scheme B		
Credit		
Couple	57.50	58.90
Single 25 and over	28.75	29.45
Single under 25	23.35	23.90
For working 30 hrs + pw	10.55	10.80
Applicable amount (i.e., taper threshold)		
Couple	77.15	79.00
Single 25 and over	77.15	79.00
Single under 25	77.15	79.00
Both schemes		
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	fixed rates
amount disregarded	3,000.00	
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit	fixed rate	

War Pensions

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many United Kingdom civilians employed in war-related work have received war pensions for asbestosis since 1967; and what factors led to their award. [16714]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

It is unlikely that any award of War Pension in respect of asbestosis has been made to any civilian. However, a civilian may be entitled to a war pension if he was disabled as a result of his work as a member of a civil defence organisation or under the other provisions of the Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme.

Broadly, under those other provisions, an award of war pension may be made where disablement is caused either by enemy action or by action taken to combat or repel an imagined attack by the enemy during World War Two.

Compensation might be available under the industrial injuries scheme, via an employer's liability insurance or, for an ex-civilian employee of the Ministry of Defence, from that Department.

Benefit Reviews

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the conclusions of the Department's benefit by benefit review will be taken into account in *(a)* the Department's study of public expenditure and *(b)* the Treasury's review of tax and benefits. [17037]

Mr. Field: The Government are committed to a far-reaching overhaul of the Social Security system that will modernise the welfare state and prepare it to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced the Comprehensive Spending Review being co-ordinated across Government on 11 June 1997, *Official Report*, column 1143–57. The Department of Social Security's review will be based on our clear objectives of promoting work incentives, reducing poverty and welfare dependency and strengthening community and family life. It will also consider how best the system can be reformed to contribute to the achievement of Government objectives including the need for restraint in public expenditure. The Review is expected to take about a year to complete.

The review of tax and benefits, headed by Martin Taylor, Chief Executive of Barclays Bank, involves officials from the Treasury, the Department for Education and Employment, the Inland Revenue and the DSS. There has been close liaison between the tax benefit review and the DSS Comprehensive Spending Review.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which Minister is responsible for co-ordinating her Department's benefit by benefit review; and when, and by what means, she expects its conclusions to be reported to the House. [18810]

Mr. Field: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to him on 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *406–07*.

Income Support

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the extra money for pensioners on income support will be distributed. [18738]

Mr. Denham: Precise operational arrangements will depend on the Regulations currently being drafted. Regulations will be laid as soon as possible.

"The Law Relating to Social Security"

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when "The Law Relating to Social Security" was withdrawn from circulation; and what are her plans for replacing it. [18833]

Mr. Field: "The Law Relating to Social Security", or "Blue Books", is still available from the Stationery Office and bookshops. Three amendments have been issued this year.

Ex-servicemen (Hearing Review)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received on her review of the Government's decision on the aging effect of bilateral sensori-neural hearing in respect of former members of the armed forces. [18839]

Mr. Denham: We have received 36 representations from hon. Members and 46 from national organisations and members of the public.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by her Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18111]

Mr. Field: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Economic planning region[1]	*Full-time employees*[2]		*Part-time employees*[2]		*Employees employed under personal contract*[2]	
	Lowest hourly rate £	*Grade*	*Lowest hourly rate*	*Grade*	*Lowest hourly rate £*	*Grade*
Scotland	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.43	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
Northern	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.39	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
Yorkshire and Humberside	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
North West	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
East Midlands	3.35	Administrative assistant	3.43	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
West Midlands	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.28	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
Wales	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.36	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
East Anglia	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.95	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
South East	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
South West	3.28	Administrative assistant	3.28	Administrative assistant	3.26	Administrative assistant
North Ireland	4.93	Administrative assistant	4.45	Support Grade Band 2	—	None
Overseas	3.72	Administrative assistant	4.14	Support Grade Band 2	3.42	Administrative assistant

1. Hourly rates include allowances and includes staff on payroll as at 30 September 1997 in their current substantive grade.
2. Except for staff in the Senior Civil Service the department does not employ staff on a personnel contractual basis. Staff shown in column four are casual staff and those on fixed term appointments.

New Deal

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the allocations in each of the next four years for programmes under the New Deal for Disabled People. [18809]

Mr. Denham: No decisions have been taken on the allocation, in each of the next four years, of the £195 million set aside for the New Deal for Sick and Disabled People.

Wisconsin Project

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *538*, (1) if she will make a statement on her discussions with an official from Wisconsin on matters relating to *(a)* welfare and *(b)* compulsion for lone parents seeking work; [18673]

(2) if she will publish the agenda and minutes to her meeting with an official from Wisconsin about welfare policy. [18674]

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the meetings with officials from Wisconsin that she had during the summer. [15755]

Mr. Keith Bradley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had one meeting with an official from Wisconsin who was in this country for a Conference at which both were due to speak. There was no formal agenda. The official concerned described the various changes made to the welfare system in Wisconsin over the past several years, gave an informal assessment of their effect and described what she saw as the main lessons to be drawn about the process of implementing major change in this area.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will ensure the Child Support Agency does not reply to an hon. Member's inquiry relating to a constituent's case with a copy of its response to the constituent. [18225]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are determined to ensure that the Child Support Agency provides an efficient and effective service to all its customers, including their representatives.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 1 December 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about replies from the Child Support Agency to inquiries from Members of Parliament.

The Agency's policy in dealing with an inquiry from an MP is to provide a full, up-to-date and accurate reply to the issues raised. Each case is treated individually and the Agency aims to answer correspondence in line with the Departmental target of responding within 20 days.

In the course of dealing with children's maintenance, correspondence between the Agency and customers is to be expected, and indeed necessary. Where this coincides with an inquiry from the customer's MP on their behalf, in order to be as helpful as possible and to ensure that the full facts are available, the Agency may copy relevant letters to the MP particularly where an identical issue has been raised by the constituent both directly with the Agency and through their MP. This has proved to be a useful, cost-effective and efficient mechanism, which helps avoid any misunderstanding and ensures that the MP is fully aware of what has been said to their constituent.

I am very conscious that there are still far too many justified complaints about the standards of basic customer contact and the service we provide. Over the next few years, I am committed to bringing high quality levels of performance to every part of our operation as a matter of routine, thereby reducing the number of complaints received and enhancing the public perception of the Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she has completed her review of national insurance contributions of 1998–99. [19162]

Ms Harman: I have completed the annual review under Section 141 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. My proposals will take effect from 6 April 1998.

Employers and employees

In line with the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, the lower earnings limit for Class 1 contributions is to be raised to £64 a week. It is set at the level of the Basic Retirement Pension rate for a single person from April 1998, rounded down to the nearest pound.

The upper earnings limit is to be raised to £485 a week which is slightly less than $7\frac{1}{2}$ times the new basic pension rates as provided by the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. These new earnings limit will replace the current ones of £62 and £465 respectively.

Employees whose earnings reach the lower earnings limit will continue to pay an initial contribution of 2 per cent. of that limit and standard rate contributions of 10 per cent. on that portion of their earnings which exceeds the lower but not the upper earnings limit.

The contribution rates for employers will remain unchanged at 3 per cent., 5 per cent., 7 per cent. and 10 per cent. respectively, as will the earnings brackets for the three lower rates.

Not contracted out employees and their employers

Neither employees nor employers will have to pay any contributions if earnings are less than £64 a week. Employees whose earnings do not exceed £465 (the former upper earnings limit) will pay 16 pence a week less in contributions than at present. This is because a further £2 of their weekly earnings will be subject to the 2 per cent. rate rather than 10 per cent. For employees with earnings above £465 the maximum possible increase will be £1.84 a week.

There will be no change for employers where earnings are £64 or more a week.

Contracted-out employees and their employers

Employees whose earnings do not exceed £465 (the former upper earnings limit) will pay 13 pence a week less in contributions than at present. This is because a further £2 of their weekly earnings will be subject to the 2 per cent. rate rather than 8.4 per cent. For employees with earnings above £465 the maximum possible increase will be £1.55 a week.

Employers who operate a Contracted-Out Salary Related Scheme (COSR)

Where earnings are between £64 and £465 employers will pay 6 pence a week extra. This is due to the increase in the lower earnings limit which means that a further £2 of earnings is not subject to the contracted-out rebate. Where earnings are more than £465 a week employers will pay £54 pence a week less. This is mainly due to the increase in the upper earnings limit which means that a further £20 of earnings is subject to the contracted-out rebate.

Employers who operate a Contracted-Out Money Purchase Scheme (COMP)

Where earnings are between £64 and £465 employers will pay 3 pence a week extra. This is due to the increase in the lower earnings limit which means that a further £2 of earnings is not subject to the contracted-out rebate. Where earnings are more than £465 a week employers will pay 27 pence a week less. This is mainly due to the increase in the upper earnings limit which means that a further £20 of earnings is subject to the contracted-out rebate.

Self-employed people

The flat rate Class 2 contribution will be raised by 20p to £6.35 a week.

Self-employed people with profits less than a specified amount, known as the small earnings exception limit, can apply to be excepted from paying Class 2 contributions. This limit will be raised by £110 to £3,590.

There will be no change to the rate of Class 4 contributions which will remain at 6 per cent. The annual limits of profits between which Class 4 contributions are paid will be raised to £7,310 and £25,220 from £7,010 and £24,180 respectively.

Self-employed people who pay only Class 2 contributions will pay an extra £10.40 a year in 1998–99.

For people with profits between £7,310 and £24,180 (the former upper profits limit) Class 4 contributions will be reduced by £18 a year assuming an unaltered level of profits. For those self-employed people with profits at or above the new upper profits limit the annual charge for Class 4 contributions will be £44.80 higher.

Class 3 (Voluntary) contributions

The rate of Class 3 contributions will be raised by 20p to £6.25 a week.

National health service allocation

The allocation to the National Health Service is unchanged at 1.05 per cent. from employees and 0.9 per cent. from employers.

Treasury grant

Although benefit expenditure from the National Insurance Fund will broadly match income, I need to ensure that the Fund maintains a prudent working balance throughout the coming year and, in accordance with Section 2(2) of the Social Security Act 1993, I propose to do so by means of a grant from the Treasury. I estimate that the maximum grant required will be approximately £800 million.

I shall by laying a Draft Order before Parliament together with a report by the Government Actuary describing the effects of my proposals.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 3 December 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Probation Service

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the estimated percentage change in the Probation Service budget in England and Wales for the next two financial years; and if he will make a statement. [18635]

Ms Quin: We are still considering probation service revenue grant for 1998–99 but expect to make an announcement very shortly. The level of funding in 1999–2000 and beyond will be considered in the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average annual case load per probation officer for the last two years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [18638]

Ms Quin: The average annual caseload per officer for 1995 and 1996, excluding community service, was 25 and 27.7 respectively.

These figures are given in table 8.13 of the Probation Statistics England and Wales 1996, a copy of which is in the Library.

Community Penalties

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has undertaken on the degree of knowledge and awareness among the judiciary about community penalties and their effectiveness; and if he will make a statement. [18636]

Ms Quin: Home Office Research Study 144, "Measuring the Satisfaction of Courts with the Probation Service", published in 1995, reported that 70 per cent. of the judges questioned thought that the probation service kept them very well or quite well informed about its work; 37 per cent. considered the quality of supervision for probation orders to be very good or quite good; and 45 per cent. were very satisfied or quite satisfied with current arrangements for enforcing probation orders.

Further relevant information will feature next year in the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate's evaluation of the community sentence demonstration projects in Teesside and Shropshire.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people *(a)* have notified the police in relation to the Sex Offender Register and *(b)* are yet to notify the police in relation to the register for the last date for which figures are available. [18639]

Mr. Michael: On 2 October, the latest date for which figures are available, 2,170 sex offenders had notified the police of their details in accordance with the Sex Offenders Act 1997.

Police records indicate a further 567 sex offenders who had yet to notify the police of their details by this date. These include both those who are within the 14 day period allowed for registration and those who have gone beyond this period.

A survey of registrations over the first three months of the operation of the sex offender register is currently being carried out. The figures will be available in mid December.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the measures under consideration for the forthcoming Crime and Disorder Bill for extended supervision of sex offenders will extend to all serious sex offenders. [18217]

Ms Quin: We envisage that the courts should have the power to require sex offenders to undergo an extended period of supervision, of up to ten years, to be added to whatever sentence the court would currently impose. The power will apply to all sex offenders who receive custodial sentences, including those imprisoned for less than 12 months, who are not liable, under the current law, to supervision following release. It will not, however, apply retrospectively to offenders already sentenced under the current or previous law.

Radar Speed Trap Detectors

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy on the use of radar devices to avoid police radar speed traps. [18140]

Mr. Michael: The use of such detector devices without a licence is an offence under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 and successful prosecutions have been taken out by the police against motorists who have used them. My Department has carried out tests which showed such devices to be largely unreliable and ineffective but we have asked the Association of Chief Police Officers' Traffic Committee to keep us informed of any significant increase in the use of these devices and of any difficulties which forces experience. In addition, where an advertisement for such a device is brought to my department's attention we lodge the papers with the Advertising Standards Authority so that the Authority can ensure that the advertising copy makes the legal position clear.

CS Gas

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have suspended their use of CS gas sprays in the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [18344]

Mr. Michael: None in England and Wales, so far as I am aware. Trials of CS sprays by Strathclyde Police and Tayside Police were suspended between 2 and 20 October but have since resumed. Responsibility for deciding whether to issue CS spray equipment rests with individual chief police officers.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18890]

Mr. Straw: Since 1 May, my Department has made 234 announcements by press release, including ones relating to public speeches. All major announcements are made to Parliament first when it is sitting. Such recent major announcements include a statement on Home Detention Orders, the White Paper on Youth Justice and the Bill to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into British Law. Press briefings are usually held to give further explanation to announcements, after they have been made public.

Vivisection

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to alter the law relating to vivisection; and if he will make a statement. [18681]

Mr. George Howarth: An Order will be made shortly to add "pigs, if genetically modified" and "sheep, if genetically modified" to Schedule 2 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Following the recommendation made by the Animal Procedures Committee in its interim report on the review of the operation of the 1986 Act, the same Order will add ferrets and gerbils to Schedule 2. This will take effect from 1 January 1999.

An Order will also be made under the European Communities Act 1972 to make minor amendments to introduce into the face of the 1986 Act some controls which are currently exercised through administrative measures (such as standard licence conditions).

Perjury

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals for a new offence of aggravated perjury to apply where persons have brought an action in the courts and have lied on oath. [18532]

Mr. Michael: We see no need to bring forward proposals for a new offence of aggravated perjury. The law enables those who have brought a civil action and are then found to have lied to be liable to prosecution and conviction for perjury, which could result in a prison sentence for up to seven years. In addition, a person who intentionally swears a false affidavit could be charged with perverting the course of justice. As I indicated in my reply to my hon. Friend on 16 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *181*, the serious common law offence of perverting, or attempting to pervert, the course of justice is committed where a person acts or embarks upon a course of conduct which has a tendency to, and is intended to, pervert the course of justice. It is a matter for the prosecuting authorities to decide in any such case whether there is sufficient evidence to mount a prosecution and whether it would be in the public interest. As a common law offence, the maximum penalty for perverting the course of justice is at large, which means that the court would be free to impose any penalty that they considered appropriate.

Hand Guns

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* timetable and *(b)* guidelines exist for compensating the owners of unusual hand guns; and what arrangements exist for paying interest on delayed compensation. [18619]

Mr. Michael: Those handguns not listed under options A and B of the Firearms Compensation Scheme will have been claimed for under option C, which required owners to attach evidence of value. These particular claims, because they require individual assessment of the evidence provided, are being deferred to allow faster processing of claims submitted under the first two options. Many option C claimants have also claimed under other options and so will receive a part payment of their claim first. It is expected that most, if not all, option C claims will have been dealt with by the end of 1998. This position is in accordance with our earlier expectations and was made clear in the information sent out to potential claimants in June. There are no arrangements in the Scheme for the payment of interest on claims.

Safer Cities Projects

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds *(a)* were allocated to safer cities projects in each year since their commencement and *(b)* will be allocated to safer cities projects in the year 1998–99. [18600]

Mr. Michael: *(a)* the Grants paid to safer cities projects in each year from 1988–89 to 1997–98 are listed[1]. These figures include the payments made by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Phase 2 English projects between 1994–95 to 1997–98.

	£ million
1989–90	2.403
1990–91	4.569
1991–92	5.178
1992–93	5.271
1993–94	3.738
1994–95	2.168
1995–96	3.848
1996–97	3.124
1997–98	2.170

At the beginning of this financial year, the Home Office also paid an exit grant of £40,000 to the one Welsh project which closed on 31 March 1997.

(b) All the remaining safer cities projects are due to close by 31 March 1998 and there is no provision for further projects in 1998–99. However, £60,000 has been set aside by the Home Office for exit grant payments to the two remaining Welsh safer cities projects on condition that they have good exit strategies.

[1] These figures do not include the management fees for the projects as this information is commercial-in-confidence and cannot be disclosed.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Museums and Galleries (Wheelchair Access)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of access for disabled people in wheelchairs to the museums and galleries for which he has responsibility. [17169]

Mr. Fisher: Access to the museums and galleries for which this Department is responsible is generally good, though some constraints are imposed by the historic buildings in which the collections are located. Many already allow full access to wheelchair users, and in most other cases nearly all of the collections are accessible. Among the facilities provided are: designated parking, ramps, lifts, specially designed lavatories, low-height telephones and low-height labelling of exhibits. Many institutions also have wheelchairs available for use and provide special training for staff.

However, there is no room for complacency. Recent advances in information technology have been used to provide visual displays where access to the actual display itself is not available. Where new building is underway, special attention is being paid to the needs of wheelchair users with the aid of expert advice.

My Department is carrying out a review of access to the national museums and galleries and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be reporting shortly on the progress of that review.

PRIME MINISTER

UN Security Council

18. **Mr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the leaders of other member states of the European Union to discuss matters relating to the membership, structure and functions of the Security Council of the United Nations. [17516]

The Prime Minister: I have not discussed this issue with my European Union counterparts. However, there are regular discussions between officials at the United Nations in New York and in Capitals.

SCOTLAND

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many public appointments he has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16777]

Mr. Dewar: Since 1 May I have made 105 Public Appointments. Of these, 77 or 73 per cent. receive remuneration.

The information about ethnic origin cannot be provided since to do so would risk identifying individuals without their consent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has provided information for all departments in an aggregated form.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individuals or organisations, corporate or otherwise, he and his ministers have met in their official capacity since 21 May 1997 who have or had donated £5,000 or more to the Labour Party in the last two years; and if he will list them. [17729]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* The Labour Party's policy on disclosure is to declare the identity of any individual or organisation which, in the course of one calendar year, makes donations in the aggregate in excess of £5,000. Donations made during 1997 will be declared in 1998. Therefore, the following information refers to qualifying donors in 1995 and 1996.

Scottish Office Ministers have met representatives of Unison, the Mirror Group, the Daily Record, the AEEU, the FBU, the GMB and the T&GWU. Ministers have also had meetings with the Paymaster General.

Maternity Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of the impact on obstetric services in South Lanarkshire and surrounding areas of the closure of Bellshill and Rutherglen maternity hospitals. [18151]

Mr. Galbraith: In considering the closure of Bellshill and Rutherglen maternity hospitals, Ministers have taken fully into account the impact on obstetric services in South Lanarkshire. I am confident that both Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire Health Board's Maternity Strategies will greatly improve the maternity services available to the mothers and babies in these areas.

Transport Policy

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if paragraph 9 of his Department's consultation document, "Developing an Integrated Transport Policy", represents Government policy. [18195]

Mr. Chisholm: The definitive statements of Government transport policy for Scotland will be contained in the Government's White Papers on Integrated Transport for Scotland, and for the UK generally, that we intend to publish in Spring 1998. In developing that policy we are currently considering the many responses to the key broad issues set out in the consultation document.

Asbestosis

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were diagnosed to be suffering from asbestosis in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency and (ii) local authority unit. [18156]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is not available in the form requested by the hon. Member. However, it is possible to provide figures for the numbers of patients discharged from hospital, whose diagnosis includes asbestosis, for the year 1995, broken down by Health Board of residence, as follows:

Health Board of residence	*Patients discharged in 1995*
Argyll and Clyde	6
Ayrshire and Arran	3
Borders	1
Dumfries and Galloway	0
Fife	9
Forth Valley	4
Grampian	3
Greater Glasgow	43
Highland	4
Lanarkshire	3
Lothian	12
Orkney	1
Tayside	1
Western Isles	0
Scotland	90

These figures include both newly diagnosed and longer term cases of asbestosis. The equivalent information for 1996 is not yet available.

Student Tuition Fees

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at what *(a)* net and *(b)* gross parental or household income level Scottish students will be required to pay the full £1,000 per annum tuition fee. [17850]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The rates for student awards and loans, and the associated contribution scales, for academic year 1998–99 have not yet been determined.

Had tuition fee contributions been in effect in academic year 1997–98, eligible Scottish domiciled students with a net parental income after allowable deductions of about £26,500 would have been assessed as due to pay the full £1,000; the comparable figure for a spouse contribution would have been in the region of £22,250.

It is not practicable to give individual figures for the equivalent gross income since this would depend on the circumstances of the family concerned though, typically, the figure would be about £35,000 per annum.

Means-testing will be carried out in exactly the same way north and south of the border, using the same sealer, as now.

Smoking

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount spent on smoking cessation initiatives for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 devoted to (i) visits by primary health care professionals and (ii) prescriptions; and what are the estimated figures for 1997–98. [17854]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* Information on the amount of expenditure specifically on smoking cessation initiatives devoted to visits by primary health care professionals is not held centrally. Similarly, there is no information available on the amount spent on prescriptions in respect of smoking cessation. In terms of Schedule 10 of the NHS (General Medical Services) (Scotland) Regulations 1995, substances such as nicotine replacements cannot be supplied by general medical practitioners or prescribed for supply under pharmaceutical services. All such products have to be purchased over the counter.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent research his Department has evaluated on *(a)* the total cost to the National Health Service in Scotland of treating people with smoking-related diseases and *(b)* the prevalence of smoking-related diseases among the Scottish population broken down by (i) sex, (ii) age, (iii) socio-economic class and (iv) health board area. [17856]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The most recent national research study on smoking related diseases was the 1991 Report, "The Smoking Epidemic—Counting the Cost in Scotland", a publication produced jointly by HEBS and ASH (Scotland). It estimated that the costs to the NHS in Scotland were approximately £69 million per year. There was no breakdown of this figure by sex, age, socio-economic class or health board area. The prevalence of all diseases in Scotland is monitored by routine ongoing surveillance rather than by specific research projects.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount spent on smoking cessation initiatives for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and what are the projected figures for 1997–98, broken down by health board. [17853]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The information requested is detailed in the tables below. This includes expenditure by the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) and the annual grant provided by The Scottish Office to ASH (Scotland) for the same period.

Expenditure on smoking cessation initiatives

£000s

Organisation	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
HEBS	748	672	[1]585
ASH (Scotland)	73	88.9	88.9
Total	821	760.9	673.9

[1] Projected.

Estimated spend by health board health promotion departments on smoking initiatives[1]

Health board	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*Projected 1997–98* £
Argyll and Clyde	45,000	45,000	45,000
Ayrshire and Arran	88,500	96,500	96,500
Borders	47,895	49,330	50,809
Dumfries and Galloway	66,030	95,994	82,808
Fife	18,600	12,000	8,200
Forth Valley	90,989	95,673	101,698
Grampian	143,000	181,000	209,000
Greater Glasgow	70,000	70,000	130,000
Highland	25,000	30,000	37,000
Lanarkshire	44,000	35,000	58,250
Lothian	84,000	106,000	103,000
Orkney	3,415	2,775	3,115

Estimated spend by health board health promotion departments on smoking initiatives[1]

Health board	1995–96 £	1996–97 £	Projected 1997–98 £
Shetland	4,490	2,540	2,610
Tayside	102,000	105,000	114,000
Western Isles	33,000	35,000	37,000
Total	865,919	961,812	1,078,990

[1] This does not include work on smoking being carried out in health boards by other professionals including GPs, health visitors, psychologists etc.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current estimated cost to the NHS in Scotland of treating people with smoking-related diseases *(a)* in total and *(b)* by health board. [17855]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* There is no simple classification of diseases into those which are smoking related and those which are not. Smoking is only one of several causative factors in many diseases. In 1991, the ASH (Scotland)/HEBS publication "The Smoking Epidemic—Counting the Cost in Scotland" estimated that the NHS costs of treating smoking related diseases were of the order of £69 million per year. A more recent study, commissioned by ASH (Scotland) in 1994, estimated an annual cost to the NHS in Scotland of £83 million. No information is held centrally on the breakdown of these figures by health board area.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18107]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* Based on a net working week of 37 hours the information is *(a)* £3.69 in respect of Administrative Assistants and equivalent grades (although there are two individuals—a Receptionist and a Messenger who are paid £3.37 and £3.63 respectively), *(b)* £3.69 in respect of Administrative Assistants and equivalent grades, *(c)* £3.69 in respect of Administrative Assistants and equivalent grades employed on a short-term casual basis and *(d)* this information is not available.

Expenditure Plans

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce his plans for allocating total expenditure within his responsibility for 1998–99 including details of the 1998–99 Local Government Finance Settlement. [19298]

Mr. Dewar: The attached table outlines my plans for allocating the total expenditure for Scotland within my responsibility.

I have been able to improve significantly on the plans for the local government settlement. Following extensive consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I propose to increase the level of Government Supported Expenditure by 2.2 per cent.—over £133 million—and the level of Aggregate External Finance by 0.6 per cent., or £33.1 million, in both cases after adjustments for the transfer of responsibility for funding nursery education and the additional resources provided in the current year for policing the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

Next year, Scottish local authorities will receive Government support through AEF of nearly £5.3 billion, £91 million greater than the published plans, which represents over 37 per cent. of the total Scottish Office budget. On top of that local authorities will receive a further £75 million of support to fund pre-school education, £9 million more than the published plans, £7 million for Early Intervention and £1 million for Alternatives to Exclusion, plus £325 million of non-housing capital allocations.

I am also announcing today provisional capping principles which will allow local authorities to increase their capped expenditure by 3.4 per cent. or £191 million, almost £150 million more than the inherited plans. The proposed regime is tiered to allow councils spending close to GAE a greater increase in expenditure than those spending well above GAE.

Government Supported Expenditure

I propose that Government Supported Expenditure (GSE) for 1998–99 should be set at £6,223.9 million. This compares with previous plans of £6,132 million.

Grant Aided Expenditure

Local authorities will incur an estimated £728.8 million on loan and leasing charges in 1998–99. After deducting this sum from the GSE total, £5,495.1 million is available for allocation as Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE). This GAE amount is 3.7 per cent. or almost £198 million higher than that for the current year (after making the above adjustments). I shall announce GAE figures for individual local authorities as soon as possible.

Aggregate External Finance

I further propose that Government support for local authority current expenditure-that is, Aggregte External Finance (AEF) which consists of Revenue Support Grant, Specific Grants and Non-Domestic Rate Income—for 1998–99 should be set at £5,271.3 million, which compares with the previous plans of £5,180 million. Proposals for the distribution of AEF to individual local authorities are likely to be isued to councils before Christmas. I announced yesterday that the National Non-Domestic Rate poundage would be 47.4p, the same as in England.

Capping

I have the power to cap a local authority either where I consider that its planned expenditure is excessive or where there is an excessive increase in its planned expenditure as compared with the previous year. My provisional capping principles for 1998–99 are:

any increase in budget between 1997–98 and 1998–99 of more than 1.75 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is above the council's GAE for 1998–99;

any increase in budget between 1997–98 and 1998–99 of more than 1.25 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is more than 2 per cent. above the council's GAE for 1998–99;

any increase in budget between 1997–98 and 1998–99 of more than 0.75 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is more than 4 per cent. above the council's GAE for 1998–99;

any budget for 1998–99 more than 12.5 per cent. above the Council's GAE assessment (as admusted if necessary) will be excessive save that if that budget is no greater than the budget set by that council for 1997–98, the council will not be capped.

The Scottish Office public expenditure plans: Allocations for 1998–99

£ million

	1997–98 Estimated outturn	*1997–98 Planned Provision*	*1998–99 Planned Provision*	*Changes*	*1998–99 Revised Provision*
Central government expenditure (including public corporations other than nationalised industries)					
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	565	565	538	4.0	542
Industry, enterprise and training	592	591	584	–1.3	583
Roads and transport	284	282	300	–22.8	277
Housing	268	268	261	39.0	300
Scottish Homes loan book sale[1]	–80	–80	0	—	0
Scottish Homes debt repayment[2]	–59	–59	-48	—	–48
Other environmental services	325	325	321	5.6	327
Law, order and protective services[3]	479	479	465	–4.4	461
Education	1,221	1,219	1,245	5.9	1,251
Arts and libraries	81	81	77	0.3	77
Health	4,393	4,376	4,475	106.6	4,581
Social Work services	61	61	61	3.0	64
Other public services[3]	158	158	146	17.5	163
Total central government expenditure	8,289	8,267	8,424	153.4	8,578
Local authority capital expenditure (excluding Water)	568	568	552	—	552
of which:	342	342	325	—	325
Single allocation	180	180	180	—	180
HRA					
Other	45	45	47	—	47
Provision to match receipts from European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund	155	160	176	–52.9	123
Central government support to local authorities' current expenditure[4]	5,255	5,255	5,172	85.6	5,257
of which:					
AEF[5]	5,220	5,220	5,165	87.6	5,252
of which:					
Specific grants[6]	412	412	420	–4.0	416
Nationalised industries' financing limits[7]	22	22	17	9.5	26
Non-Control Total Expenditure from Windfall Tax	21	—	—	74	74
of which:					
New Deal for Schools	9	—	—	27	27
Housing capital receipts initiative	12	—	—	44	44
Childcare	—	—	—	3	3
Total expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibilities[8]	14,309	14,271	14,341	269	14,610
of which, the Scottish Block[9]	13,702	13,685	13,786	182	13,968

[1] Reflects the repayment of loans to the National Loans Fund which will fall due in 1997–98 following the delayed disposal of Scottish Homes portfolio of loans to housing associations.

[2] Scottish Homes' repayment of debt from capital receipts.

[3] From 1998–99 departments will take on responsibility from PRS for the buildings which the government owns and occupies. From 1998–99 they will no longer pay rents to PRS, but will pay capital charges on the value of the property. This has resulted in a reduction in planned expenditure for 1998–99 of some £10 million on the LOPS programme, relating to the Scottish Courts estate, and £10 million on Other Public Services, relating to the Scottish Office, GRO(S) and SRO estates.

[4] Includes Housing Support Grant of £15 million/5 million.

[5] AEF comprises revenue support grant, income from non-domestic rates (NDRI) and grants to local authorities for specific purposes.

[6] Specific grants include–police £334 million/£339 million, urban £45 million/£43 million, mental illness £13 million/£13 million.

[7] Includes Caledonian MacBrayne and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.

[8] As a result of rounding, the figures may not sum to the totals shown.

[9] The Scottish Block comprises all expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretary of State with the exception of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and nationalised industries' external financing requirements.

Renewables Obligation

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about a third round under the Scottish Renewables Obligation. [19299]

Mr. Wilson: A consultation exercise held earlier this year by my Department showed broad support for the Government's approach to developing renewable energy. I am therefore proposing a third order under the SRO to oblige ScottishPower and Hydro-Electric to secure the availability of more capacity from new renewable sources in Scotland.

The first two orders led to 56 renewables projects with a combined capacity of 189MW securing contracts with ScottishPower and Hydro-Electric, although many of these have not yet been commissioned. I am very keen to see SR03, which will come into force in early 1999, again attracting technically sound yet innovative projects which must be extremely competitive on price, with the downward trend in prices seen under SRO2 being continued in so far as that is possible.

Capacity will be made available to those technologies that are able to demonstrate these qualities. On that basis I am minded that the third order should cover wind, small hydro, waste to energy and biomass projects, and that it should also make limited capacity available to small wind schemes and wave power projects. I hope that community-based projects will take advantage of this opportunity.

The Government is committed to a new and strong drive to promote renewables and a review of renewable energy policy is underway. I intend that the SRO3, which represents the culmination of the current programme in Scotland, should be for around 110–120MW in capacity, i.e. about the same size as SR02.

I am aware of certain concerns about the local environmental impact of particular renewables projects, and for that reason I expect prospective developers to consult interested parties, including local planning authorities, at an early stage. Evidence of having done so will be required as part of the application process. Developers are further reminded that the award of a contract under the SRO in no way implies preferential treatment when it comes to the planning process and planning permission will still have to be sought in the usual way.

My Department will shortly be writing to ScottishPower and Hydro-Electric setting out these proposals in more detail and will also issue detailed guidance to prospective applicants under SR03. Developers who are interested in bidding are invited to register their interest with my Department as soon as possible.

Coastal Waters (Radioactive Material)

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will discuss the report of the National Radiological Protection Board Assessment of the Radiological Implications of Dumping in Beaufort's Dyke and Other Coastal Waters from the 1950s with representatives of *(a)* the Clyde Fishermen's Association and *(b)* other fishermen's organisations; and if he will make a statement. [18640]

Mr. Chisholm: The National Radiological Protection Board report concludes that any doses of radiation from the past dumpings identified would be well within the International Commission on Radiological Protections's recommended limit and that further additional monitoring is not required. However, the Board recommended that advice should be drawn up against the possibility, which it acknowledges is remote, that two anti-static devices dumped off Arran in 1958 might be trawled up and washed ashore. My officials will be in touch with the fishermen's association once that advice has been finalised.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Contaminated Land

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the estimated acreage of contaminated land in England; and what proposals his Department has to encourage the reclamation of contaminated land. [18143]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency has estimated that there may be some 300,000 hectares of land across Britain as a whole which is affected, to some extent, by industrial or natural contamination. However, much of this contamination will be relatively minor. In only a small proportion of cases will there be a need for detailed investigation, assessment or remediation either with respect to current risks to human health and the environment or to facilitate the redevelopment of the land.

A range of policy programmes are already in place to encourage the reclamation of derelict and potentially contaminated land. My Department, together with other public bodies including the Environment Agency and the research councils, funds research and development for site investigation and remediation techniques, as well as publishing technical advice and guidance. Planning policies and guidance seek directly to encourage the recycling of brown-field sites rather than permitting the development of greenfield sites, and also seek to ensure that contamination risks are properly dealt with as particular developments are taken forward. Significant sums of public investment in the regeneration of vacant, derelict and contaminated land are committed each year by the statutory regeneration agencies, such as English Partnerships.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment will be announcing shortly proposals for the implementation of legislation providing a statutory regime for the identification and remediation of contaminated land which is not necessarily subject to development proposals, but which is currently causing significant risks to human health or the environment.

Worthing By-pass

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the plans for a Worthing by-pass; and if he will make a statement. [18144]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are currently undertaking a strategic Roads Review. It is intended that the output of the Roads Review should include, firstly, a short-term investment programme; and, secondly, a programme of studies to look at the remaining problems—from which we will develop the medium and longer-term investment programme.

Once the Roads Review has been completed, we expect to be able to set out what future work is needed on plans for the A27 at Worthing.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the original projected costs to public funds and what are the latest forecast outturn costs of the Jubilee Line extension. [18221]

Ms Glenda Jackson: At project commencement in October 1993, the estimated overall cost of the Jubilee Line extension was £2.1 billion at cash outturn prices. This included £1.9 billion ring-fenced cost, funded by Government grant, the rest being costs for associated works, funded by the London Transport core business. A further £100 million in ring-fenced grant was later added to mitigate the rise in costs following the New Austrian Tunnelling Method collapse on the Heathrow Express project in 1994. London Transport now estimate outturn cost at £2.76 billion. Of this total, £2 billion will be directly funded by ring-fenced grant; the remainder will be met from London Transport's core resources (which include substantial Government grant) and from private sector contributions of over £400 million, over £100 million of which have already been received.

South Yorkshire Supertram

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were *(a)* the projected and *(b)* the outturn costs to public funds of the South Yorkshire Supertram. [18220]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The South Yorkshire Supertram scheme was forecast to cost £240.610 million in outturn prices. The final outturn expenditure reported by South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive in March 1997 was £240.609 million.

Fatal Accidents at Work

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what long-term measures his Department *(a)* has in place and *(b)* proposes to reduce the number of fatal accidents at work; and if he will make a statement. [18574]

Angela Eagle: The Government share my hon. Friend's concern about the increase in the number of fatal accidents at work in 1996–97. In July, I approved the Health and Safety Commission's Plan of Work for 1997–98. The Plan of Work sets out the actions that the Commission and the Health and Safety Executive have agreed with me should be taken now and in the longer term to reduce fatalities, and more generally to promote health and safety in the workplace.

Nuclear Sites (Emergency Plans)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the report commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive on nuclear site emergency plan extendability; and if he will make a statement. [18367]

Angela Eagle: Yes. A copy of the report of the review, commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and undertaken by WS Atkins Science and Technology on the extendibility of local authority plans for responding to nuclear emergencies, will be placed in the Library.

Extendibility was one of many issues considered by the Hinkley Point C Public Inquiry. In response to the recommendations, HSE's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate published in 1990 a quantified scenario against which extended plans could be drawn up and tested. The scenario was last used to drive the Heysham Level 2 emergency exercise "Madonna" in September 1997. The review report was part of a process of evaluation which, together with the experience of the Heysham exercise, will be fed into a paper on outline planning for extendibility which will be considered by the Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group (NEPLG) for issue during 1998.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the likely effects on each local authority of returning non-domestic rates to local government; [18346]

(2) what plans he has to incorporate a resource equalisation scheme into the SSA in respect of the return of non-domestic rates to local authorities. [18347]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government will be publishing shortly a consultation paper on options for the localisation of non-domestic rates. The effects on individual authorities will depend on the specifications of the scheme, which will not be decided until after we have seen the responses to the consultation. However, resource equalisation between authorities will clearly remain essential.

Housing Associations

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much funding has been allocated in 1997 to housing associations for the conversion of properties to meet housing needs. [18570]

Mr. Raynsford: Allocations are made by financial year, rather than calendar year. In 1996–97 £191 million public funding was allocated to housing associations through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and local authorities' Social Housing Grant for the acquisition and rehabilitation or conversion of properties to meet housing need.

A further £43 million was allocated to housing associations for improvement or conversion works to their existing stock.

New Housing (Water Supply)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of procedures to take account of local water supply in respect of planning for new housing. [18524]

Mr. Raynsford Planning Policy Guidance Note 12 (PPG12) already requires local planning authorities to take account of the capacity of existing infrastructure and the need for additional facilities in preparing their development plans. However, we are currently considering the need to revise and update PPG12 and we will consider whether further advice is required on this issue as part of that review.

Construction and Agriculture Industries

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many inspections have taken place of working conditions in the construction and agriculture industries in 1997 to date. [18572]

Angela Eagle: In the period 1 January 1997–21 November 1997, the Field Operations Directorate of the Health and Safety Executive made 31,843 inspection contacts in the construction industry. Inspection contacts in the agricultural sector over the same time period were 11,946. In addition to inspections, contacts are made for other purposes, including the investigation of accidents and complaints and for enforcement.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many inspectors are employed by his Department to inspect working conditions in the construction and agriculture industries in England and Wales. [18573]

Angela Eagle: For England and Wales, the Field Operations Directorate of the Health and Safety Executive has allocated 103 operational inspectors to the construction sector and 65.9 to the agricultural sector.

Radioactive Materials

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list all those locations licensed by his Department for the use of radioactive materials; and if he will make a statement. [18368]

Angela Eagle: There are 40 nuclear licensed sites, which are licensed and regulated by the Health and Safety Executive under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended). As required under Section 6 of this Act, a list of these sites is held by the Department of Trade and Industry and is available for inspection by members of the public. Copies are also available for inspection at the Health and Safety Executive's Regional and other main offices.

In general, radioactive materials and waste are regulated under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (as amended by the Environment Act 1995) and the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1985. Under the Radioactive Substances Act, the keeping and use of radioactive material, other than on nuclear licensed sites, must be registered with the appropriate Agency (that is, the Environment Agency in England and Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland, and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland). In addition, the Act also requires that the disposal of radioactive waste from nuclear licensed sites, and the accumulation and disposal of radioactive waste from all other sites, are authorised by the appropriate Agency. Certain classes of users and radioactive material are exempted from some or all of these requirements, by Exemption Orders which are Statutory Instruments made under the Act, or, in the case of certain Ministry of Defence sites, as a consequence of Crown Immunity.

The Environment Agency advise that in England and Wales there are currently in force approximately 5,700 registrations for the keeping and use of radioactive material and approximately 1,100 authorisations for the accumulation and/or disposal of radioactive waste. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency advise that in Scotland about 700 premises are registered for the keeping and use of radioactive material, and about 400 premises are authorised for the accumulation and/or disposal of radioactive waste. The Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service advise that in Northern Ireland approximately 120 sites are registered for the keeping or use of radioactive materials, of which approximately 25 are authorised to accumulate and dispose of radioactive waste.

Applications and certificates for registrations and authorisations under the Radioactive Substances Act (except any information specifically excluded by virtue of Section 39(1) of the Act on national security or commercial grounds) are available for public inspection at the area offices of the Environment Agency (in England and Wales); at the regional offices of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (in Scotland); and at the Head Office of the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland. No centrally held list is available. Subject to Section 25 of the Act, the appropriate agencies are also required to provide copies of registration and authorisation certificates and applications to relevant local authorities, which must themselves—subject to the provisions of Section 39(2)—make publicly available the information which they hold.

Marine Accidents

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Marine Accidents Investigation Branch report on the accident involving the vessels "Seahorse" and "Exodus". [18499]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This accident, which took place in Irish territorial waters, was investigated by both Irish and UK accident investigators in full co-operation. The Irish authorities intend to publish their report.

The UK's Marine Accidents Investigation Branch conducted the investigation under their "Inspector's Investigation" procedure whereby the report is not formally published but is made available to involved and interested parties. A short summary of the report will be included in the forthcoming MAIB "Safety Digest". The next edition will be published early next year. Copies will be placed in the library of the House.

Accidents (Passengers and Crew)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each of the last 10 years, by incident, the number of passengers and crew killed in accidents involving *(a)* the rail network, *(b)* UK registered aircraft or aircraft within United Kingdom airspace, *(c)* ferries in the United Kingdom waters or registered in the United Kingdom and *(d)* river craft operating in the United Kingdom. [18173]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 18 November 1997]:* Individual accidents could be listed only at disproportionate cost. The number of fatalities in each year are as follows:

Passenger and staff/crew fatalities in transport accidents[1]

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Railways[2]	4	36	12	1	6	1	0	8	2	1
UK registered aircraft or aircraft in UK airspace[3]	62	278	76	45	23	40	27	38	30	43
UK registered passenger ferries or passenger ferries in UK waters	190	[4]0	[4]0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
River craft operating in the UK[5]	[6]—	3	51	[6]—	2	2	1	1	3	4

[1] As far as possible the fatalities included in the table are those due to an aircraft, train or vessel accident, for example a collision. Fatalities due to the movement of a vehicle etc, for example due to the opening or closing of a carriage door at a railway station, are excluded.
[2] For railways, figures for 1991 are for the period January 1991 to March 1992. Those for the subsequent periods shown relate to financial years. Railways includes all railway undertakings in Great Britain.
[3] Figures cover both public transport flights and general aviation (executive, club and group, private and training flights). Most fatalities occur in this latter group.
[4] There were in addition six fatalities in 1988 and two in 1989 involving a United Kingdom registered merchant vessel. Available records do not indicate whether the vessels were ferries.
[5] Accidents reported to British Waterways.
[6] Not available.

Railways (Public Accountability)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of public accountability for the railway system. [18799]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are committed to establishing more effective and accountable regulation of the railways to ensure that the system is run in the public interest. As a first step towards improving public accountability, we have introduced new Objectives, Instructions and Guidance for the Franchising Director and a concordat with the Rail Regulator, designed to strengthen railways regulation. We are also conducting a wide ranging review which will look at all aspects of the rail industry, including the shortcomings of the sanctions already available to the regulators.

Government Buildings

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on Government policy on insuring their building estate against fire and other risks. [18837]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The policy on insurance is set out in Chapter 27 of Government Accounting. There is a requirement to consult HM Treasury before taking out commercial insurance, except for:

(a) building insurance where insurance is a condition of a lease and the lessor will not accept an indemnity;

(b) overall site insurance; and

(c) insurance in respect of boilers and lifts.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions since Crown immunity was lifted Government buildings have been insured against fire and general risks; if he will list the buildings involved. [18838]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* My Department does not keep a central record of building insured against fire or other risks.

Political Donations

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what meetings he or his ministers have had with individuals who are connected with housebuilders or construction companies and who have made donations to the Labour party of more than £5,000. [18979]

Mr. Prescott: My Ministers and I have met representatives of the construction and housebuilding industries on numerous occasions as part of our policy responsibilities for efficient construction, land use planning, housing, transport and environmental sustainability.

Information on donations to the Labour Party at more than £5,000 is published in the Labour Annual Report Donations to the Conservative Party are not of course disclosed.

Thorne and Hatfield Moors

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much of the area of Thorne and Hatfield Moors is currently in the process of being returned to the legal ownership of English Nature; and when this will be completed. [18972]

Angela Eagle: In 1992 Fisons, the predecessor of Levingtons, gave the freehold ownership of 1,175 hectares at Thorne and Hatfield Moors to English Nature. Legal arrangements for the management of the sites for their nature conservation interest were concluded in 1994 and in 1995 this area of land was declared a National Nature Reserve.

Two further areas of 205.7 hectares and 80 hectares were handed back to English Nature in 1996. Legal arrangements for the handback of these two areas is not yet complete.

These areas represent 56 per cent. of the SSSI.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to issue new guidance on the conduct of compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement. [19448]

Ms Armstrong: I have today published a new Departmental Circular No. 16/97 (Welsh Office 62/97) which gives authorities guidance on the conduct of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT).

The guidance reflects the new regulations on CCT laid before Parliament on 21 November. These amended the existing framework for CCT in England and Wales to make it more flexible and encourage local authorities to move to a Best Value-based approach to service delivery. The new guidance will allow authorities to pursue the principles of Best Value in a manner consistent with the purpose of the CCT legislation (that is that local authorities carry out work only if they do so competitively) and provide more flexibility to tendering.

A draft of the guidance formed part of a package of proposed changes to CCT which went out to consultation on 25 July. The new Circular takes account of the views of 112 local authorities and related organisations, professional bodies and private sector interests who responded specifically to the draft. A further 19 responses were received by the Welsh Office. Copies of the responses are held in the DETR's Library.

The guidance sets out the Government's views on how CCT should be carried out in the period before Best Value is implemented. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that competition is undertaken in an open and transparent manner and that service users and providers are consulted on the level and standard of services to be provided. Local authorities should secure services which are economic, effective and efficient and in which considerations of price and quality are properly balanced. Competing bids need to be evaluated objectively and authorities need to deal fairly with potential contractors to ensure that tendering practice does not advantage any one potential supplier or suppliers.

The new guidance applies immediately to those services currently subject to CCT. The Secretary of State will take into account the extent to which there has been a contravention of the guidance in determining whether or not authorities have acted anti-competitively.

Local Authorities (Best Value Duty)

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his decision about which local authorities will pilot the duty of best value; and if he will make a statement. [19462]

Ms Armstrong: I intend to announce these decisions later this week. My Department will write to all local authorities and other organisations that submitted proposals to pilot Best Value. I shall place a list of proposals, together with a record of the decision taken on each proposal, in the Library on the day of the announcement.

Nuclear Materials (Transport)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had concerning the principle of state liability for damages to citizens and the environment from an accident involving the shipment of nuclear materials. [18403]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

I have had no such discussions. Under UK law, which is in line with international conventions, the nuclear operator is exclusively liable for nuclear damage. All nuclear operators are required to have third party insurance arrangements, which include risks associated with nuclear material in transit.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Berlaymont

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the current costs of the Berlaymont renovation and connected expenses; what was the original projected cost; if he will make a statement on the presence of asbestos in that building; and which other Community institutions are in the process of relocation. [18480]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Berlaymont building was evacuated in 1991, after the discovery of asbestos. The cost of renovation is estimated at ECU 325 million. The cost of asbestos removal is estimated at ECU 90 million. These costs will initially be borne by the Belgian Government (which owns the building). The Commission will reimburse the renovation costs (but not the cost of asbestos removal) over 27 years and will pay ECU 50 million for the building's shell. Legal ownership of the Berlaymont will then pass to them.

The only Community institution in the process of relocating is the European Parliament, which recently moved into a new building in Brussels and is constructing new premises in Strasbourg.

Decrypting Powers

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if decrypting powers resulting from discussions centring on COM (97) 503 will be available to *(a)* Europol and *(b)* agencies of the European Community; and if he will make a statement. [18489]

Mr. Robin Cook: COM (97) 53 is a consultation document. It does not propose specific legislation but seeks comments on the basis of which the Commission intends to come forward with detailed proposals. Its primary focus is on digital signature rather than on encryption. It makes no prescription for decryption powers.

Agenda 2000

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his Department's policy towards the EU Commission's Agenda 2000. [18856]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Enlargement of the European Union (EU) will enhance stability and prosperity across Europe and is strongly in the national interest. Reform of the EU's main policies is essential for enlargement to be successful. That is why we broadly welcome the proposals made in the European Commission's Agenda 2000 document, in particular:

- to begin EU accession negotiations as soon as possible with those candidate countries that are ready while ensuring an all-inclusive enlargement process.
- to maintain the ceiling on the Community budget's Own Resources at 1.27 per cent. of EU-GDP throughout the next financing period from 2000–2006.
- to reform the CAP by cutting support prices and increasing targeted measures for rural areas and the environment.
- to reform the Structural and Cohesion Funds while maintaining their budget ceiling at 0.46 per cent. of EU-GDP and treating new and present Member States fairly.

The Luxembourg European Council on 12–13 December 1997 will receive a report from the General Affairs Council on Agenda 2000. We expect the European Council to invite the Commission to open accession negotiations and to table draft legislative proposals early in 1998.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts Government Ministers have maintained with the representatives of missing persons from Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and if the British Government will be providing specific assistance in order to determine the fate of the missing persons. [18826]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I met representatives of the "Women of Srebrenica" group of relatives of victims Srebrenica on 19 November. We are currently considering an appeal for donations to the 1998 exhumation project, launched on 26 November by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government have provided to the international programme to identify and exhume mass grave sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to identify the bodies of missing persons. [18827]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are currently considering how to respond to an appeal of 26 November for donations to the International Criminal Tribunal's exhumation programme for 1998. The British contingent of SFOR provides a secure environment within which ICTY's forensic teams operate.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral Answer of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 765, what estimate he has made of the proportion of the decline in youth unemployment in the United Kingdom over the last four years which is attributable *(a)* to the fall in numbers in that age group and *(b)* to other factors. [18569]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* About 30 per cent. of the reduction in unemployment among young people in the last four years has been due to a decline in the overall population in this age group. The rest is due to a rise in the proportion of young people remaining in full-time education and to the economic upswing, which started earlier in this country than in other major European countries.

EU Council

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for

December; and if he will list the major European Union events for the next six months. [19231]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information is as follows:

Monthly forecast of business for December 1997

	Venue	*Event*
1 December	Brussels	Ecofin Council
1 December	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
December 4	Brussels	Health Council
December 4–5	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
December 8	Brussels	Energy Council
December 8–9	Brussels	General Affairs Council
December 10–11	Brussels	Transport Council
December 12–13	Luxembourg	European Council
December 15	Brussels	Social Affairs Council
December 15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
December 16–17	Brussels	Environment Council
December 18–19	Copenhagen	OSCE Ministerial Council
December 18–19	Brussels	Fisheries Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

1 December: Ecofin Council

Approval of agenda.

Approval of the list of A items.

Preparation of Stage 3 of European Monetary Union:

Follow-up to the Amsterdam European Council.

Date of introduction of euro notes and coins (possible item).

Adoption of common position on the Regulation on technical characteristics of coins (possible item).

Taxation policy.

Fiscalis programme.

Export credits (possible item).

1 December: Telecommunications Council

Adoption of the agenda.

Approval of the list of A points.

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 97/33/EC with regard to operator number portability and carrier pre-selection: Common position.

Proposal for a Council Decision adopting a multiannual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe: Adoption.

Internet: Open debate.

Proposal for a Council decision adopting a multiannual Community action plan to promote safe use of the Internet: Presentation by Commission.

Communication from the Commission to the Council: "Ensuring security and trust in electronic communication towards a European framework for digital signatures and encryption": Council conclusions.

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on connected telecommunications equipment and the mutual recognition of the conformity of equipment: Progress report.

Communication from the Commission: "Strategy and guidelines on the further development of mobile and wireless communications": Exchange of views—Council conclusions.

Communication from the Commission on the implementation of the telecommunications regulatory package: First update—Presentation by the Commission.

Green Paper on the regulatory implications of convergence in the telecommunications, audiovisual and information technology sectors: Presentation by the Commission.

Other business: Contribution from the United Kingdom delegation on the problems posed by the coming of the millennium.

4 December: Health Council

Approval of the agenda.

Adoption of the list of A items.

Tobacco advertising: Common position.

Rare diseases: Orientation debate.

Pollution related diseases—Injury prevention.

Women's health: Adoption of Resolution.

Green Paper on Food Law and Commission Communication on consumer health and food safety: Orientation debate.

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies: Orientation debate.

European Union/United States taskforce on communicable diseases: Orientation debate.

Draft recommendation on screening donors and donations: Presentation by the Commission.

Any other business.

4–5 December: Justice and Home Affairs Council

Adoption of the agenda.

Approval of the list of A items.

Fight against organised crime:

Draft joint action to create a Judicial Contact Network.

Draft joint action to establish a mechanism for evaluating the application and implementation at national level of international undertakings in the fight against organised crime.

Draft joint action making it a criminal offence to participate in a criminal organisation in the Member States of the European Union.

Draft joint action on making corruption in the private sector a criminal offence.

Draft joint action establishing a programme of exchanges, training and co-operation for persons responsible for action to combat organised crime (Falcone Programme).

Report on the state of organised crime in the European Union in 1996.

Europol: Trafficking in human beings.

Draft convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters between the Member States of the European Union.

Customs co-operation:

Draft convention on mutual assistance and co-operation between Customs Administrations (Naples II).

Draft resolution adopting a strategic programme for the Customs Administrations (3rd Pillar).

Draft Convention on driving disqualifications.

Draft Convention on jurisdiction, recognition and enforcement of judgements in matrimonial matters (Brussels II)

Preparation of structured dialogue:

Draft annotated agenda for the meeting with the Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs.

Rule of law.

Eurodac:

Draft Convention concerning the establishment of "Eurodac" for the comparison of fingerprints of applicants for asylum.

Technical specifications and financial aspects.

Temporary protection.

Influx of immigrants from Iraq.

Draft joint action introducing a programm of training, exchanges and co-operation in the field of asylum, immigration, and crossing of external borders (Odysseus Programme).

Draft Resolution laying down the priorities for co-operation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs for the period from 1 January 1998 to the date of entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam.

Achievements in the field of Justice and Home Affairs during 1997 (Draft report to the European Council).

Other business.

8 December: Energy Council

Gas liberalisation: Common position.

Energy Framework: Commission presentation.

ALTENER II: Decision.

SYNERGY: Renewal for 1998.

Renewables: Commission presentation on White Paper.

Co-generation: Resolution on Commission report.

Energy Charter Treaty: Progress report.

8–9 December: General Affairs Council

Adoption of A points.

EP Resolutions of 17–21 November.

Preparation for European Council in Luxembourg.

Agenda 2000.

Post-Amsterdam: Policy Planning Cell.

OSCE: Copenhagen Ministerial.

Mediterranean Policy: Negotiating Mandates for Syria.

World Trade Organisation: Financial Services Negotiations.

Transatlantic Relations: Reports on European Union/United States and European Union/Canada Summits.

Relations with Switzerland (Possible item).

Russia: Cooperation Council (Possible item).

Former Yugoslavia: Political situation and Autonomous Trade measures.

Middle East Peace Process (Possible item).

European Union Armaments Policy (Possible A point).

Any other business.

10–11 December: Transport Council

Mandates for Maritime negotiations with India and China: For adoption.

Amendment to Directive 95/21 on Port State Control: Political agreement.

Maritime external relations: Progress report.

Extension of maritime cabotage regulation to European Economic Area: Debate.

Aviation negotiations with the United States: Debate.

European Aviation Safety Authority: Debate.

Air Traffic Management: Progress report.

Airport Charging Directive: Progress report.

Directive on Cabin Crew Training: Progress report.

Overflying of Serbia: Debate.

Agreement with EUROCONTROL and ESA on satellite navigation: For Council agreement.

Directive on Heavy Goods Vehicle Taxation and charging: For common position.

Negotiations with Switzerland: Commission report.

Directive on Vehicle Registration Documents: For Political agreement.

12–13 December: European Council

Agenda not yet available.

15 December: Social Affairs Council

Approval of the agenda.

Adoption of A points (possible item).

Proposal for a Council Directive on the framework agreement on part-time work: Adoption.

Commission Proposal for guidelines on the employment policy of Member State in 1998: Possible adoption.

Draft Council Decision establishing community activities on research, analysis and co-operation in the field of employment and labour market: Adoption.

Follow-up to the Davignon report: Employee involvement in the European Company Stature: Debate.

Extension of Directives 94/45/EC (European Works Council) and 96/34/EC (Parental Leave) to the United Kingdom: Adoption.

Proposal for a Council Regulation amending the (EEC) Regulation No. 1408/71 on social security for migrant workers (extension to all insured persons): Adoption.

Commission White Paper on the sectors excluded from the Working Time Directive: Debate.

Proposal for a Council Directive on the burden of proof of discrimination cases on the basis of sex: Final adoption.

Follow-up to the fourth World Conference on women (Peking, September 1995): Presidency report.

Other business:

Commission presentation of the European Court of Justice judgement in Marschall.

Commission Presentation of Community Action Plan for Free Movement of Workers.

Commission presentation of draft directive on transferability of occupational pensions.

Commission presentation of extension of Regulation 1408/71 to Third-Countries Nationals.

15–16 December: Agriculture Council

Agenda not yet available.

16–17 December: Environment Council

Agenda not yet available.

18–19 December: OSCE Ministerial Council

Agenda not yet available.

18–19 December: Fisheries Council

Annual total allowable catches.

Fisheries guide prices.

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

European calendar: December 1997 to May 1998

	Venue	*Event*
December 1997		
1	Brussels	Ecofin Council
1	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
2	Brussels	Political Committee
3–4	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
4	Brussels	Health Council
4–5	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
8	Brussels	Energy Council
8–9	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	Transport Council

European calendar: December 1997 to May 1998

	Venue	*Event*
12–13	Luxembourg	European Council
15	Brussels	Social Affairs Council
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
15–19	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
16–17	Brussels	Environment Council
18–19	Copenhagen	OSCE Ministerial Council
18–19	Brussels	Fisheries Council
January 1998		
1		UK Presidency commences
8	London	Visit of college of Commissioners
12	Brussels	Fisheries Council (tbc)
12–16	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
15	Brussels	Political Committee
19	Brussels	Ecofin Council
19–20	Brussels	Agriculture Council
26–27	Brussels	General Affairs Council
28–29	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
29–30	Birmingham	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)
February 1998		
3	Brussels	Political Committee
9–11	Costa Rica	EU/San José Group
12	Brussels	Research Council
12–13	Panama	EU/Rio Group
12–13	London	Political Committee
13–15	Cambridge	Internal Market (Informal)
16	Brussels	Ecofin Council
16–17	Brussels	Agriculture Council
16–20	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
23–24	Brussels	General Affairs Council
26	Brussels	Telecom Council
March 1998		
3	Brussels	Political Committee
9	Brussels	ECOFIN Council (t.b.c.)
9–13	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
13–14	London	Joint Social and Education (Informal)
14–15	Edinburgh	Foreign Ministers' Informal
15–17	Manchester	Seminar for Cultural Ministers
16–17	Brussels	Agriculture Council
17	Brussels	Transport Council
19	Brussels	Political Committee
19	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
20–22	York	ECOFIN Informal
23	Brussels	Environment Council
24	Brussels	Fisheries Council
30	Brussels	Internal Market Council
30–31	Brussels	General Affairs Council
30–31	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
31–1 April	Moscow	G8 Energy Ministerial
April 1998		
1–3	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
2–4	London	ASEM II
6	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
7	Brussels	Political Committee
16	Brussels	Political Committee
20–21	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
21	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council
23	Luxembourg	Consumer Affairs Council
24–26	Chester	Environment and Transport (Informal)
27–28	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
29–30	Brussels	European Parliament
30	Luxembourg	Health Council

European calendar: December 1997 to May 1998

	Venue	*Event*
May 1998		
5	Brussels	Political Committee (t.b.c.)
7	Brussels	Industry Council
10–12	Newcastle	Agriculture (Informal)
11	Brussels	Energy Council
11	Brussels	Euro-Med Energy Ministerial
12	Brussels	Political Committee
11–15	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
18	Brussels	Development Council
18	Brussels	Internal Market
19	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
25–26	Brussels	General Affairs Council
25–25	Brussels	Agricultural Council
27–28	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
28–29	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council

Amsterdam Treaty

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal advice he has received over the challenge to the Protocol on asylum in Title VI of the Amsterdam Treaty based on Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and if he will make a statement. [17913]

Ms Quin: I have been asked to reply.

We are not aware of any formal legal challenge to the Asylum Protocol. As we have made clear, we will, in accordance with United Kingdom asylum law, continue to give individual consideration to asylum applications from European Union nationals as we do to other nationals. We do not therefore consider that any question arises as to the United Kingdom's adherence to Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the Aid and Trade Provision projects currently in place by country, their costs and their expected dates of completion. [18950]

Mr. Foulkes: The following table shows the financial year in which DFID expenditure is expected to end for projects currently under implementation and for projects for which there are ongoing loan subsidy payments.

Country	*Project*	*ATP commitment*	*Expenditure ends*
Bangladesh	Bhairab Bridge: Pre-Feasibility Study/Appraisal Report	0.3	1997–98
China	Cosco Ships	13.8	2007–08
China	Yue Yang Power Station	55.7	2007–08
China	Bohai Aluminium Mill I	8.8	2008–09
China	Xinjiang Ethylene Plant	47.2	2011–12
China	Urumqi PTA	33.7	2007–08
China	Fushun Heat and Power Plant	11.7	1997–98
China	Urumqi PX	13.0	2008–09
China	Dalian Urban Traffic Control	1.0	1997–98
China	Nanjing Airport Project	9.4	1997–98
China	Liuzhou Water Treatment Works	1.9	1997–98

Country	Project	ATP commitment	Expenditure ends
China	Guangzhou Metro Overhead Catenary System	2.5	1998–99
China	Guangzhou Metro Ventilation System Project	1.3	1999–2000
China	Hepu Water Project	1.1	1998–99
China	Zhangjiagang Water Project	0.9	1999–2000
China	Wuxi Water Project	1.1	1999–2000
China	Shandong Water Projects	3.1	1999–2000
China	Jiangyin Yangtze River Bridge Project	21.1	1999–2000
Columbia	System X	5.1	2010–11
Egypt	Maghara Coal Mine	0.1	1997–98
Ghana	South Eastern Districts Water Supply Project	5.1	1999–2000
Ghana	National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) Centres Support Project	3.6	1998–99
Ghana	Accra Waste Project	7.8	2001–02
Indonesia	Steel Bridging	6.6	2011–12
Indonesia	Steel Bridging II	2.7	2015–16
Indonesia	Navigational Aids	6.4	2012–13
Indonesia	Scattered Diesels	5.9	2013–14
Indonesia	Cigading Port Extension	13.3	2014–15
Indonesia	Radio Studio Rehabilitation	5.0	2015–16
Indonesia	Cigading/Serpong Railway Rehabilitation	24.7	2015–16
Indonesia	Radio Communication Systems for Ministry/Forest	34.1	2015/16
Indonesia	Citayam/Cibinong Railway	20.1	2015/16
Indonesia	Western Universities Equipment	13.7	2016/17
Indonesia	Flight Simulator	5.0	2016/17
Indonesia	Bali and Medan Airport Security	10.5	2016/17
Indonesia	Jambi Power Station	5.3	2016/17
Indonesia	Samarinda Power Station	12.6	1998/99
Indonesia	Samarinda Transmission Line	1.6	1997/98
Indonesia	150/500 KV Substation Project	15.5	1997/98
Indonesia	Piston Engines Research Laboratory	4.6	1998/99
Indonesia	Science and Technology Project: (Java University)	4.9	1998/99
Jordan	Walking Draglines	4.7	2001/02
Lesotho	Muela Hydropower Project	4.8	1998/99
Morocco	Tetouan Gas Turbines	10.9	1999/2000
Pakistan	Karachi Water II	6.6	1997/98
Pakistan	Fire Crash Tenders	2.5	1998/99
Panama	Gas Turbine Power Station	6.7	2002/03
Philippines	Airport Security Systems	4.2	2000/01
Philippines	Steel Bridging	9.2	1999/2000
Thailand	Mini Hydros	4.1	2000/01
Turkey	Natural Gas Conversion	58.7	2008/09
Turkey	Equipment Package State Universities	23.4	1997/98
Zimbabwe	Supply of AWD Bedford Trucks	16.1	1997/98
Zimbabwe	AWD Trucks Delivery	0.8	1997/98
Zimbabwe	ATC Radar Phase II	4.3	1997/98
Zimbabwe	300 Landrovers	1.4	1998/99

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of jobs which will be lost in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland as a result of the discontinuance of ATP. [18949]

Mr. Foulkes: As there has been no change in the overall volume or tying status of the aid programme we would anticipate that closing the ATP scheme would have no impact on UK jobs.

Street Children

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the aid and advice currently provided by her Department to countries which have street children. [18968]

Mr. Foulkes: As most of Department for International Development's (DFID) bilateral projects cover the wider population it is not possible to isolate expenditure on specific target groups within them. Although data may be readily available for projects designed specifically for children, expenditure on all areas which impinge on children cannot be separated from more general expenditure.

DFID is currently supporting the following non-governmental projects aimed at assisting street children through our Joint Funding Scheme (JFS):

Agency	Country	Project name	1996–97	1997–98	1999–99	1999–20
Childhope	Brazil	Judicial and Institutional Protection of Child and Adolescent	£13,714	£30,713	£30,745	£30,779
Childhope	Brazil	Projeto Ibeji for the Streetchildren	33,062	50,636	49,132	49,744
Childhope	Philippines	Development of Education in the Street	34,920	19,275	—	—
Homeless International	India	Support for Street Children	21,812	21,869	22,351	—
International Childcare Trust	Kenya	Street Children's Project	36,250	30,227	35,352	—
International Children's Trust	Ecuador	Street Children of Guayaquil	85,500	86,200	99,000	—
Jubilee Action	Brazil	Street Girls' Education, Training Centre and Residential Home	—	86,247	61,239	44,911
Teesside Council for Voluntary Service	Peru	Care, Education etc for Street Children	13,272	30,451	—	—
Toybox Charity	Guatemala	The Tower—Rehabilitation Centre for Streetchildren	18,822	19,055	—	—
			£257,352	£378,713	£297,819	£125,434

Funding has also been provided to those agencies which receive block grants through the JFS in support of a variety of street children initiatives in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Mixed Credits

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries she expects to qualify for assistance using mixed credits. [18951]

Mr. Foulkes: We would expect to use mixed credits only in the poorer countries. Any mixed credit projects will be subject to the agreed strategy and sectoral focus for each country which would have the primary aim of helping to eradicate poverty.

NGO Projects

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of people employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time by the NGO projects which are funded by her Department. [18954]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting a very substantial number of NGO projects across a range of programmes. This includes our volunteer programme through which we are funding around 2,500 volunteers working full time in developing countries, as well as support staff in the UK. We are unable, however, to give an estimate of the total number employed as this information is not held centrally.

Cuba

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what European Community humanitarian aid is currently being supplied to Cuba. [17892]

Mr. Foulkes: In 1997, the European Community has provided humanitarian aid worth 8.6 million ecu (about £6 million) to the Cuban population. This was mostly in the form of medicines, medical and stomatological equipment, food stuffs, textile material, and hygiene and maintenance products, provided through international NGOs to support medical services in the country. A further 8 million ecu (£5.7 million) is to be provided under a similar programme in 1998.

UN (National Curriculum)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make representations to her Ministerial colleagues to include the topic of the United Nations within the National Curriculum. [18790]

Mr. Foulkes: We hold ongoing discussions with the Department for Education and Employment on the place of development education in the national curriculum. This includes the role of the United Nations in development.

Aid Assessment

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will publish the list of countries in which her Department has assessed the UK to be not well placed to make an impact. [18952]

Mr. Foulkes: My Department has not produced such a list. The impact the UK can have in a particular country depends on a number of factors including the nature and quality of the relationship and the extent to which we share policy objectives. These may change over time and will be reviewed in our country strategy papers and in the annual resource allocation round.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if she will make a statement about her Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18899]

Mr. Foulkes: No tally is kept of ministerial announcements, which come in many forms. Announcements are made in the first instance to the House when it is appropriate to do so.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Ian Magill

Mr. Walker: To ask the Attorney-General if he will refer the case of Mr. Ian Magill, sentenced at Belfast Crown Court on 14 November, to the Court of Appeal on the ground of undue leniency. [18503]

The Attorney-General: The Criminal Justice Act 1988, which creates the power to refer a sentence I consider to be unduly lenient to the Court of Appeal, limits that power to sentences imposed for certain offences specified in the Act or in Orders made under it. My power does not extend to the offences for which Ian Patrick Magill was sentenced.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Further Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the average weekly income of *(a)* students in further education as part of the New Deal and *(b)* students in further education. [17398]

Dr. Howells: Young people in the full-time education and training option within the New Deal for 18–24 year olds will receive an allowance equivalent to their usual benefits. No figures are centrally available in respect of other students in further education.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of the impact on student numbers in further education by 1999–2000 of the funding announced on 12 November. [17397]

Dr. Howells: The additional funding announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is for 1998–99

and provides for an additional 20,000 full-time equivalents which could equate to between 70,000 to 80,000 actual students. Decisions on funding for financial year 1999–2000 and beyond will be announced next summer in the light of the Government's comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the funding for further education he announced on 12 November. [17394]

Dr. Howells: The additional funding, announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, for further education in England next year provides for the resumption of growth on a financially sound basis. The funding provides for an additional 20,000 full-time equivalent students, with the efficiency squeeze on the sector restricted to the costs arising from inflation.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what potential additional sources of income for the further education sector he has assessed; and if he will make a statement; [17403]

(2) if he will make a statement on the sources of the additional funding for further education for the year 1998–99. [17413]

Dr. Howells: On 12 November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced additional funding for the Further Education sector next year totalling £83 million. This includes an extra £20 million from employers in respect of employer-led provision. Colleges will also have the opportunity to bid for well over £100 million worth of the New Deal education and training budget next year and, in 1998 and 1999, for some £140 million available from Objective 4 of the European Social Fund to help prepare workers for industrial change.

Diving Courses

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was spent by the Further Education Funding Council on funding courses leading to PADI levels 1 and 2 qualifications in each year since 1992–93. [17823]

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when funding by the Further Education Funding Council for the provision of diving courses leading to PADI level 1 and 2 courses was cancelled. [17821]

Dr. Howells: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Further Education Funding Council to write to my hon. Friend concerning these matters.

Disability Rights Task Force

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will announce the terms of reference and membership of the Disability Rights Task Force. [19471]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Disability Rights Task Force's Terms of Reference are:

"To consider how best to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people within the context of our wider society, and to make recommendations on the role and functions of a Disability Rights Commission. To provide the latter by March 1998 and to provide a full report of its recommendations on wider issues no later than July 1999.

The Task Force will take full account of the costs as well as the benefits of any proposals, so far as is quantifiable and practicable, and in particular ensure that its recommendations for a Disability Rights Commission achieve value for money for the taxpayer."

The following have been invited to serve as members of the Task Force:

Name	
Stephen Alambritis	Head of Press and Parliamentary Affairs, Federation of Small Businesses
Bob Benson	Director of Disability Scotland
Jane Campbell	Member of the National Centre for Independent Living and British Council of Organisations of Disabled People
Caroline Gooding	Member of Trades Union Disability Alliance
David Grayson	Chair of the National Disability Council, Business Links National Advisory Panel, a director of Business in the Community
Rachel Hurst	Chair of Rights Now
David Jenkins	General Secretary of Welsh TUC
Su Jenkins	Legal Adviser, J. Sainsbury Plc
Brian Lamb	Assistant Director and Head of Public Affairs, SCOPE
Colin Low	Vice Chair, Royal National Institute for the Blind
Tracey-Jane Malthouse	Employment Research Executive, Institute of Directors
Joe Mann	General Secretary, National League of the Blind and Disabled
Bert Massie	Director of Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Denise Platt	Head of Social Services, Local Government Association
Brian Pomeroy	Senior Partner, Deloitte and Touche Consulting Group
Philippa Russell	Director of the Council for Disabled Children
Liz Sayce	Policy Director, Mind (National Association for Mental Health)
Susan Scott-Parker	Chief Executive, Employers' Forum on Disability
Ranjit Sondhi	Former Deputy Chairman of Commission for Racial Equity

Name	
James Strachan	Chief Executive, Royal National Institute for Deaf people
Richard Taylor	Chief Executive, Lifespan NHS Trust
Keith Welton	Group Chief Executive, Mid Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited
Monica Wilson	Chief Executive of Disability Action
Richard Wood	Chief Executive, British Council of Organisations of Disabled People

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will review the threshold exempting employers with fewer than 20 employees from the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [19449]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am pleased today to announce such a review. It will provide an early opportunity to seek views on one way in which the position of disabled people in society might be improved. A key aspect of the review will be a consultation exercise aimed at gleaning views and information from a wide range of disability and employer organisations, especially those representing small firms, as well as individual disabled people and employers. It will include meetings with interested parties.

The Act requires a review to be held, begun immediately after the fourth anniversary of the commencement of the exemption provision if not held sooner, and allows the threshold to be lowered, but not removed completely, following the review. Any change must come into force within a year of the review starting.

The Government will consider carefully the responses to the consultation before deciding whether the threshold should be lowered to extend the Act's employment rights to more disabled employees and job applicants and, if so, to what level. We shall take account of any problems which may particularly apply to smaller employers, as well as looking at the wider costs and benefits of change.

TREASURY

Tax (Self-assessment)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he plans to take to correct errors in the instructions in tax self-assessment forms in connection with single premium bonds. [17231]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* This has been discussed with Tax Offices and Taxpayer Representative Bodies and corrective procedures put in place. It affects a very small number of people.

Dividends (Tax Credits)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 18 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *111,* if he will list *(a)* the representations his Department received from (i) trade associations, (ii) major corporations and (iii) others, *(b)* the concerns raised in those representations and *(c)* the nature of the technical clarifications sought by the United States Government. [17973]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* Confirmation was sought and given, informally, to the US Government that their understanding of the Budget changes to the UK's CT legislation was correct, insofar as it related to payments of tax credits on dividends received by US residents. It would not be appropriate to publish the identities of others who have made representations, or the nature of their comments, without their prior consent.

Alcohol Duty

Mr. Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the results of the review of duty on alcoholic drinks. [18185]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The review team, which is looking into the effects on the Exchequer and industry revenue of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping, are due to report by the end of December. After considering the report, I will decide when to publish.

Mr. Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the review of alcohol duties is taking into account projections on the Treasury economic model of the effects of differential duties. [18184]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The review is looking into the effects on the Exchequer and industry revenue of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. The effects of differential duties on the Treasury economic model is a separate issue.

Duty Free Trade

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters he has received supporting the continuation of the duty free system after June 1999. [18158]

Dawn Primarolo: My Treasury colleagues and I have received 257 letters from hon. Members on behalf of constituents in support of the continuation of intra-EU duty free sales after June 1999.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to eradicate the smuggling of tobacco from the continent into the United Kingdom [18546]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of front-line Customs staff to deal with Single Market excise smuggling has been significantly increased in the last 15 months. An extra 70 have been allocated throughout the country under the Spend to Save initiative. In addition, a further 30, backed up by specialist investigation officers, are currently being deployed at Dover to intensify the drive

against the illegal trade. Customs announced new measures on 26 September 1997 to crack down on hired vehicles used for smuggling.

My right hon. Friend announced in his Budget a review of the effects on the Exchequer and the industry of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. The review, which is being conducted in partnership with all the trade sectors concerned and with key Government departments, will report to me by the end of the year with options for dealing with these issues.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the seizures of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* cigarettes and *(c)* rolling tobacco at ports of entry to the United Kingdom in 1994, 1995, 1996; and what are the latest available figures. [18371]

Dawn Primarolo: Detections throughout the UK of goods smuggled from the Single Market were as follows, in terms of the duty (in £ million) that should have been paid.

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1996–97*	*1996–97*
Alcohol	0.8	2.75	8	11.8
Cigarettes	0.3	0.9	1.2	5.3
Handling Rolling Tobacco	1	3.1	5.6	12.3

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have taken place between the European Monetary Institute and the United States Federal Reserve over joint management of global currency matters after Economic and Monetary Union. [17219]

Mrs. Liddell: Treasury Ministers cannot answer for any discussions that may have taken place between these independent bodies.

International Monetary Fund (Korea)

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the negotiations between the IMF and Korea. [19463]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I am pleased the Managing Director of the IMF has reported today agreement with the Korean authorities to a strong programme, which he will recommend to the Board of the IMF. If the programme is agreed, the UK is prepared with some of our European and other G7 partners to consider, if needed, supplementary finance in support of the programme. The UK would consider an amount up to the equivalent of $1.25 billion. Any loan would depend on a financing need and would only be made with agreement by the IMF. Were such a loan to be made it would be advanced by the Bank of England to the Central Bank of Korea. The Treasury would provide to the Bank of England an indemnity under the International Monetary Arrangements Act 1983 .

Export Initiative

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the Minister for Firms, Trade and Industry was informed of the termination of the Home Office Export Initiative. [16213]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 17 November 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

I wrote to the hon. Member about this matter on 19 November and I have placed a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will itemise and place in the Library copies of RUC correspondence, submissions and monitoring returns to the Fair Employment Commission in the past eight years. [13072]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 November 1997]:* Correspondence and submissions between any organisation and the Fair Employment Commission are confidential. As such it is not considered appropriate to make this information public.

However the monitoring returns for the past eight years will be placed in the library.

Personal Security

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals have been advised about personal safety by the RUC or notified that their personal details may have come into the possession of paramilitary organisations in each of the last four years, indicating where possible the community affiliation of the individuals affected. [15896]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 November 1997]:* The information sought is not readily available and could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Artificial Breasts and Limbs

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the shortest current waiting time for *(a)* non-fundholder and *(b)* fundholder patients for the fitting of a prosthesis following (i) the amputation of a leg and (ii) breast reconstruction following a mastectomy. [17893]

Mr. Worthington: No one is waiting outside the three week timescale for the fitting of a prosthesis. Information relating to breast reconstruction is not available centrally.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Eastern Health and Social Services Board treats *(a)* breast reconstruction following a mastectomy and *(b)* the fitting of a prosthesis following amputation of a limb as a cosmetic procedure. [17904]

Mr. Worthington: *(a)* Breast reconstruction following a mastectomy is generally regarded by the Eastern Board, as a cosmetic procedure. The Board and the surgeons who carry out this operation are however very aware of the deep distress which patients who wish to undergo reconstruction may suffer while waiting.

(b) The Board takes a different view of the fitting of a prosthesis following amputation of a limb and does not regard that as a cosmetic procedure.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* non-fundholder and *(b)* fundholder patients are currently waiting for the fitting of a prosthesis following the amputation of (i) an arm and (ii) a leg. [17900]

Mr. Worthington: No distinction is made between non-fundholder and fundholder patients. Fitting is completed within three weeks of a patient being ready to commence prosthetic treatment following amputation. No one is currently waiting outside this timescale.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Eastern Health and Social Services Board has to commit additional resources for breast reconstruction following mastectomies. [17882]

Mr. Worthington: The Eastern Board, following receipt of additional funding, has agreed, at the request of the Royal Group of Hospitals, to purchase a further seven breast reconstruction procedures there. The Board also intends to pay for a further 100 plastic surgery procedures and 340 general surgery procedures at the Ulster Hospital. These may include post mastectomy reconstruction but this will depend on decisions by the appropriate consultants about clinical priority.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many GP fundholder patients have had a mastectomy in 1996–97; [17902]

(2) how many GP non-fundholder patients had a mastectomy in 1996–97. [17883]

Mr. Worthington: The number of inpatient episodes involving procedures for total or other excision of the breast in health service hospitals in Northern Ireland during the year 1996–97 was 1,652. Of these episodes, 728 involved patients of GP fundholders and 895 involved patients of non-fundholders. Central records do not distinguish whether the GP was a fundholder or a non-fundholder for the remaining 29 episodes.

Source:

Hospital Inpatients System. Figures for 1996–97 are provisional.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many breast reconstructions following mastectomy the Eastern Health and Social Services Board has contracted for in the current financial year; and what funds have been committed to purchase these services. [17901]

Mr. Worthington: In the normal process the Eastern Board does not contract specifically for breast reconstruction as this is commissioned as either a general surgery or plastic surgery procedure. It is not therefore possible to say what funds have been committed to purchase procedures of this kind in 1997–98.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many GP fundholders patients who have had a mastectomy have been advised to have breast reconstruction in 1996–97; and how many have had their operation for reconstruction delayed by more than three months; [17887]

(2) what is the longest current waiting time for *(a)* non-fundholder and *(b)* fundholder patients for reconstruction of breast surgery following a mastectomy; [17897]

(3) how many GP non-fundholder patients who have had a mastectomy were advised to have breast reconstruction in 1996–97; and how many of these have had their operation for reconstruction delayed by more than three months; [17884]

(4) how many *(a)* non-fundholder and *(b)* fundholder patients are currently waiting for reconstruction of breast surgery following a mastectomy. [17899]

Mr. Worthington: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what consultations the Eastern Health and Social Services Board has had with medical experts in respect of the allocation of resources for breast reconstruction; [17880]

(2) what consultation the Eastern Health and Social Services Board has had with surgeons specialising in breast surgery over *(a)* delays in breast reconstruction treatment following mastectomies and *(b)* the priority accorded to this treatment. [17881]

Mr. Worthington: In August additional funding was made available, some of it for waiting list pressures. The Eastern Board approached the Trusts in its area to ask for proposals from them for waiting list work. The Royal Group put forward, inter alia a proposal for the treatment of seven additional patients requiring breast reconstruction to which the Board has agreed. The Ulster Hospital in its response indicated that it could undertake 100 additional plastic surgery procedures and 240 in general surgery. The appropriate consultants will consider the clinical priority of those waiting, including the one patient waiting for post mastectomy reconstruction on the plastic surgery list at the Ulster. The Board has also advised that it has not received any indication of concerns about this specific service from any of the Trusts providing it either in respect of waiting times or the level of investment in it.

Springvale Site

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the planning process for the provision of educational facilities on the Springvale site. [19300]

Mr. Worthington: The Government welcome the close collaboration between the University of Ulster and the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education which has brought forward consideration of new approaches to joint further and higher education provision at Springvale. These considerations reflect both the recommendations of the recent Dearing Report and local circumstances. They are currently subject to economic appraisal, the findings of which the Government await with interest. Any decision will take account of value for money, affordability and the potential attractiveness as a PFI project.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance her Department has given for the

export of mixed oxide fuel from the United Kingdom within the last five years; what has been the cost of such assistance to date; what additional assistance is to be offered; and if she will estimate the future costs to be incurred during the next five years. [18498]

Mr. Battle: The Department has not given, or is scheduled to give, any financial assistance for the export of mixed oxide fuel from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the total quantities of plutonium currently held *(a)* at Sellafield and *(b)* at Dounreay, indicating the form in which each category of plutonium is currently managed. [18411]

Mr. Battle: Details of the quantities of plutonium stored at United Kingdom nuclear facilities, including its form and ownership, are published by my Department each year. Copies of the latest annual plutonium figures for the year ended 31 March 1997 were published on 31 July 1997 and placed in the Library of House.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which states have signed the 1980 Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material; which of these have confirmed their ratification to the International Atomic Energy Agency; what states have to date notified the IAEA of *(a)* reservations and *(b)* withdrawals under Article 17 of the Convention; which parties to the Convention have proposed amending the Treaty since it was opened for signature; and how many prosecutions have been conducted to date under the convention. [18404]

Mr. Battle: The Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material was signed in the 1980s by: Argentina*, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria*, Canada, Czechoslovakia*, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, European Atomic Energy Community*, Finland, France*, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic*, Greece, Guatemala*, Haiti, Hungary*, Indonesia*, Republic of Ireland, Israel*, Italy*, Republic of Korea*, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mongolia*, Morocco, Netherlands*, Niger, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland*, Portugal, Romania*, South Africa*, Soviet Union*, Spain*, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey*, United Kingdom, United States of America and Yugoslavia. Of these, all except Dominican Republic, Haiti, Morocco, Niger, Panama, Romania and South Africa have confirmed their ratification to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Those marked with an asterisk notified the IAEA of reservations when signing the Convention. I am not aware of any of these reservations having been withdrawn or of any formal proposals for amendment to the Convention. There is no provision in the Convention for prosecutions to be conducted under it.

Plutonium and Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what values were set on the *(a)* plutonium and *(b)* uranium stocks held by (i) British Nuclear Fuels and (ii) the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority in the National Asset Register. [18666]

Mr. Battle: The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) National Asset Register records all material fixed assets owned and controlled directly by the DTI and those in executive non-departmental public bodies and public corporations for which it is responsible.

Stocks of plutonium and uranium do not form part of fixed assets held by British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) and United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA).

BNFL hold stocks of separated civil plutonium and uranium on behalf of UK and overseas customers, including British Energy and Magnox Electric who also own the vast majority. The UKAEA hold stocks of uranium. In view of this, no values of these materials appear in the accounts of BNFL and UKAEA. It is for the owners to decide on what value to place on these materials.

Textile Industry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to support the textile industry; and if she will make a statement. [18721]

Mr. Battle: My Department provides considerable support to the UK's textiles and clothing industries and is working with representatives of the sector to take forward a wide variety of sector-specific activities and initiatives which will both raise the profile of the industry and improve its competitiveness. Eleven separate textiles and clothing projects are currently being supported under the Sector Challenge. We support many of the highly successful supply chain activities of the Apparel and Textiles Challenge and provide financial support for young designers to show at London Fashion Week. The highly praised Education Pack for Schools received DTI funding and the textiles and clothing industry is one of the major beneficiaries under the Trade Fair Support Scheme. These examples give an indication of the breadth of our support for the industry covering areas as diverse as education and training, export promotion, supply chain development, and technology dissemination.

"Managing UK Nuclear Liabilities"

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the recent report, a copy of which has been sent to her Department, from the Sussex University Science Policy Research Unit, "Managing UK Nuclear Liabilities". [18656]

Mr. Battle: The SPRU report is a substantial piece of work that merits serious attention. My Department is currently considering it but I do not expect us to reach any conclusion about SPRU recommendations before the New Year.

Enterprise Zone Web Site

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the specifications are for the provision of the Enterprise Zone web site. [18564]

Mrs. Roche: The Enterprise Zone Internet has been designed to provide UK businesses with quick and easy access to relevant and authoritative sources of business related information on the World Wide Web. Only sites

which are assessed by a group of business information experts as meeting quality criteria published on the Enterprise Zone will be linked to the Enterprise Zone.

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the results of the tendering process for the contract for her Department's Enterprise zone web site. [18566]

Mrs. Roche: Seventeen companies were invited to submit proposals to develop the Enterprise Zone. The proposals were assessed by a selection group that included representatives of the Department of Trade and Industry, Cabinet Office and the Business Link Network. The proposal from Microsoft was recommended by the group as best meeting the specification and representing best value for money.

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the role of her Department in the provision of information for the Enterprise Zone web site; and if there are any rules restricting use of the site for advertising particular products. [18563]

Mrs. Roche: The Enterprise Zone has been developed to provide UK businesses with quick and easy access to authoritative sources of business information on the World Wide Web. Sites linked to the Enterprise Zone are provided by a wide range of organisations. There is a link from the Enterprise Zone to the Department of Trade and Industry web site.

The Enterprise Zone does not provide links to sites that simply advertise business related products. To be linked to the Enterprise Zone, sites of commercial providers must give business users free access to useful and authoritative information, in addition to providing them with the opportunity to purchase further information or products.

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies tendered for the contract to provide the Enterprise Zone web site; and if she will list them. [18565]

Mrs. Roche: Of the 17 companies invited to submit proposals, the following 14 tendered for the contract to develop the Enterprise Zone web site:

Augusta Technology Ltd.

Brainstorm Computer Solutions

Brand ID

British Telecom

CMG

Complete Works Ltd.

IBM

ICL Multimedia Solutions

Infernet

Marketing Net Ltd.

Microsoft

Online Magic Ltd.

SAC Technographic Ltd.

SSA Softwright.

Nuclear Emergencies

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to review the *(a)* mechanism and *(b)* responsibility for informing the public of a nuclear emergency; and if she will make a statement. [18369]

Mr. Battle: Currently, the legislative requirements for informing the public of a nuclear emergency are given in the "Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations 1992" (PIRER). Guidance has been published by the Health and Safety Executive in support of the Regulations and further relevant guidance has been issued to the emergency response bodies concerned by the Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group (NEPLG).

Consultative proposals are at present being developed on the new "Radioactive Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations" (REPPIR) which will subsume PIRER and implement the Emergency Preparedness requirements of the European Council Directive 96/29 EURATOM laying down Basic Safety Standards for the protection of the health of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionising radiation. These proposals will be published in a consultative document in Spring 1998.

In parallel with these activities, a National Steering Committee on Warning and Informing the Public is meeting to develop a view on the broad issue of informing the public in a variety of emergency situations.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Geraint Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportions of businesses eligible for the DTI Loan Guarantee Scheme were granted a loan by a bank during the last year for which figures are available. [15326]

Mrs. Roche: No figures on the proportion of eligible businesses successful in obtaining a loan are available. All applications are made direct to lenders who must consider whether or not conventional finance can be made available. Eligibility for the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme is considered only in cases where the lender would be prepared to lend but for a lack of available assets which could be used as security.

Motor Dealers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will include motor dealers who do not provide credit in the licensing system at present operated by trading standards departments. [17144]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: While there are legal provisions in Scotland for local councils to license second-hand car dealers, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has no plans currently to introduce similar provisions here.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the proposed extension of the Seventh European Council Directive on aid to shipbuilding. [17905]

Mr. Battle: The Government support the proposed extension of the Seventh Directive on aids to shipbuilding until the end of 1998 as it is conditional on the EU negotiating a tougher replacement regime. This will lead to an earlier reduction in EU state aids for this sector, which is a key Government objective.

The extension of the Seventh Directive is part of the EU contingency arrangements in the light of the continuing delay in US ratification of the OECD Shipbuilding Agreement and is accompanied by a Commission proposal for a replacement shipbuilding aids regime. The Government support the main thrust of this Commission proposal as its overall impact will be to reduce EU shipbuilding aids and it is a transitional regime leading to the final elimination of special shipbuilding aids after 5 years. It envisages the removal of contract related aid by the end of 2000 and switches the emphasis to improving the competitiveness of the shipbuilding industry. (Further details of these two proposals are contained in Explanatory Memorandum 11165/97 and 11167/97 which are available in the Library of the House).

The Government still believe that the OECD Shipbuilding Agreement offers the best multilateral basis for removing shipbuilding aids and for restoring normal competitive conditions to the world shipbuilding market and hopes that the US will be able to complete its ratification. However in the meantime it regards the EU contingency arrangements as the next best option.

Duty Free Trade

Mr. Gale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will estimate the number of permanent jobs in the United Kingdom that are *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly dependent upon the trade in duty-free goods. [18062]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The figures requested are not available because statistics are not collected in that form. Moreover, because of the number of different factors affecting retail activity at ports, airports, etc., I do not consider it would be possible to arrive at an accurate estimate.

Fixed Term Contract Staff

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make it her policy that fixed term contract staff *(a)* employed and *(b)* funded by research councils will not be required to sign waiver clauses in their employment contracts. [18628]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The Research Councils fund research in higher education institutions and other organisations in which the institution is responsible for the terms and conditions of employment of staff recruited to carry out the research. With very few exceptions, the Research Councils already make no requirement on institutions to include waiver clauses in the relevant contracts of employment. The Research Councils also employ research staff directly in their own institutes and units. The Management Statement and Financial Memorandum which sets the framework for the relationship between the Councils and the Office of Science and Technology requires the Councils to use waiver clauses in certain fixed-term employment contracts. We will keep that document under review.

Business Links

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the business links that have been closed or amalgamated since 1 May. [13518]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 30 October 1997]:* There were 89 business link partnerships on 1 May and there are still the same number of partnerships to date.

Business link partnerships reflect local business needs in their decisions on how they are organised to manage the delivery of business link services in their areas, including the number of local outlets within each partnership.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the performance of SMEs in Staffordshire. [13891]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 3 November 1997]:* According to the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR) there are 3,328 SMEs in Staffordshire who fall into the 10–199 employee category.

VAT registration data suggest that new business generation in Staffordshire is slightly below the regional and national averages. In 1995 the Staffordshire business formation rate was 9.4 per cent., West Midlands 9.9 per cent. and the UK 10.3 per cent. However, there is evidence to show that Staffordshire Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are more likely to survive in business. Of the Staffordshire SMEs joining the VAT register in 1990, 43.4 per cent. were still registered 4 years later compared with 42.2 per cent. regionally and 41.9 per cent. nationally.

Of the 3,238 SMEs in Staffordshire,

1,099 (33 per cent.) have used the services of Business Link Staffordshire.

356 Staffordshire companies which have 3–250 employees are committed to attaining the Investors in People Standard.

A further 116 companies of this size have already attained the Investors in People Standard.

Power Generation

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the amount of existing coal-fired generating capacity which will be replaced by the generating projects to be awarded under the 5th round of the non fossil fuel obligation order. [18323]

Mrs. Beckett: The size of the fifth non-fossil fuel obligation order will be decided next year in the light of the quality and cost of the bids received. The impact of the new renewable generating stations will depend on their mode of operation, the competitive position of other stations and the level of demand that is required to be met. It is probable that little NFFO–5 capacity will come on stream before 2002–03.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will meet representatives of *(a)* mining unions and *(b)* the coal mining companies to discuss the future of the coal industry. [18326]

Mrs. Beckett: DTI Ministers have had several extensive meetings with miners' representatives and the coal mining companies to discuss the important future role that the coal industry can play.

Inward Investment

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to complete her discussions with the territorial Secretaries of State on co-ordinating inward investment packages; and if she will make a statement when agreement has been reached. [17064]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 21 November 1997]:* Discussions with my colleagues are continuing. Parliament will be informed when those discussions have been concluded and the Concordat on financial assistance to industry has been published.

Meetings

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which business directors and executives she has met in her official capacity in her London offices. [17950]

Mrs. Beckett: I have regular meetings with business executives both in my office and elsewhere.

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will ask the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe to disclose which charities received the profits from the sale of his BP shares. [17563]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* No. The distribution is being managed by a trust on the Minister's behalf.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many public appointments she has made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16786]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Since 1 May 1997 Ministers have made 92 new appointments to Public Bodies. Forty of these (43 per cent.) receive some remuneration and I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 28 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *669.*

Overhead Power Lines

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when an application for a 33Kv overhead line from Butt Yeats to Tatham Bridge and from Wennington Station to Lower Ravens Close Wood Wennington in the Lune Valley was received from Norweb; and if she has determined it. [18904]

Mr. Battle: The application was received on 11 November 1997. It is now under consideration by the Department in line with the statutory procedures designed to permit interested parties to make their views known. As part of this process, we shall have regard to planning guidance relevant to areas of outstanding natural beauty and will consider the company's argument for the need for such a line, and the views of the local community, the local planning authorities, individuals and hon. Members.

HEALTH

George House Trust

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to letters to him dated 28 May, 3 July and 28 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to the George House Trust. [13713]

Ms Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on 27 November 1997, with a full explanation for the delay in replying.

Superannuation Schemes

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on requests for early retirement resulting from the delays in processing requests for transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to *(a)* the Universities Superannuation Scheme and *(b)* the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme; and if he will make statement; [17055]

(2) what is the average time for processing a request to transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to *(a)* the Universities Superannuation Scheme and *(b)* the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme; and if he will make a statement; [17059]

(3) if he will make a statement on the staffing levels necessary to process applications for transfers from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to *(a)* the Universities Superannuation Scheme and *(b)* the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme to avoid delays to applicants; [17057]

(4) how many requests for transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to *(a)* the Universities Superannuation Scheme and *(b)* the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme have been subject to a delay of (i) three months, (ii) six months, (iii) one year, (iv) 18 months and (v) two years; and if he will provide a breakdown by local authority; [17054]

(5) how many cases involving miscalculations in the amounts involved in transfers from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to *(a)* the Universities Superannuation Scheme and *(b)* the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme have led to (i) overpayment, (ii) court orders and (iii) referral to the Ombudsman; and if he will make a statement; [17056]

(6) how many requests for transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to the Universities Superannuation Scheme involve staff currently employed at *(a)* Nottingham and *(b)* Trent universities; and how many have been subject to delays of (i) three months, (ii) six months, (iii) one year, (iv) 18 months and (v) two years; and if he will make a statement. [17058]

Mr. Milburn: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to my hon. Friend.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. John Heppell, dated 3 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions, as their substance falls within my area of responsibility. The answers to each question are set out below. I am afraid they are not all in the precise format you have requested. I also need to place them into the broader context of College of Education Transfers.

Background

When NHS staff were moved to Colleges of Education it was agreed that the most favourable available transfer of pension rights should be given. For those transferring to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) a bulk transfer arrangement was agreed. Bulk transfers are more favourable than individual transfers because their transfer value is based upon movement in wages rather than prices. By its nature, however, a bulk transfer is not finalised until every case has been calculated. There have been many delays; while some of these have been unavoidable some were the result of poor performance by this Agency. With the benefit of hindsight we would have treated them differently. The bulk transfer of funds has not yet been completed; however the individuals pension entitlements are secured because the liabilities are accepted in full by the USS. To underpin this, significant payments on account have been made by the NHS Scheme to fund these liabilities. We are hoping, with the co-operation of the USS and their actuaries to be in a position within the next few weeks to be able to make the final payment to complete the transfers.

For those NHS staff who were transferring to the Teachers Superannuation Scheme (TSS) different arrangements were agreed, amounting to a 1:1 transfer of service. This involves no transfer of funds because both Schemes are notionally funded by the Exchequer. However the detailed work to complete the transfers has been undertaken on a case by case basis. To our knowledge all but a few of the 2,864 cases have been cleared.

Against this background the answers to your questions are as follows:

What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact on requests for early retirement resulting fro the delays in processing requests for transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to:

(a) the USS; and

(b) the TSS.

While there have been significant delays in finalising the bulk transfer payment to the USS, the pensions entitlements of the individuals concerned have been safeguarded between the USS and the NHS Pension Scheme. The Schemes are not aware of any direct impact that the delay in finalising the bulk transfer payment has had on transactions involving early retirements.

In administering early retirements from the TSS, where a transfer was outstanding, both schemes have given such cases priority treatment conclusion. Again, the Schemes are not aware of any retirees who have been adversely affected by delays in the transfer process.

What is the average time limit for processing a transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to:

(a) the USS;

(b) the TSS.

The Agency only maintains figures for average clearance times for all transfers casework. We cannot distinguish between individual Schemes. Normal transfers go through two stages—provisional, covering an estimate and members option process; and final, which culminates either in a payment reflecting the capitalised value of the pension entitlement or confirmation of the service being transferred. The average times to clear, in working days over the past two years are:

	Provisional	*Final*
1996–97	60	37
1997–98	68	47

A statement on the staffing levels necessary to process applications for transfers from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to:

(a) the USS;

(b) the TSS;

To avoid delays to applicants

All operational work is processed within the Agency by multi-skilled teams dealing with all aspects of the Scheme, not just transfers. In 1996–97 the equivalent of some 21 full-time staff were deployed on transfer cases, 22 in 1997–98. However at any one time the Agency can deploy many more staff than this, if it would help a particular situation. The delays in finalising the USS and TSS special exercises have not been attributable to staffing levels, but more to their complexity and difficulties with data. The TSS exercise is nearly completed. The USS exercise is expected to be completed by 31 December 1997.

How many requests for transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to:

(a) the USS;

(b) the TSS;

have been subject to a delay of:

(i) 3 months;

(ii) 6 months;

(iii) 1 year;

(iv) 18 months;

(v) 2 years.

The USS bulk transfer was planned to be completed by the Schemes and their actuaries by May 1997. I should point out that this recognises that the completion date has had to be rescheduled to reflect each new college merger as it came within the ambit of the overall bulk transfer. The last such merger took place in November 1996. I am afraid the Agency does not hold separate clearance data about individual TSS cases related to the College of Education transfers.

How many cases involving miscalculations in the amounts involved in transfers from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to:

(a) the USS;

(b) the TSS;

have led to:

(i) overpayment;

(ii) court orders;

(iii) referral to the Ombudsman.

The USS transfers are covered by a bulk payment and this has not yet been finalised. The individual TSS cases do not involve transfers of amounts because the Schemes are both notionally funded by the exchequer. We are not aware that any transfer transaction has led to an overpayment, court orders or referrals to the Ombudsman.

How many requests for transfer from the NHS Superannuation Scheme to the USS involve staff currently employed at:

(a) Nottingham;

(b) Trent Universities;

and how many have been subject to delays of:

(i) 3 months;

(ii) 6 months;

(iii) 1 year;

(iv) 18 months;

(v) 2 years.

Staff at Mid Trent College merged with Nottingham University and transfer data about the 189 staff transferring to the University of Nottingham was released to USS just over 3 months later than planned. A query for one member of staff remains outstanding. Staff at North Trent College merged with Sheffield University and transfer data about the 198 staff transferring to the University of Sheffield was released to USS some 9 months later than originally planned. We are not aware of any outstanding queries relating to these cases.

Dental Services

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department takes to monitor the quality of private dental treatment. [18400]

Mr. Milburn: The General Dental Council is the regulatory body responsible for dental treatment provided outside the National Health Service. The Department, which provides funding for the continuing education and training of dentists who have an arrangement to provide general dental services under the National Health Service, gets regular feedback from the Council on matters like professional conduct and fitness to practise. The great majority of general dental practitioners carry out some NHS work even if they also undertake private practice.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure access to NHS dentistry for all residents of the South Staffordshire health authority district. [18487]

Mr. Milburn: On 9 September we announced the "Investing In Dentistry" initiative, which makes available up to £9 million in 1997–98 to help health authorities improve the availability of National Health Service dentistry in areas of the country where there are particular problems of access to NHS dental services.

Breast Screening

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to provide national guidelines on the introduction of two-view screening for each round of breast screening; [18506]

(2) what plans the Government have to improve the United Kingdom's detection ratio for those rounds of breast screening following the first screening; [18508]

(3) what assessment he has made of the advantages of two-view mammography for detecting small cancers. [18510]

Mr. Boateng: The Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit, which is funded by the Department of Health, is reviewing the advantages of two-view mammography. Recently published data suggest that for a woman's first screen, the use of two-view mammography increases by 45 per cent. the detection of invasive cancers of less than 15 millimetres, and for subsequent screens it increases the detection rate by 25 per cent.

All breast screening units currently take a second mammographic view of the breast at a woman's first visit to the screening programme. Breast screening units have discretion over the use of two view mammography at subsequent screening rounds. The case for requiring all units to take two views at every screening round will have to be assessed along with the outcome of research currently being carried out into other changes that might be made to improve the quality of the service offered to women, for example extending the screening programme to older women, and reducing the screening interval.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on extending the upper age limit of those automatically invited to breast screening; [18507]

(2) if he will assess the advantages of extending the upper age limit of those automatically invited to breast screening to 69 years of age. [18526]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are funding a pilot schemes in Northern and Yorkshire, Trent and South Thames regions to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the screening programme to include women aged 65–69. These pilots will run for three years to 1999–2000 to give a clear picture of likely uptake among older women, and effectiveness in terms of the number of cancers detected. We will base any changes to policy on the evidence emerging from these.

Screening every three years is currently available to older women on request. This is well publicised in a number of ways. Women who have already been screened through the programme are informed of their right to request screening after the age of 65. The booklet "Your Health: A Guide to Services for Women", which is widely available through general practitioner's surgeries, clinics, post offices and some shops, makes clear that women aged 65 and over will be screened free of charge three yearly if they request it.

Social Service Provision

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the incidence of patients forced to remain in hospital after they have been discharged because of a lack of appropriate social service provision. [18518]

Mr. Boateng: The incidence of patients who remain in hospital after they have been declared clinically fit for discharge is reviewed quarterly by the National Health Service Executive and the reasons for the delay in discharge are collected.

Dental Students (Tuition Fees)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what calculations his Department has made of the impact on the National Health Service budget of the introduction of tuition fees for dental students. [18360]

Mr. Milburn: Dental students will make a means-tested contribution to their tuition fees for the first four years of their course. The Department of Health will pay the contribution from year five onwards. This will not be at the expense of patient care—a transfer of resources from the Department for Education and Employment is being agreed to meet the cost.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to commission research into the physical causes of myalgic encephalomyelitis; [18660]

(2) what consultation the Government have carried out with those who suffer from myalgic encephalomyelitis; [18658]

(3) what assessment he has made of existing services provided by health authorities for those suffering with myalgic encephalomyelitis; [18662]

(4) what guidance has been given to GPs on the treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis; [18661]

(5) if he will commission a national epidemiological study into myalgic encephalomyelitis. [18659]

Mr. Boateng: Priorities for funding research in the Department are set very carefully, based on the burden of disease and other criteria. Bids for conducting research into chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)/myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) are therefore always considered on that basis. The Department continues to fund research into the management and treatment of CFS/ME through the National Health Service Research and Development Programme.

It is currently funding an on-going research project, costing about £60,000, which is looking at whether general practitioners are best placed to manage CFS/ME patients. A recently completed research project, costing over £65,000, considered whether a particular type of psychological treatment was effective in reducing disability in CFS/ME patients. The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The Council currently provides support for one Small Project Grant in the area of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome entitled "The role of noradrenaline in the neuropsychological pathogenesis of the chronic fatigue syndrome". The total amount awarded was £37,000.

There are no plans to commission a national epidemiological study into CFS/ME. A number of small studies of epidemiology have indicated that prevalence is around 1–2/1000 of the population with a peak incidence in the 20–40 age group and a slight female predominance. Obtaining accurate epidemiological information is particularly difficult in the case of CFS/ME due to variations in definitions and the difficulties in making an accurate diagnosis. There is no single diagnostic test for CFS/ME. It is usually diagnosed by testing for and eliminating other conditions. People with CFS/ME can experience any or all of a wide range of symptoms, but chronic fatigue is a key factor in the syndrome.

The Government have not carried out a consultation of people who suffer from CFS/ME. However, we have funded CFS/ME voluntary organisations who have close contact with sufferers. Since 1988, we have made over £225,000 available to CFS/ME organisations and by 1998, this will have risen to over a quarter of a million pounds.

The NHS provides a wide range of services to which sufferers of CFS/ME have access and such patients are seen within a wide range of community services and hospital specialties. Patients can discuss the options available to them with their GP and they may also request an assessment of their needs by local authority social services departments. It is the responsibility of health authorities to decide how the needs of CFS/ME sufferers should be met and whether or not they should purchase dedicated services. All such decisions are made in the light of competing priorities and finite resources.

We consider that it is more appropriate for clinical guidelines to be produced by clinicians themselves or through their representative professional bodies. Establishing definitions of disease and the criteria for their diagnosis is also a matter for the professions. Furthermore, the Medical Royal Colleges point out that, whilst CFS/ME should be managed by GPs, it is inappropriate at present to issue clinical guidelines given the lack of methodologically sound research. There is no single effective treatment for CFS/ME. The condition varies significantly from one patient to another and therefore individual patients benefit from different treatment regimes.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18892]

Ms Jowell: The most important announcements of Government policy are made, in the first instance, to Parliament. A considerable number of announcements have been made in a variety of ways, often combining different approaches, reflecting the nature of the announcement. Our policy is to adopt the most appropriate vehicle.

Incontinence Products

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the extra cost to the NHS would be if VAT was applied to home-delivered incontinence products at 17.5 per cent. [18978]

Mr. Boateng: Under the Value Added Tax Act 1994, Schedule 8, Group 12, Item 2(g) incontinence products are zero-rated only when supplied to a disabled person or to a charity that makes them available to a disabled person. As the National Health Service falls into neither of these categories, it has always been the intention that supplies of these products by the NHS should have been standard rated and the NHS is funded on this understanding. Since there is no change to this intention, there will be no associated increased cost for the NHS. NHS trusts have been temporarily able to take advantage of a VAT reimbursement on these products due to a loophole which Customs and Excise are now seeking to close.

DEFENCE

Otterburn Ranges

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the local authorities with which he or his Department have held discussions about the future of the Otterburn ranges. [18800]

Dr. Reid: The Ministry of Defence has held discussions with the following local authorities about the future of the Otterburn ranges:

The Northumberland National Park Authority

The Northumberland County Council

The Tynedale District Council

The Alnwick District Council

The Castle Morpeth District Council.

RAF Menwith Hill

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the function of the Menwith Hill base in North Yorkshire. [18792]

Dr. Reid: RAF Menwith Hill is a site owned by the Ministry of Defence and made available to the US Department of Defense as a communications facility. The station is an integral part of the US Department of Defense's world wide network which supports the UK, US and NATO interests.

Royal Military Police

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rationalisation studies affecting the Royal Military Police are taking place in his Department; and when these will report. [18787]

Dr. Reid: The Army Training and Recruiting Agency is currently conducting a study into the scope for rationalisation within the Adjutant General's Corps Training Group, which includes the Royal Military Police Training School at Chichester. The study is in two phases. Phase One is examining the feasibility of relocating the RMPTS to another AGC Training Group site or to the MOD Police Training school in Essex, or of leaving it where it is. Phase Two will examine the wider scope for rationalisation within the AGC Training Group as a whole. Phase One is expected to be completed early in the new year, and Phase Two in the spring.

Stabilisation Force (Women)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom women service personnel are serving in Bosnia as part of the stabilisation force. [18583]

Dr. Reid: On 1 December, there were 387 UK women Service personnel serving with the Stabilisation Force in former Yugoslavia: 47 officers and 340 other ranks.

Nimrod

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the improvements in performance of the Nimrod 2000 over the existing aircraft; [18616]

(2) when the Nimrod 2000 aircraft will enter full service. [18594]

Mr. Spellar: The Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance and Attack Mark 4, as the new aircraft will be known, should be significantly more capable, and cheaper to operate, than the current Nimrod MR2.

The in-service date is defined as the date when the first front line squadron of seven aircraft is declared operational. This is scheduled for April 2003. The final aircraft is planned for delivery in June 2006.

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *153*, about the fully automated digital engine control system, if he will place in the Library copies of the 70 incident signals relating to FADEL on the Chinook Mark II helicopter. [18983]

Mr. Spellar: The subject documents are a part of the flight safety reporting procedures and disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal reporting. I am withholding the information requested under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Textron Lycoming White Paper on Chinook FADEL. [18973]

Mr. Spellar: The information provided by Textron Lycoming in their White Paper is commercially confidential. Accordingly, I am withholding the information requested under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the minute ref. D/DHP/HP1/4/3, dated 29 April 1994 covering the Textron Lycoming White Paper on Chinook FADEL. [18974]

Mr. Spellar: The subject document contains internal opinions and advice, disclosure of which would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion. Accordingly, I am withholding the information requested under exemption 2b of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Welfare Reforms

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with other EU states to co-ordinate national policies on *(a)* animal testing, *(b)* animal husbandry and *(c)* other animal welfare reforms. [18680]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, in his contacts with his colleagues in all the EU Member States in preparation for the Presidency, is seeking to establish how best to advance this Department's aim of promoting progress on farm animal welfare at the EU level. Officials of the relevant Departments also have frequent contacts with their counterparts in the other Member States and in countries who are parties to the Council of Europe conventions concerning animal welfare.

Low Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, by regions defined by the boundaries of the regional government offices, the lowest hourly rate paid by his Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18118]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* I will answer for the Department, the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) and the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA). Chief Executives of the Department's other Agencies will be replying direct.

Staff in the Department, PSD and FRCA are salaried. They are not paid by the hour and, in common with other Government Departments, only two geographical rates of salary exist—London and National. However, I am able to provide data based on salary levels divided by normal full-time working hours of 36 hours per week in London or 37 hours elsewhere.

(a) for full-time employees the lowest hourly rate using a formula based on the above is as follows:

Job Title

Administrative assistant

London pay rate

£4.13 per hour

National pay rate

£3.42 per hour

(b) for part-time employees in the same grade, the above rates are paid according to the number of hours they work.

(c) employees in the same grade on fixed term contracts are also paid at the above rates.

(d) the rates of pay of employees of firms in the private sector undertaking contracted-out services are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Letter form T.W.A. Little to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 December 1997:

The Minster has asked me to reply to your question about the lowest hourly rate paid to staff within the VLA.

Staff in this Agency are salaried and are not paid by the hour. However, I am able to provide data based on salary levels divided by normal full-time working hours of 36 hours per week in London or 37 hours elsewhere.

In the VLA there are no geographical distinctions in pay.

(a) For full-time employees the lowest hourly rate using a formula based on the above is an follows:

Pay Band G

Working 37 hours per week received £4.27 per hour

Working 36 hours per week received £4.38 per hour

(b) For part-time employees in the same grade the above rates are paid according to the number of hours they work.

(c) Employees in the same pay band on personal contracts are also paid at the above rate.

(d) This information is not available.

At (c) we have regarded "personal contracts" as fixed term appointees.

Letter from Michael Finnigan to Mr. David Chidgey, Dated 3 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and food has asked me to reply to your question about the lowest hourly rate paid to staff within the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA).

Staff in the FRCA are salaried and not paid by the hour. However, I am able to provide data based on salary levels divided by normal full-time working hours of 36 hours per week in London or 37 hours elsewhere.

(a) For full-time employees the lowest hourly rate using a formula based on the above is as follows:

Job Title: Administrative Assistant

London pay rate: £4.13 per hour

National pay rate: £3.42 per hour

(b) For part-time employees in the same grade, the above rates are paid according to the number of hours they work.

(c) Employees in the same pay band on personal contracts are also paid at the above rate.

(d) This information is not available.

Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning the lowest hourly rate paid to employees.

Staff in CSL are salaried and are not paid by the hour. However, I am able to provide data based on salary levels divided by the normal full-time working hours of 37 per week.

For full-time employees the lowest hourly rate, based on the formula above, is £3.62 per hour for a member of staff in the CSL Level 1 grade.

For part-time employees in the same grade the above rate is paid according to the number of hours worked. Employees in the same grade on fixed-term contracts are also paid at the above rate. There are no geographical distinctions in the rates of pay.

Letter from J.M. Rutter to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about lowest hourly rates of pay in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

Staff in the VMD are salaried and not paid by the hour. However, I am able to provide data based on salary levels divided by normal full time working hours of 36 hours per week. For full or part time staff the lowest rate is for an Administrative Assistant earning £4.13 per hour. We do not employ any staff on personal contracts in this grade, and the rates of pay of employees working for companies contracted by VMD are not held by VMD.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Services (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food enquiring about the lowest hourly rate paid to full-time employees, part-time employees and others has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.

MHS staff are salaried and not paid by the hour. However I am able to provide data based on salary levels divided by normal full time and part time working hours of 37 and 16 hours per week respectively. MHS pay levels are on a national (Great Britain) basis and not differentiated by regional boundaries.

For full time employees the lowest hourly rate is £4.00 per hour for the Office Junior post.

For part time employees the lowest hourly rate is £5.29 hour for the Executive Assistant post.

The MHS does not have any persons employed under personal contracts.

The MHS employs the services of contract Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVSs) to carry out the enforcement of fresh meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed premises. The MHS has no information of the rates of pay of such contract OVSs employed by private veterinary practices.

Letter from P.W. Greig-Smith to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 December 1997:

In response to your Parliamentary Question on hourly rates of pay, I have been asked to provide you with the relevant figures covering the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Agriculture Science (CEFAS).

Staff in CEFAS are salaried and are not paid by the hour. However, we are able to provide an hourly rate, based on the salary level divided by normal full-time working hours of 37 hours per week.

(a) For full-time employees the lowest hourly rate using the above formula is as follows:

Job Title: Administrative Assistant

Hourly rate: £3.42

(b) For part-time employees in the same grade, the above rate is paid according to the number of hours they work.

(c) Employees in the same grade on personal contracts are also paid at the above rate.

(d) The rates of pay of employees working for companies contracted by CEFAS are not known.

WALES

Minimum Wage

11. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the impact of a minimum wage on inward investment in Wales. [17481]

Mr. Hain: None.

17. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from trade unions in Wales on the minimum wage. [17487]

Mr. Hain: We have received one such representation—from the National Farmers Union of England and Wales.

Youth Assembly

12. **Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce proposals to create a youth assembly for Wales to act in an advisory capacity to the main Welsh Assembly. [17482]

Mr. Ron Davies: This is an interesting suggestion that the Assembly itself might wish to consider in its attempt to listen to and represent the whole of Wales.

Welsh Assembly

13. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how the standing orders of the Welsh Assembly will be formulated; and if he will make a statement. [17483]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Assembly's first standing orders will be prepared by a multi-party Commission and submitted to me for approval. I propose to appoint the Commission following Royal Assent to the Bill.

14. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals the Government intend to make to accommodate the concerns of the areas that voted no in the referendum on the Welsh Assembly proposal. [17484]

Mr. Ron Davies: I propose to set up an advisory group to assist me in preparing guidance to the Commission which, subject to the provisions of the Government of Wales Bill, will draw up the Assembly's first standing orders. The advisory group will include people from different political parties and individuals with expertise in a range of fields such as business, local government and the voluntary sector. There will be opportunities for organisations and individuals from all parts of Wales to put their views to the advisory group.

24. **Mr. Collins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to publish further details of how the Welsh Assembly will operate. [17494]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Government of Wales Bill was published on 27 November 1997. It establishes principles of openness, accountability and integrity under which the Assembly will operate. Standing Orders, prepared by Commissioners appointed by me and representing a wide range of political and other interests in Wales, will provide detailed working arrangements for the Assembly.

10. **Ms Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in establishing an independent body to advise on matters relating to the Welsh Assembly. [17480]

Mr. Ron Davies: The White Paper stated that a multi-party Commission would be appointed to draft the Assembly's first standing orders. I propose to appoint that Commission following Royal Assent to the Government of Wales Bill. In the meantime I propose to set up an advisory group to assist me in preparing guidance to the Standing Orders Commission. The National Assembly Advisory Group will consider matters such as: the Assembly's decision-making arrangements, its business procedures, and the responsibilities of Assembly members. There will be opportunities for organisations and individuals around Wales to put their views to the advisory group. The group will include members from different political parties as well as individuals with expertise in a range of fields such as business, local government and the voluntary sector. I am pleased to announce that the Chairman of the National Assembly Advisory Group will be John Elfed Jones CBE. He is currently chairman of International Greetings plc. and a former chairman of the Welsh Language Board and of Welsh Water. He has extensive experience of both the private and public sectors in Wales. I am sure he will make an excellent chairman of the group. I expect to announce the names of the other members of the group shortly.

Private Finance Initiative

15. **Ms Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his review of the PFI will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [17485]

Mr. Ron Davies: I announced details of my priority PFI schemes together with local authority Pathfinder projects at the Welsh Grand Committee meeting in Mold on 30 June.

Opencast Mining

18. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the environmental effects of opencast mining. [17488]

Mr. Hain: National planning policy on opencast mining is set out in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 3 "Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal". The guidance provides a policy framework for local authorities and the industry to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account into assessing proposals for opencast mining. A consultation paper seeking views on opencasting has been distributed widely, inviting comments by 5 December.

All-Wales Agri-environment Scheme

19. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in developing the all-Wales agri-environmental scheme. [17489]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on 18 November 1997, *Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee,* column 42.

Uniform Business Rate

20. **Mrs. Laing:** To ask the Secretary of State of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the uniform business rate from Welsh businesses. [17490]

Mr. Win Griffiths: We have received six representations from Welsh businesses regarding the uniform business rate on their own or other properties.

Health Service Waiting Lists

21. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to reduce hospital waiting lists in Wales. [17491]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Along with Emergency Admissions and ensuring that adequate intensive care facilities are available, cutting waiting lists and reducing waiting times continue to be a key priority for the Government and the NHS in Wales. I have recently announced plans to develop a strategy which will include fresh thinking and a new approach for a more effective means to tackle waiting lists and waiting times and their causes.

I expect the £9.548 million of additional money allocated to the NHS this year, will significantly help to ease the pressures on the health and social care system during the winter period while also restraining the growth in waiting lists and waiting times.

23. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the trend is in health service waiting lists in Wales; and what target he is working to for the next 12 months. [17493]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Between September 1996 and September 1997 the numbers of people in Wales waiting over six months for their first outpatient appointment have reduced by some 14 per cent., from 9,664 to 8,340 and since September 1994 by 74 per cent. from 31,825.

Those waiting over 12 months in Wales for inpatient or day case admission rose by 28 per cent. between September 1996 and September 1997 from 5,345 to 6,810 but since September 1994 decreased by 2 per cent. from 6,953.

Over 90 per cent. of patients are seen within the times set out in the Patient's Charter, but I am determined to improve on this and recently announced plans to develop a waiting times strategy which will include fresh thinking and a new approach to tackle the problems of waiting lists and waiting times.

Hill and Upland Farming

22. **Mr Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce measure to assist the hill and upland farm sector in Wales. [17492]

Mr. Win Griffiths: An announcement on the outcome of the autumn review of Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances will be made shortly. In addition, I am working to introduce an all-Wales agri-environment scheme, and to develop the Welsh Food Strategy so that Welsh agriculture is better able to compete in the long term.

Health Service Trusts

25. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the national health service trust reconfiguration exercise. [17495]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I launched the reconfiguration exercise to improve the quality of hospital and community health services in Wales through the establishment of a more effective and efficient structure of NHS Trusts. It is expected that the review will lead to improvements in the planning and delivery of services to patients, the replacement of competition between Trusts and a new collaborative approach and the transfer of considerable resources from management and administration towards direct patient care.

Rare Cattle Breeds

26. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to promote the farming of rare Welsh beef cattle breeds. [17496]

Mr. Win Griffiths: None—The Vaynol and White Park are the only rare breeds of cattle in Wales.

Inward Investment

27. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much inward investment there has been in Wales since 1 May. [17497]

Mr. Hain: In the period 1 May to 31 October 1997, the Welsh Development Agency has recorded inward investment projects which promise 4,939 new and safeguarded jobs and capital investment of just over £250 million.

Local Government Finance

28. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Welsh Local Government Association concerning next year's financial settlement. [17498]

Mr. Ron Davies: I discussed the 1998–99 settlement with the Welsh Local Government Association at the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance meeting of 27 October. I have given careful consideration to the Association's views in making the proposals for the revenue settlement which I announced to the House yesterday.

Teachers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for LEAs in Wales being able to employ additional teachers; and if he will make a statement. [17949]

Mr. Hain: Staffing levels in schools are a matter for local education authorities and governing bodies in the light of their statutory duties and their perception of local needs and priorities. An additional £50 million is being made available for revenue spending in schools in Wales in 1998–99, the great bulk of which will be included in school budgets.

Smoking

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of NHS spending on treatment for people suffering smoking-related diseases in the most recent available year: and if he will make a statement. [17945]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Smoking contributes to a number of illness and disabilities, the treatment costs for which are not all readily identifiable from estimates of primary and acute service costs.

The last estimate of the cost was compiled for the Health Promotion Authority for Wales in 1993 on research and surveys carried out in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This indicated that the annual cost to the NHS in Wales was in the region of £34 million per annum at 1992–93 prices.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent on smoking cessation initiatives in each of the last three years; what his estimate is of expenditure in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [17944]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Responsibility for national health promotion initiatives in Wales, such as smoking cessation initiatives, rests with the Health Promotion Authority for Wales. Expenditure on smoking cessation initiatives is as follows:

	1994–95 £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*1997–98* £
Campaigns	255,825	337,183	214,862	185,620
Pilot projects	154,837	13,213	140,828	—
Research	584	55,291	38,426	46,400
European funded work	—	—	34,542	36,000
Total	411,246	405,687	428,658	268,020

Plans for 1998–99 have yet to be finalised but expenditure is expected to be in the region of £300,000.

The above information relates to initiatives directed solely at smoking. Smoking cessation advice also features strongly in other general health promotion initiatives funded by the Authority.

Vandalism in Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to assist LEAs in combating out-of-hours vandalism in their schools. [17947]

Mr. Hain: £1.25 million has been allocated for school security measures, divided on a formula basis to the 22 LEAs under the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) programme in 1997–98. I recently announced the successful bids under the New Deals for Schools for which an additional £5.025 million capital funding is available this financial year; over £650,000 was allocated for improvements to school security.

Police Numbers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many police officers there are per head of population in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the North Wales Constabulary area; and if he will make a statement. [17946]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Provisional figures as at 30 September 1997, provided by the Home Office, show that there were 226 officers per 100,000 population for Wales as a whole and 209 officers per 100,000 population in the North Wales police force area.

Windfall Tax (Education Authorities)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much Welsh local education authorities have received from the windfall tax; what that figure is expressed as a per capita figure for Welsh school students; and if he will make a statement. [18209]

Mr. Hain: £5.025 million capital funding for schools has been allocated in 1997–98 to Welsh local authorities from the windfall tax. This equates to £10.12 per capita for Welsh school students. A further £15.076 million per annum will be available each year between 1998–99 and 2001–02.

Government Estate (Sales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what items of the Government estate in Wales are planned to be sold; and if he will make a statement. [18210]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Of the items shown in the recently published National Asset Register as being in the ownership of the Welsh Office there are plans to dispose of the following properties.

Ely Hospital, Cardiff
1 Neville Street, Cardiff
Clinic at Gelli Deg
Mid-Wales Hospital, Talgarth
Brynhyfred Hospital, Forden
Land at Pen Y Groes Health Centre, West Glamorgan
Former ambulance station, Fishguard
Pen y Fal Hospital, Abergavenny
Oakdale Clinic
Former clinic, Meas y Cymmer
Former ambulance station, Bargoed
Land at Llanfrecha Grange, Cwmbran
Pontypool Hospital
Land, Griffithstown
Land, Brynmawr Clinic
Land, Bettws Clinic
Varteg radio mast site
Llynfi Hospital, Swansea
WHCSA Stores, Garngoch, Swansea
Bridgend Hospital
Garth Mor Neath
Druid Hospital, Llangefni
Valley Hospital

Broughton Hospital

St. David's Hospital, Bangor

North Wales Hospital, Denbigh

Groesfynydd Conwy

Land, Blackbridge, Near Holyhead.

In addition surplus land and buildings acquired by agreement or compulsory purchase in connection with Trunk Road improvement schemes are disposed of at the earliest opportunity.

The following NDPBs are involved in land acquisition and disposals as a normal part of their business:

Land Authority for Wales

Welsh Development Agency

Development Board for Rural Wales

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation.

Health Service Administration

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what net savings have been made since 1 May in administration within the health service; if he will itemise these; and what proportion they constitute of the target savings. [18504]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on health authority and Trust savings is not collected in year. Figures for this year will be available from the 1997–98 audited accounts, which will be available on 1 August 1998.

The general efficiency target of 2.7 per cent. that health authorities and trusts have been asked to meet should release £38 million into patient care, including some £1.8 million from trust management costs. In addition, there should be £2.3 million in ongoing savings from the reorganisation of health authorities, and the suspension of the 8th wave of GP Fundholding released £1.9 million immediately.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the level of public funding per year for each training and enterprise council in Wales since they were established. [18657]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is in the following table.

TEC funding 1990–91 to 1997–98

	[1]1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	[2]1997–98
Gwent[3]	2,489	16,320	17,769	16,647	17,284	16,018	22,163	24,098
Mid Glamorgan[3]	10,038	18,722	20,048	18,777	18,994	16,376	15,839	14,630
North East Wales[4]	5,756	10,679	10,622	9,742	9,590	10,018	9,580	—
North West Wales[4]	1,619	12,167	12,770	13,333	14,489	13,266	13,491	—
CELTEC[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	21,551
Powys	nil	4,676	4,474	4,148	4,908	4,749	4,844	4,304
South Glamorgan	2,076	10,852	12,089	11,863	13,499	11,444	13,344	13,714
West Wales	15,728	20,659	27,395	27,284	27,077	29,787	29,851	27,770

[1] 1990–91 was the development phase of TECs in Wales. The network was completed in April 1991.
[2] All figures are outturns except those for 1997–98 which show the funding initially contracted with each TEC.
[3] The boundaries between Gwent and Mid Glamorgan TECs changed from 1 April 1996 when Gwent took over responsibility for the Rhymney Valley.
[4] As from 1 April 1997 North East Wales TEC and North West Wales TEC merged to form CELTEC.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18896]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is not readily available, and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

It is my policy that major announcements should be made to the House whenever possible and this is usually the case. However there are cases, particularly when Parliament is not sitting, when this is not possible.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was spent on housing benefit for residents for *(a)* houses in multiple occupation, *(b)* the rest of the private rented sector, *(c)* council housing and *(d)* other social housing; and what was the average cost per person in each case. [16511]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure in Wales

	Estimated expenditure 1996–97 £ million	*Average weekly amounts 1996–97 £.p*
Rent rebates for council tenants	280	34.20
Rent allowances for private rented sector tenants, (excluding housing associations)	163	46.40
Rent allowances for housing association tenants	78	41.80

Sources:
Departmental Report and Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Note:
There is no information available specific to tenants of houses in multiple occupation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Benefits

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many benefit claimants have been required to complete form IB50 in relation to the all work test during the last 12 months; how many of these have then been required to attend for a medical examination; and how many claimants have been required to complete form IB50 and/or attend a medical examination on more than one occasion. [17030]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

	October 1996 to September 1997
Number of questionnaires (IB50s) issued	[1]1,465,120
Number of examinations performed	[2]675,424

[1] 100 per cent. scan of the Incapacity Benefit Computer. Excludes a small number of clerically processed cases.
[2] The figures quoted for the number of examinations will include cases where the questionnaire was issued prior to October 1996. Information provided by Benefits Agency Medical Service central data unit. Includes all work test and own occupation test examinations.

Income Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support who are also claiming support for mortgage interest payments there are currently in each government office region. [16637]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

GSS region	*Income support*	*Jobseeker's allowance (IB)*
London and South East	99,000	39,000
North	16,000	5,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	27,000	8,000
East Midlands	20,000	6,000
East Anglia	9,000	3,000
South West	26,000	8,000
West Midlands	31,000	9,000
North West	46,000	10,000
Wales	23,000	4,000
Scotland	17,000	5,000
Great Britain	313,000	98,000

Note:
The information in the table shows income support/income based jobseeker's allowance claimants with mortgage interest by Government Standard Statistical Region in November 1996.
Source:
Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries—November 1996.

National Insurance (Actors)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to alter the treatment of actors in respect of class 1 national insurance contributions. [16906]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *294*.

Pensioners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the administrative cost is of the disbursement of the extra money for pensioners announced by the Chancellor in his Green Budget, as a proportion of its value. [18975]

Mr. Denham: The information is not yet available. Precise operational arrangements will depend on the Regulations currently being drafted.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of lone parents on income support receive child maintenance; and what is the average amount of child maintenance received *(a)* by all such parents and *(b)* by those with non-zero receipt. [18885]

Mr. Keith Bradley: At February 1997, there were 1,020,000[1] lone parents receiving Income Support. Of these, 67,000[1] had maintenance taken into account in their Income Support assessment. In addition, there were 300,000[2] lone parents on Income Support with a full maintenance assessment using the Child Support Agency's collection service, of whom 160,000 had an assessment of more than nil.

Information on the proportion of absent parents actually paying maintenance is not separately available for these cases. But, where payments were made they were retained by the Secretary of State to offset Income Support.

Where maintenance was taken into account in the Income Support assessment, the average weekly payment was £27.76[1]. for those lone parents on Income Support using the Agency's collection service, average child support assessments were £16.60[2]. The average assessment excluding those where the assessment was nil was £32.30[2].

The receipt of regular maintenance is a key part of the Government's strategy for helping lone mothers move off income support into work. We are determined to ensure that the Child Support Agency provides an effective and efficient service in assessing and collecting the amounts of maintenance which are due.

Sources:

[1] Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry—February 1997.

[2] Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics—February 1997.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if she will make a statement about her Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18900]

Ms Harman: The Department of Social Security has made 21 minor ministerial announcements by press notice since 1 May, which were not made in the first instance to Parliament; two of these were contained in speeches to outside bodies; three involved press briefings.

No other announcements have been made by the Department by other means.

When Parliament is in session, all significant announcements are made in the first instance to Parliament.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Cabinet Office (Information Technology)

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contracts for services the Cabinet Office *(a)* has entered into since 2 May and *(b)* is proposing to enter into with (i) the Digital Equipment Company and (ii) Microsoft Corporation, or any of their subsidiaries. [18982]

Dr. David Clark: Since 2 May, the Cabinet Office (including the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service) and its agencies have entered into the following contracts:

(i) With the Digital Equipment Company, the Prime Minister's Office has engaged some 4.5 days technical support to re-configure existing Digital equipment.

(ii) With Microsoft, an existing contract for the provision of telephone support services for the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate has been renewed. The Prime Minister's Office has entered into a contract for telephone support of Microsoft products used in No. 10.

In addition, the Central Office of Information, for which I also have responsibility, took out a Microsoft Annual Incident Contract and Technet Licence for support of Microsoft products.

The services of the Digital Equipment Company are being used to design a replacement CAB-E-NET system under the terms of a contract with the Cabinet Office awarded in 1996 after a full and open competition complying with EC and GATT rules, for which Digital are working with Microsoft. This work does not involve a new contract.

No new contracts with either organisation are presently foreseen.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contracts for installing or supplying a replacement to the CAB-E-NET information technology system have been put out to open tender. [18980]

Dr. David Clark: The services of the Digital Equipment Company are being used to design a replacement CAB-E-NET system under the terms of a contract with the Cabinet Office awarded in 1996 after a full and open competition complying with EC and GATT rules.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions Ministers have had with representatives of *(a)* the Digital Equipment Company or Microsoft Corporation or any of their subsidiaries, regarding the replacement of the CAB-E-NET information technology system. [18981]

Dr. David Clark: Ministers in my Department have had no discussions with representatives of *(a)* the Digital Equipment Company and *(b)* Microsoft, or any of their subsidiaries, regarding the replacement of the CAB-E-NET information technology system. Discussions about the design of such a replacement have taken place at official level under a pre-existing contract with Digital.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 4 December 1997

TREASURY

Tax Self-assessment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the accuracy on Inland Revenue tax computations after self-assessment by taxpayers. [17230]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* The vast majority of around 3 million calculations so far issued are correct. However, errors can occur if the taxpayer provides incorrect information, or information is not properly keyed into Inland Revenue systems by staff. Inland Revenue offices have quality assurance processes in place to minimise the latter form of error, and these will be enhanced as experience is gained of the new system. Where an error is pointed out to the Inland Revenue, or where one is picked up during the inquiry process, it will be corrected.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the rules used to value North Sea gas for tax purposes. [19570]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government intend to introduce legislation which will ensure that the rules used to value North Sea gas for tax purposes will continue to operate in the way that the industry and the Inland Revenue have until now applied them. This will remove some doubts, arising from recent legal advice, about the current interpretation of the rules. The legislation will be included in the next Finance Bill and will apply to all gas disposals which have to be valued, including disposals which have already taken place. The Inland Revenue is issuing a Press Release today which contains details of the changes and draft legislation on which it will be consulting the North Sea oil and gas industry.

National Assets Register

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those assets listed in the National Assets Register which are located in the City of Norwich. [18148]

Mr. Darling: The National Asset Register was put together within five months, in order to meet the Government's promise to produce it by the end of November, from the data currently available to departments. And, as a result, the information is at a relatively high level of aggregation which does not easily allow a full geographic analysis to be undertaken. However, in order to increase openness and accountability, the Government will consider how to improve the information on the assets owned by the nation.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack (Communications)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if dedicated telephone links exist between all Railtrack zonal controls; and if he will make a statement. [18206]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate understands that all Zonal Controls are connected to the internal railway telephone system and have separate BT numbers. In addition, after the Ais Gill accident on 31 January 1995, the telephone access between the controls was enhanced by the installation of a number of auto diallers and emergency lines at some controls including York and Manchester. A further enhancement is currently being implemented by Railtrack so that there will be designated lines at each control centre for exclusive use by adjacent control centres.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if NRN radio is available for each Railtrack control office. [18205]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate understands that all Railtrack Control Offices, except one located at Derby, have direct access to the National Radio Network. The Derby control is a satellite office of the Birmingham control and there is a direct hot line between the offices. HM Railway Inspectorate is satisfied with these arrangements.

Rail Services (Safety)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to strengthen safety measures in respect of the provision of rail services. [18149]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) is the safety regulator for the railways and advises Ministers on the need for measures to be taken to strengthen existing requirements and arrangements. Ministers expect the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that safety standards are maintained, and improved where necessary.

Nuclear Fuel (Transport)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations exist covering the rail transport of mixed oxide plutonium-based nuclear fuel through the Channel Tunnel; and what safety and emergency planning exercises have been conducted in respect of accidents involving trains carrying radioactive material through the tunnel. [18520]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The rules of Eurotunnel do not permit mixed oxide nuclear fuel to be transported through the Channel Tunnel.

Transporters of radioactive material within the United Kingdom must have contingency plans in place to respond to accidents. The United Kingdom Nuclear Industry

Road/Rail Emergency Plan (NIREP) has been established to enable an immediate response from the nearest participating organisation to a transport incident involving radioactive material: the plan is exercised annually. Eurotunnel also holds annual exercises to test its emergency procedures which would apply in the event of any incident in the Channel Tunnel. Eurotunnel's express permission must be sought before any shipment of radioactive material is transported via the Channel Tunnel and it may obtain advice/assistance via NIREP should radioactive material be present on a train involved in an accident.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what amendments the United Kingdom proposed to the draft code covering the safe carriage of nuclear materials on board ships, as adopted by the International Maritime Organisation; and what mechanisms his Department has in place to monitor the application of the code to the sea transport of nuclear materials to and from the United Kingdom. [18405]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Code for the Safe Carriage of Irradiated Nuclear Fuel, Plutonium and High-Level Radioactive Wastes in Flasks on board Ships (INF Code) was adopted by the Assembly of the International Maritime Organisation in 1993. The Assembly adopted amendments to the Code last month. The United Kingdom participated fully in the negotiations leading to the adoption both of the original Code and these amendments. While compliance with the INF Code is currently voluntary, UK registered ships engaged in the trade have documents of compliance issued by my Department's Marine Safety Agency. UK companies involved in transporting materials covered by the INF Code use ships complying with the Code. The UK is currently participating in work to make compliance with the Code mandatory. This will enhance our enforcement powers.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contribution his Department made to the preparation of the International Atomic Energy Agency Safety Series Number 6 (SS6) Regulations on the transport of radioactive materials; and what review he has undertaken of the application of the regulations to the air transport of mixed oxide fuel. [18406]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Officials from my Department participated fully in the meetings of the International Atomic Energy Agency during the development of Safety Series Number 6, Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material 1985 Edition (As Amended 1990). These multi-modal recommendations provide the basis for the mandatory requirements for air transport as incorporated into the current edition of the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air. The Department similarly supported the IAEA's continuous review and revision procedures leading to the latest edition of "Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material 1996 Edition", now known as Safety Standards Series No. ST-1. The transport of radioactive material in large quantity by air, including that of mixed oxide fuel, was considered in great depth and detail during the development of ST-1. The UK will continue to contribute to future regulatory developments through both the IAEA and the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

Housing

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department and government regional offices have undertaken of the capacity of urban areas to accommodate extra housing; and what were its findings. [18603]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department and the Government Offices have commissioned and funded a number of projects on brownfield sites and urban capacity, most of which will report next year.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much land for new housing is currently identified as available by local planning authorities in each *(a)* region and *(b)* county. [18602]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is held by local planning authorities and not held centrally. Local authorities are required by PPG3 to maintain a continuous five year supply of land for housing.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has given local planning authorities about the size of windfall sites to be included in assumptions about future housing land supply in *(a)* development plans and *(b)* housing land availability studies. [18605]

Mr. Raynsford: Guidance on this matter is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3). A copy of this document is held in the House of Commons Library.

Cycling

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many responses to his consultation document on developing an integrated transport system made reference to cycling. [18845]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The closing date for responses to the consultation on an integrated transport policy was 14 November. We have received a large number of responses which we are in the process of analysing. It is too early to give details of representations on individual subject areas although a number of respondents have mentioned cycling.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his timetable for developing a national cycling strategy. [18846]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The National Cycling Strategy was launched in July 1996. It aims to double the number of trips by bicycle by 2002, and double them again by 2012. My Department, along with many other partner organisations, is supporting the Strategy. Work to implement it is being co-ordinated by the National Cycling Forum, which I chair. A first annual report on progress will be published before Christmas.

Rental Housing

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the building of properties within the Greater London Authority area for low cost rent. [18587]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government recognise that the building of properties for low cost rent within London raises particular issues because of the scarcity of land for new social housing developments and the high cost of acquisition in what is a global property market. The Revised Strategic Planning Guidance for London Planning Authorities (RPG3) and the proposed revisions to circular 13/96 which details how the delivery of affordable housing may be assisted through negotiations with developers, both send out a clear message that the Government wish to ensure greater allocation of land for low cost rent properties in the capital than has been provided in recent years.

The main mechanism for the delivery of affordable housing is through the Housing Corporation of Local Authority Social Housing Grants. In 1997/98. some £161 million representing 65 per cent. of the Housing Corporation's London Region programme, is being directed to new build housing for rent.

Our early action to release capital receipts from council; house sales has injected an additional £53 Million into London's housing in 1997–98. Allocations for 1998–99 will be announced shortly. A significant proportion of this will be used by the London Authorities in enabling the provision of new or rehabilitated social housing partnership with registered social landlords.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the gross cost to public funds of a reduction in housing association rents of *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* nine per cent., *(c)* eight per cent., *(d)* seven per cent., *(e)* six per cent., *(f)* five per cent., *(g)* four per cent., *(h)* three per cent., *(i)* two per cent. and *(j)* one per cent.; and what would be the cost net of savings in (i) housing benefits and (ii) public expenditure linked to the RPI. [18595]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no powers under which the Government could impose a general reduction in housing association rents. The calculations below are on the hypothetical assumption that the cuts in rent could be achieved and that housing associations would be fully compensated for their loss of revenue. The estimated gross cost and the cost net of savings in Housing Benefit are as shown. The figures represent the annual costs calculated on the basis of average housing association rents in 1996–97. The Department does not have a model for calculating the RPI-related savings in public expenditure arising from reductions in housing association rents.

Reduction in rents per cent.	*Cost of compensating HA revenue loss £ million per annum*	*Net cost after savings in Housing Benefit £ million per annum*
10	298	86
9	269	77
8	239	68
7	209	60
6	179	51
5	149	42
4	119	34
3	90	25
2	60	17
1	30	9

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the gross cost to public funds of a reduction in local authority rents of *(a)* 20 per cent., *(b)* 19 per cent., *(c)* 18 per cent., *(d)* 17 per cent., *(e)* 16 per cent., *(f)* 15 per cent., *(g)* 14 per cent., *(h)* 13 per cent., *(i)* 12 per cent. and *(j)* 11 per cent.: and what would be the cost net of savings in (i) housing benefits and (ii) public expenditure linked to the RPI. [18596]

Mr. Raynsford: A reduction in Guideline Rent in 1998–99 for Housing Revenue Account local authorities in England would have the following estimated effects:

Present value (discounting to 1996–97) of effects from 1998–99 to 2027/28 1996–97 prices discounting to 1996–97

Guideline Rent reduction in 1998–99 (per cent.)	*Loss of gross rental income, (£ million)*	*Saving in rent rebates, (£ million)*	*Saving in public expenditure linked to the RPI, (£ million)*	*Net public expenditure cost, (£ million)*
11	6,402	4,816	1,476	110
12	6,984	5,244	1,610	130
13	7,565	5,675	1,744	146
14	8,147	6,104	1,878	165
15	8,729	6,527	2,012	190
16	9,311	6,954	2,146	211
17	9,893	7,379	2,280	234
18	10,475	7,799	2,415	261
19	11,057	8,222	2,549	286
20	11,639	8,643	2,683	313

Figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest £1 million. The calculations are derived from LAMOD, the Department's model for estimating the public expenditure effects of a change in Guideline Rent policy for local authorities. The results from LAMOD are sensitive to assumptions which are kept under continuous review.

Social Housing

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates his Department has produced of the need for social housing in each *(a)* region and *(b)* county. [18609]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has not in the past produced estimates of the need for social housing for either *(a)* counties or *(b)* regions. We are considering the scope for more detailed regional analysis of housing requirements including social housing needs.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Compensation)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to notify households likely to be eligible for the exceptional compensation payable as a result of Channel Tunnel Rail Link blight on their properties; and if he will make a statement. [18625]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The arrangements for the Scheme of Redress for Exceptional Hardship were advertised in a range of local newspapers selected to cover the various route options. In addition, details were sent to Members of Parliament, local authorities and Citizens Advice Bureaux for the areas concerned. As a reminder prominent newspaper advertisements have recently been re-published. Furthermore, the initial announcement of the Scheme attracted wide coverage including on local television news.

Thorne and Hatfield Moors

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received concerning the proposed de-notification of SSSI status on Thorne and Hatfield Moors, indicating how many were *(a)* supportive of the proposal and *(b)* opposed to the proposal. [18597]

Angela Eagle: The Secretary of State has received 725 representations against English Nature's proposals to de-notify parts of Thorne and Hatfield Moors Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There have been no letters of support to date. On 2 December English Nature's Council decided not to proceed with the de-notification.

Rail Operators (Fines)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much rail operators have been fined for failing to deliver an adequate service in the last 12 months. [18709]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Rail Regulator has imposed financial penalties totalling £350,000 on rail operators for failing to meet his standards for the National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES).

The Franchising Director has imposed financial penalties totalling £141,000 on two train operating companies for trains being run with fewer seats than required under the franchise agreements. The Franchising Director has also operated financial incentive regimes under franchise agreements which reward or penalise operators according to performance compared with historical benchmarks. Details of these appear in the Franchising Director's quarterly bulletins and in his Annual Report which are in the Library of the House.

Commuting

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on disincentives to commuting journeys in respect of his integrated transport strategy. [18876]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The closing date for responses to the consultation on an integrated transport policy was 14 November. We have received a large number of responses which we are in the process of analysing. It is too early to give details of representations on individual subject areas although a number of respondents have mentioned specific journey purposes including commuting in their responses. The importance of encouraging "Green Commuting" was a major theme in the regional consultation meetings held to discuss the consultation document.

A full report on the consultation exercise will be published with the White Paper.

Red Routes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the present mileage within the Greater London Authority area of the red route system. [18965]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The length of the red route network is 315 miles.

Building Control Inspectors

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what measures are in place for the monitoring and control of approved building control inspectors from the private sector; and if he will make a statement; [18871]

(2) what measures are in place for the monitoring and control of local authority building control inspectors. [18870]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Local authority building control officers are answerable to the chief officers of the authorities for which they work, and through them to elected members. As regards private sector approved inspectors, the appointing body also has the power to withdraw approval. In the case of corporate bodies, approval is given by the Secretary of State, and, in the case of individuals, it is given by the Construction Industry Council. I am currently consulting the Local Government Association, the Construction Industry Council and the Association of Corporate Approved Inspectors on ways of securing consistent building control standards and better conditions for competition across the public and private sectors of building control.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will meet deputations from local authorities to discuss his provisional capping and grant settlement. [18976]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Yes. My Department wrote to local authorities on Tuesday 2 December with details of the provisional local government finance settlement 1998–99 and set out the arrangements we propose for discussions on our proposals.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice his Department has offered local authorities on millennium compliance and its cost. [18887]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Each local authority is responsible for ensuring its own millennium compliance. Authorities have access to high-quality advice on this issue, through the Local Government Management Board and other professional bodies. In addition, the Government have published best practice guidance on millennium compliance. We have

taken the financial implications of millennium compliance into account in the proposed 1998–99 local government financial settlement.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total cost of millennium compliance to local government. [19202]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has not itself made an estimate of the total cost of millennium compliancy. The Local Government Association's estimate of the cost, for 1998–99, of information technology adaption for the year 2000 was taken into account in the Local Government Finance provisional settlement which was announced to the House on Tuesday 2 December.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which Acts of Parliament require him to call in planning appeals for proposed developments involving more than 150 houses or flats for his own determination. [19036]

Mr. Raynsford: There is no statutory requirement for my right hon. Friend to recover planning appeals for his own determination. Under paragraph 3 of schedule 6 to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, my right hon. Friend may, if he thinks fit, direct that a planning appeal will be determined by him rather than by an appointed person.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many planning applications for proposed developments involving more than 150 houses or flats were *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected on appeal in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97; [19035]

(2) how many planning appeals for proposed developments involving more than 150 houses or flats were called in for his or his predecessor's own determination in each of the years *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97 [19038]

Mr. Raynsford: The provision of information on Planning Appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Tim Yeo, dated 4 December 1997.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Questions about planning appeal decisions in 1994–95 to 1996–97 for proposed developments involving more than 150 houses or flats.

Our records, for those appeals where the number of dwellings were indicated, show the following:

Planning appeals involving more than 150 houses or flats

Year	*Allowed*	*Rejected*
1994–95	2	8
1995–96	3	3
1996–97	3	5

Planning appeals involving more than 150 houses or flats recovered for decision by the Secretary of State

Year	*Number*
1994–95	18
1995–96	14
1996–97	8

Task Force on Cleaner Vehicles

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Minister for the Environment was informed that Mr. Keith Taylor, Chief Executive of Esso, had been appointed to the Government's task force on cleaner vehicles. [19151]

Mr. Meacher: The members of the Task Force's steering group were nominated by the Minister for Transport, in close consultation with the Science, Energy and Industry Minister and officials from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and Department of Trade and Industry. I, along with other relevant DETR Ministers, have been kept fully informed of developments in appointing members of the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force.

Regional Planning Guidance

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the advice of the West Midlands Regional Forum of Local Authorities on housing provision; and if he will issue an amendment to Regional Planning Guidance II. [19508]

Mr. Caborn: The Forum is to be congratulated on the comprehensive nature of its advice and its involvement of the House Builders Federation and the Council for the Protection of Rural England in its formulation.

We have concluded that further Regional Planning Guidance on housing provision in the West Midlands is required. We expect to issue this early in the new year. I will write to the hon. Members at that time and place a copy of the amendment in the Library of the House.

We have concluded that provision should be made for 335,000 dwellings in the region between 1991 and 2011 including replacements and conversions to be redistributed as set out below. This is broadly in line with the advice received from the Forum but we take the view that the metropolitan area has the capacity to make slightly higher provision than they proposed. This would have benefits both for urban regeneration and protection of the countryside. In amending the guidance we will want to set out clear policies that authorities should pursue in their development plans to increase the amount of housing on previously developed land, to make provision for affordable housing and to ensure sustainable locations for housing development within transport corridors.

Annual average of housing provisions for west midlands region 1991–2011

	Number
Regional total	16,750
Herefordshire	825
Worcestershire	2,065
Shropshire	2,400

Annual average of housing provisions for west midlands region 1991–2011

	Number
Staffordshire	3,520
Warwickshire	2,035
Shire County total	10,845
Birmingham	2,325
Coventry	555
Dudley	620
Sandwell	890
Solihull	505
Walsall	505
Wolverhampton	505
Metropolitan total	5,905

Speed Cameras

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of the speed cameras on the motorway system are active over a 24 hour weekday period. [18844]

Mr. Michael: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available centrally. The use made of speed cameras on motorways is an operational matter for each individual chief officer of police to decide, taking account of local priorities and resources. It is important to bear in mind that, even when the cameras are not taking photographs, their signs and presence are influencing driver behaviour. It is the driver's perceived risk of detection which makes him comply with the speed limit now. Prosecution may make him do so in future. The police do not want to detect and prosecute all speeding motorists. Their aim is to achieve driver compliance with speed limits with the minimum necessary prosecutions.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions have taken place in West Yorkshire in 1997 as a result of information taken from speed cameras *(a)* on the motorway systems and *(b)* on trunk roads. [18843]

Mr. Michael: I have been asked to reply.

Information broken down by motorway systems and trunk roads is not collected centrally but I understand from the Chief Constable that provisional figures for West Yorkshire Police for 1997 so far indicate that some 9,400 offences have been detected by automatic cameras and dealt with either by fixed penalty or prosecution. Of these, I understand that some 5,300 arose from speed cameras on the motorway systems and 4,100 on trunk roads. Official, verified statistics for police action against speeding offenders detected by automatic cameras in England and Wales for 1997 will be published in the usual way next year.

Bathing Water Quality

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will announce the United Kingdom Bathing Water Compliance results for 1997; and if he will make a statement. [19301]

Mr. Meacher: The quality of UK bathing waters fell slightly this year, with 88 per cent. of identified waters meeting EC mandatory coliform bacteria standards. This compares with 90 per cent. of UK bathing waters meeting the standards in 1996. The proportion of bathing waters complying with the standards in England and Wales remained the same at 89 per cent.

The UK results are around the average for the EU but I want us to be among the leaders. We will only get there by urgent and targeted action on the small proportion of bathing waters which fail persistently. No Member State achieves 100 per cent. compliance consistently but I shall not be satisfied until we are achieving close to 100 per cent. regularly. There is still some way to go.

It is very disappointing that compliance with the Directive is not better than last year, as more improvement schemes have come on stream.

The results in the North-West are especially poor, with only half the bathing waters there passing the mandatory bacteria standards, compared with 61 per cent. last year. This is particularly disappointing when major bathing water improvement schemes have been completed in the area. I am asking North West Water to work with the Environment Agency as a matter of urgency to help to sort out the remaining problems, particularly in the Blackpool, Fylde coast area.

I am also writing to the Chairman of the Environment Agency for a detailed report on the prospects for compliance and the action needed on persistent failures. I know that only last month the Agency warned water companies that delays in programming major investments were putting Britain at risk of failing to meet EC deadlines for improved sewage treatment under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. In addition to speeding up work to implement the UWWTD, I want to see concerted action by the Agency and the water companies to identify the causes of failure of bathing waters under the Bathing Water Directive, and give priority to tackling them in order to raise the level of compliance. However there is also good news in the results I am announcing today. I am encouraged to see that 180 UK bathing waters reached the higher guideline standard this year which is needed for a "Blue Flag" and I hope more local authorities than have done so in the past will be encouraged to apply for this prestigious award.

Furthermore, 397 is a record number of bathing waters meeting the required standard and nearly two-thirds of the 50 failures in England and Wales missed compliance by only one of the 20 samples. Some regions performed particularly well this year and Anglian region deserve to be congratulated for achieving 100 per cent. compliance.

The main results for the United Kingdom are summarised below. This information, together with details of English and Welsh bathing waters, will be placed in the Libraries of the House today. This will be supplemented by a report with more detailed results in due course.

England and Wales Environment Agency—Operational regions	*Pass*	*Fail*	*Total*
Northumbrian[1]	32 (29)	2 (5)	34 (34)
Yorkshire[1]	19 (20)	3 (2)	22 (22)
Anglian	35 (34)	0 (1)	35 (35)
Thames	3 (2)	0 (1)	3 (3)

	Pass	Fail	Total
England and Wales Environment Agency—Operational regions			
Southern	67 (62)	8 (7)	75 (69)
Wessex[1]	39 (41)	4 (1)	43 (42)
South West[1]	125 (126)	12 (12)	[2]137 (138)
North West	17 (20)	17 (13)	34 (33)
Welsh	60 (52)	4 (5)	64 (57)
Total	397 (386)	50 (47)	447 (433)
Scotland	18 (21)	5 (2)	23 (23)
Northern Ireland	14 (16)	2 (0)	16 (16)
Grand Total	429 (423)	57 (49)	486 (472)

Results for 1996 are in brackets.

[1] Northumbrian and Yorkshire, South West and Wessex Regions were amalgamated in 1993, results are recorded separately here to enable comparison to be made with earlier years.

[2] South West has one less bathing water this year due to engineering works on the cliffs at Beacon Cove between May and August, making sampling impossible. Beacon Cover is, therefore, not included in compliance assessment for 1997.

Coastguard

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on which date Ministers approved the five-year strategy for Her Majesty's Coastguard. [19203]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Ministers approved, for consultation, the five year strategy on 13 November. The announcement was made on 17 November. Further discussions are underway. The first consultation meeting with the Trade Unions was on 24 November.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Portsmouth South, sent on 18 September concerning Miss Norford of Southsea. [18519]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I wrote to the hon. Member on 28 November.

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the BMA's report on the therapeutic uses of cannabis; and if he will make a statement. [18560]

Mr. George Howarth: My right hon. Friend and I were sent copies of the report by the British Medical Association on 17 November with an invitation to comment, and we are currently studying the recommendations which relate to Home Office responsibilities in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. When we respond, I shall place a copy of the reply in the Library.

Special Constables

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has completed his consultation exercise on the provision of compensation for special constables injured in the course of their duty; and when he expects to introduce the regulations recommended in the report of the Working Group on the Special Constabulary. [18562]

Mr. Michael: Proposals for new regulations were endorsed by the Working Group on 20 November and we are about to begin formal consultation with the police and local authority association. Subject to these consultations, we propose to implement the proposals as part of a comprehensive new set of regulations for the Special Constabulary. This will take account of other recommendations by the Working Group and we are aiming to lay the Regulations before Parliament before the Summer recess.

I have placed a copy of the consultation paper in the Library.

Slot Machines

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the increase in slot machine turnover from his decision to allow the £2 coin to be used as a stake. [18272]

Mr. George Howarth: Following a recommendation from the Gaming Board, the maximum stake for a single game on gaming machines was increased from 25p to 30p from 1 October 1997. Larger coins can already be used for multiple play.

We do not have any estimates of the effect of the £2 coin on machine turnover. It is unlikely to be in use in amusement-with-prizes and jackpot gaming machines until next year.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many slot machines are currently operated on premises licensed to sell alcoholic beverages; and what estimate he has made of the total annual turnover of these machines. [18273]

Mr. George Howarth: Figures kept centrally do not categorise gaming machines by different types of premises.

The British Amusement Catering Trades Association (BACTA), the trade association representing the gaming machines industry, has recently undertaken a study in conjunction with the Henley Centre. This suggests that at the end of 1996 there were around 75,000 amusement-with-prizes machines (maximum prize £10) in public houses in Great Britain; 700 jackpot machines (maximum prize £250) in casinos; 31,300 jackpot machines in members clubs registered under the Gaming Act 1968; and 25,000 machines in bingo clubs, the majority with £10 prizes.

BACTA estimates that in 1996 the amount spent in public houses was about £2.6 billion, with 80 per cent. returned as prizes. Total gross turnover on machines in the above premises is estimated at approximately £5 billion, with about £4 billion paid back to the players.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the organisations and individuals who have made submissions to the

review of the detention of asylum seekers; and when he expects to *(a)* announce and *(b)* publish the findings of the review; [17419]

(2) what is the timetable for the inter-departmental review of the detention of asylum seekers. [17461]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: At the beginning of September, I wrote to 12 non-governmental organisations inviting their comments on the major policy areas covered by the detention review. Submissions have been received from the following groups:

United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Amnesty International

Immigration Advisory Service

The Law Society

The Refugee Council

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Churches Commission for Racial Justice

Refugee Legal Centre

Charter 87

Immigration Law Practitioners Association

A number of other bodies have put forward submissions on this issue, both before and during the review.

Consideration is now being given to the comments received. I expect to be able to announce the results in the new year.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what issues relating to asylum are currently under review; which Government Departments are involved; and what are the terms of reference of each review group. [17420]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All the issues relating to asylum are under review, especially the procedures for dealing with asylum claims and the means of supporting asylum seekers while their claims are being assessed. The Government Departments which have provided members of the study team are the Home Office; Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions; Department of Health; Department of Social Security; and the Cabinet Office. Departments represented on the Steering Group which is overseeing the study team's work, in addition to those already listed, are the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; the Lord Chancellor's Department; Department for Education and Employment; and Her Majesty's Treasury.

The terms of reference are: to carry out a scrutiny of the arrangements for dealing with and providing for asylum seekers to assess how these might be improved to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the arrangements taken as a whole, and to identify ways of minimising costs across government with a view to containing those costs well within the total provision for asylum seekers in existing Departmental programmes. In particular:

to evaluate whether the existing allocation of responsibilities between Departments for processing and provision is the most conducive to efficient and cost-effective management and to recommend any options for improvement;

to recommend other changes to structures, incentives and information flow to enhance the overall efficiency of systems of processing and provision;

to develop costed proposals to reduce significantly both the time taken from the beginning to the end of the asylum process and the number of unfounded applications; and

to make recommendations on the most cost effective arrangements for providing for asylum seekers throughout the process, taking account of the impact of those arrangements on the numbers of applicants for asylum and the likely take-up.

We are also conducting internal reviews of detention policy and of the immigration and asylum appeals system.

Motoring Offences

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to review the sentencing procedures for lesser motoring offences resulting in *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injury not taken into consideration in sentencing. [18589]

Mr. Michael: The Government have no plans to review sentencing procedure for lower level motoring offences resulting in death and injury. Sentencing procedure in individual cases is a matter for the courts. A range of offences exist to deal with those who commit motoring offences, with severe penalties available for serious offences. For example, causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs and causing death by dangerous driving carry maximum penalties of ten years' imprisonment.

The North Report in 1988 considered, but rejected, the creation of a new offence of causing death by careless driving. It concluded that it would be wrong to visit on a driver severe penalties for the tragic consequences of an act which amounted only to carelessness.

Sex and Violence (Offenders)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders convicted of offences including *(a)* sex and *(b)* violence were sentenced to periods of imprisonment of over four years in the last year for which figures are available. [18847]

Mr. Michael: For England and Wales in 1996 (latest available), of the 4,426 offenders convicted of indictable sexual offences, 635 were sentenced to periods of immediate custody of over four years, of whom 17 recorded life sentences.

Similarly, for the indictable offence group of violence against the person, 30,011 offenders were convicted, of whom 944 were sentenced to periods of imprisonment of over four years, including 267 life sentences.

Crime Victims

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the current policy and practice of the police in providing the media with the names of victims of crimes. [17933]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The Home Office is currently considering whether new central guidance to the police on relations with the media would be valuable. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has been asked for its views. Currently, the ACPO Media Advisory Group advises chief officers that, wherever possible, they should consider the wishes of the victim in deciding whether to publicise a crime and the identity of the victim and respect the victim's wishes if

he or she does not wish his or her personal details to be given any publicity. Some police forces, as a matter of policy, do not release the names of victims. I understand that Greater Manchester Police issue guidance to all their officers to the effect that the names of victims should not be released to the press without their consent.

Firearms Acts

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* has been the total cost of compensation paid to date and *(b)* estimate he has made of that to be paid to the end of 1997–98 under the Firearms Acts. [19102]

Mr. Michael: As at 28 November, £25.4 million had been paid out in compensation. The current estimate of compensation payments in 1997–98 is £115 million. This figure will be reviewed in the new year in the light of further progress on the processing of payments.

Community Penalties

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has undertaken on the level of the public's satisfaction with the use of community penalties; and if he will make a statement. [18637]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* The Home Office has not itself recently undertaken research designed to investigate the level of public satisfaction with the use of community penalties. But studies such as that by Professor Hough published in the *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* (Vol. 35 No. 3 1996) confirm that these penalties are not as widely understood or valued as they should be.

Rapid Draw Lotteries

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from charities regarding the introduction of rapid draw lotteries. [18811]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* As at 1 December, we have received representations from 22 charities; 20 of these stand to benefit from the introduction of Pronto and two do not wish to be associated with it.

Youth Organisations

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish the national accreditation bodies for youth organisations recommended by Lord Cullen. [19000]

Mr. Michael: The recommendation for the national accreditation of clubs and groups voluntarily attended by children and young people is under consideration by the Government.

Parole Board Panels

Ms Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to alter the composition of Parole Board panels considering the release of mandatory life sentence adult prisoners. [19593]

Ms Quin: The Parole Board is facing a continuing and significant increase in its work load. A very important element of that overall work load is the task of advising Ministers on the progression and release of adult life sentence prisoners convicted of murder. At present, the panels considering these cases comprise four members of the Board, always including a judge and a psychiatrist.

By contrast, the panels that consider the release of discretionary life sentence prisoners and those sentenced to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure, and those that decide or advise on the release of long term determinate sentence prisoners, comprise only three members. The additional member in mandatory cases incurs costs to the Board of around £25,000 annually, and complicates the listing of cases, leading to delay.

I am satisfied, on the advice of both the current Chair and recently retired Chairman of the Parole Board, that the size of mandatory panels can now safely be reduced from four to three, without risking in any way the quality of advice which Ministers receive. I have asked that these panels should continue to include both a judge and a psychiatrist.

Schengen Acquis

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of Stat for the Home Department if he will make available to Parliament the full Schengen acquis. [19720]

Mr. Straw: The Government wish to make the fullest possible information available to Parliament in connection with the ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam. The key Schengen Treaties which form the framework for Schengen co-operation are available in the Library. We have been informed that Schengen states have now finalised a list of documents which, for the purposes of incorporation, are to be considered formally as the acquis. Once we receive the full set of papers which comprise the acquis, we shall make them, subject to the usual understanding about confidentiality, available to Parliament.

Lunar House Staff

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are currently based at Lunar House; and what was the number last year at the most convenient comparative date. [18396]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The total number of staff who were working in Lunar House as at 28 November 1997 was 1,628.

A comparable figure for the corresponding period in 1996 is not available as historical staff records are not maintained on a building specific basis.

Police (Video Cameras)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what controls apply to the use of hand-held video cameras by the police. [18914]

Mr. Michael: The use of hand-held video cameras is an operational matter and the decision to use them and in which circumstances comes within the responsibility of individual chief officers.

Guidelines on the use of equipment in police surveillance operations, including cameras, were issued by the Home Office in 1984. They make it clear that a senior officer should give authority for the equipment to be used and that he should first satisfy himself that its use will not involve any unwarrantable intrusion of privacy and is fully justified in all the circumstances of the operation in question.

Human Rights Convention

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications for sentencing in England and Wales of the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights. [17703]

Mr. Michael: The Human Rights Bill is designed to give people direct access in the United Kingdom to the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights. After incorporation, people who are subject to a sentencing decision will be able to argue in our domestic courts that the decision is not compatible with the Convention, whereas at present, they are able to argue the point only before the European Court of Human Rights.

MI5

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent staff are dedicated to supporting the telephone-tapping function of MI5. [18698]

Mr. Straw: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to discuss operational matters relating to the work of the security and intelligence services.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has seen the files held on him by MI5. [18696]

Mr. Straw: I have not asked to see, nor have I seen, any file which the Security Service may hold on me.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards are in place to ensure that MI5 does not operate outside its legal remit. [18699]

Mr. Straw: The Security Service falls under my authority and I take a close interest in its work, by regular meetings with the Director General and otherwise. The Permanent Secretary and other officials in my Department deal regularly and directly with the Service across the range of its activities, and ensure that I am aware of any significant developments. I receive, annually, reports on the service's performance and plans, and I act as joint sponsor of the Single Intelligence Vote under which the Service is funded. Applications for warrants to intercept communications or interfere with property are submitted to me and are reviewed by independent Commissioners whose annual reports are published.

Complaints from individuals about the Security Service are investigated by an independent Tribunal which, together with the Commissioner, has full access to Security Service documents and information which they need. The service's accounts are scrutinised by the National Audit Office and its overall policy, administration and finance are subject to scrutiny by the Intelligence and Security Committee to which I give evidence from time to time. And finally—but very importantly—the Service has extensive internal procedures to ensure that its operations are properly authorised and comply with statutory requirements.

British Telecom

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many current British Telecom employees have been required to sign the Official Secrets Act 1911. [18695]

Mr. Straw: It is a matter for British Telecom to ensure that their employees comply with all legislation relevant to their work.

Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many times those subject to investigation under *(a)* Article 7 and *(b)* Article 8 of the Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (i) have been informed and (ii) have not been informed that they have been subject to investigation; [18701]

(2) how many requests have been *(a)* received and from whom and *(b)* made and to whom under Article 6 of the Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters; [18700]

(3) how many video conferences have taken place under Article 12 of the Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. [18684]

Mr. Straw: None. The draft Convention to which I referred in my reply to the hon. Member of 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *39*, is presently under negotiation.

MI6 and GCHQ

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department contributes to the budget of *(a)* MI6 and *(b)* GCHQ; and if he will make a statement. [18682]

Mr. Straw: No. The budgets of all the security and intelligence agencies are funded from the Single Intelligence Vote (Class XVIII Vote 2).

Official Secrets Act 1911

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate how many United Kingdom citizens have signed the Official Secrets Act 1911 since 1967. [18694]

Mr. Michael: Certain provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1911 were repealed by the Official Secrets Act 1989, which came into effect on 1 March 1990. Prior to that date, it had been the practice to require Government Ministers and members of the Civil Service and of the armed forces to sign a declaration certifying that they were aware of the provisions of the legislation. Information about the numbers of those who signed such declarations is not available centrally.

Current practice is to draw the relevant provisions of the Official Secrets Acts to the attention of those most likely to have access to the sorts of information covered by them.

The provisions of the Official Secrets Acts apply, and have always applied, irrespective of whether any formal declaration has been signed.

Telecommunications (Interception)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the scope of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 to cover automatic call tracing. [18915]

Mr. Straw: In my reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on 24 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *441,* I said that it was my intention to introduce, in due course, legislation to bring interception on private networks into the statutory framework. Whether we should take that opportunity to introduce further measures relating to interception of communication; and, if so, what those measures should comprise, is currently under consideration.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure cordless telephones can be subject to legal interception only by means of a warrant. [18908]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley on 24 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *441.*

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that all residents within the Metropolitan Police District are treated equally for the purposes of consultation on proposals to create a new police authority. [18644]

Mr. Michael: The Green Paper 'New Leadership for London—the Government's proposals for a Greater London Authority' was published in July 1997 and included details of the proposals for a new police authority to cover the Metropolitan Police District (MPD). During the period of consultation, which ended on 24 October, the Green Paper was freely available to any interested individuals or organisations, including residents of the MPD. The Government Office for London received over 1,200 written responses, including ones from Hertfordshire County Council, the Boroughs of Broxbourne and Reigate and Banstead. I recently met members of the Outer London Metropolitan Police Group, which represents the interests of those districts which are not London boroughs, to hear their views and discuss the proposals. All comments and written responses will be taken into account.

Secure Training Centres

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated average annual payment which will be made to private sector contractors for each child detained in a secure training centre; and if he will make a statement. [18642]

Mr. Michael: It would be inappropriate to publish the average payment figure to contractors while there are contracts yet to be awarded. The Government will ensure that secure training centres offer good value for money through normal contract requirements for "best value".

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Torture Equipment

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those European Union countries which *(a)* prohibit and *(b)* limit the export or transhipment of torture equipment. [17313]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: It is difficult to define torture equipment. Many items of equipment can be mis-used for the purposes of torture. We are in the process of consulting our European Union partners in relation to our intention during our forthcoming Presidency to encourage them to impose similar restrictions to those that we announced on 28 July, 1997, *Official Report,* 28 July 1997, columns *65-66,* on the export and transhipment of equipment where there is evidence that it has been used for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The picture is not yet complete, but it is already clear that there is no uniformity of practice within the Union. Some partners control equipment of the type described in our announcement, while others do not.

Overseas Staff (Telephone Numbers)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the Private Office of the Under-Secretary of State does not have the out-of-hours telephone number of the Deputy High Commissioner in Bombay. [18527]

Mr. Fatchett: It is our practice not to disclose the home telephone numbers of our staff serving overseas. All of our overseas posts operate a Duty Officer system which enables those who need to transact business urgently with our staff outside normal working hours to do so.

Ottawa Treaty

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Kingdom plans to ratify the Ottawa Land Mines Treaty; and what action Her Majesty's Government plan to take to encourage non-signing countries to ratify the treaty. [18936]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On ratification of the Ottawa Convention, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), on 24 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *398-99.* We shall continue to take every opportunity to urge as many countries as possible to sign the Ottawa Convention and will press for complementary action, to promote a global ban on anti-personnel land mines, in international fora, including the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

The Late Mr. and Mrs. Wigham (Egypt)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will investigate the circumstances in which the personal effects and valuables of the late Mr. and Mrs. Wigham of Swanley, Kent were not returned by the Egyptian authorities; what action the British Embassy in Cairo has been taking to secure their immediate return; and if he will issue a statement. [19003]

Mr. Fatchett: As soon as the Embassy heard that valuables were missing they asked the Egyptian authorities urgently to locate them. They have not yet found and the Embassy continue to press. The authorities released the luggage to the Embassy on 2 December. With Embassy assistance, the insurers will return it to the family immediately.

GCHQ

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* non-civilian staff have been employed within GCHQ for each year from 1980. [18916]

Mr. Robin Cook: It is not our policy to provide detailed information on the staffing of the Intelligence and Security Services.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if GCHQ is required to apply for warrants each time it wishes to intercept overseas telegrams. [18690]

Mr. Robin Cook: GCHQ obtains a warrant wherever necessary as required by the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions since 1987 GCHQ has been involved in the surveillance of party political conferences. [18702]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Intelligence Services Act 1994 requires the Director of GCHQ to ensure that GCHQ does not take any action to further the interests of any UK political party. This was established policy even before the Act was passed. On a number of occasions GCHQ has provided advice and assistance to the police present at such conferences on the security of their communications, at their request and also as provided for under the Act. But GCHQ has not been involved in the surveillance of party political conferences.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if CCHQ is permitted to undertake *(a)* telephone tapping and *(b)* other interceptions of communications where the terminal points of the communication are both in Great Britain. [18686]

Mr. Robin Cook: GCHQ's functions are set out in Section 3 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994. Communications which GCHQ is permitted to intercept under the authority of a warrant are set out in section 2 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the range of responsibilities currently discharged by GCHQ. [18917]

Mr. Robin Cook: The responsibilities of GCHQ are set out in Section 3 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance has been given to employees at GCHQ in respect of the Data Protection Act 1984. [18688]

Mr. Robin Cook: All staff were informed in 1986 that personal data held by GCHQ are exempt from operative parts of the Data Protection Act 1984 because that exemption is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security. The guidance said that the spirit of the Act would be applied so far as serving staff members were concerned, in that they would be given access to personal data held on data bases in the same way as they would have been had the Act been in force.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff who were members of a union were seconded from *(a)* the DTI and *(b)* other departments to work in GCHQ Cheltenham during the period that a union ban was in place. [18691]

Mr. Robin Cook: GCHQ estimates that about 10 people were seconded from other Government Departments to GCHQ between 1984 and 1997. It is not believed that any of these were from the DTI. GCHQ has no record of their union membership.

Diplomatic Privileges Act

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he takes to ensure there is no contravention of the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964. [18687]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964 gave legal force in the UK to the Vienna Convention concluded in 1962. However, as a result of the 1985 Government Report on the Abuse of Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges (Cmnd 9497), the Government's requirements and procedures were tightened. Stricter standards are applied, in particular on: size of diplomatic missions; notification of new staff; use of diplomatic premises; handling of diplomatic bags; breaches of criminal law and illegal parking.

Protocol Department within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for implementing these requirements and monitoring any breaches. To this end, the Department issues a comprehensive memorandum on privileges and immunities to every Diplomatic Mission. A section of the memorandum states the action we will take in the event of any breach of privileges or abuse of diplomatic immunity. This section is given to each newly appointed diplomat with their identity card. All Heads of Mission are reminded regularly of their obligations by the Head of the Diplomatic Service and the Director of Protocol. Protocol Department also controls the duty-free privileges of each mission in relation to alcohol, tobacco and vehicles.

The Diplomatic Protection Group of the Metropolitan Police report all offences allegedly committed by diplomats to Protocol Department who in turn takes the necessary action with the relevant Head of Mission, asking for a waiver of immunity or in its absence the removal of a diplomat if the circumstances merit such action. Only six such requests were made in 1996. Diplomats who park illegally and incur fixed penalty fines are expected to pay them. All figures relating to alleged serious crimes committed by diplomats and unpaid parking fines are submitted to Parliament annually and published in *Hansard*.

Visa Applications

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances visa

applications from United Kingdom citizens seeking to visit countries overseas are monitored by MI6; and what proportion of visa applications are thus monitored. [18697]

Mr. Robin Cook: Visa applications from United Kingdom citizens seeking to visit countries overseas are a matter between the individual and the Government of the country concerned. They do not involve any British Government agency. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information about operational matters relating to the work of the intelligence and security services.

Lawyers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many trained lawyers are employed within *(a)* M16 and *(b)* GCHQ. [18692]

Mr. Robin Cook: Both the Secret Intelligence Service and the GCHQ employ qualified Legal Advisers. It is not our policy to provide detailed information on the staffing of the Intelligence and Security Services.

EU Agreements

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral answer of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 754, on what previous occasions he has made statements relating to the bilateral agreement between Spain and the Dutch Presidency; and if he will make a statement. [19043]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the replies I gave him on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *122-23*. I have referred to events surrounding the outcome on Article 4 of the Schengen Protocol on several occasions, as has my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, notably during the evidence he gave to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 4 November and during the Second Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill on 12 November.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government has made to the government of Zimbabwe about the proposed confiscation of land. [19207]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We recognise the need for land reform in Zimbabwe but do not support that Government's present programme of land acquisition. We have expressed to them our concern that their current action will damage the economy, undermine investor confidence and do nothing to help the poor. We have urged them to follow a carefully planned programme that is fair and transparent and aimed at poverty eradication.

WALES

Out of School Clubs

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the current number of out of school clubs in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney; and how many he estimates will be established in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and *(b)* Wales under the Government's new undertaking. [18505]

Mr. Hain: I understand that one out of school club is being developed in Merthyr Tydfil and there are Homework Clubs associated with each of the secondary schools in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. During 1997 there were, in addition, 3 Summer Literacy Schools in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. Under the Government's proposals, The National Lottery New Opportunities Fund will become an important source of funds for new initiatives in education. These will be carefully selected after wide consultation. The extra resources for child care announced by the Chancellor on 26 November 1997 is extremely welcome news and we will make sure that a fair allocation of the new money comes to Wales.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to consult the people of Wales on their preferred location for the Welsh Assembly. [18523]

Mr. Ron Davies: I am publishing a consultation paper on Monday. I am also arranging for pre-publication copies to be sent to all Welsh members and am making copies available in the Library of the House today so that members will have it in advance of Second Reading of the Government of Wales Bill.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that the Welsh Assembly has a duty to promote sustainable development; and in what form he will publish such proposals. [19117]

Mr. Ron Davies: Paragraph 1.24 of "A Voice for Wales" (Cm 3718) said that the Government would ensure that the Assembly promotes sustainable development. I plan to make an announcement to the House on this matter during Second Reading of the Government of Wales Bill.

Job Creation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new policies he plans to introduce to encourage job creation in Wales. [18793]

Mr. Hain: Our proposals for stimulating the Welsh economy are set out in "An Economic Strategy for Wales" (Welsh Office October 1997). A copy is in the Library of the House. Comments are invited by 20 December.

Dentists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to protect the public from incompetent dentists. [18725]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Dental Practice Board has a statutory responsibility to the Secretary of State to monitor aspects of clinical probity in the General Dental Service in Wales and to initiate appropriate action in circumstances where acceptable standards have not been met.

Some 2,500 random examinations have been carried out in Wales since April 1997 by the Board's Dental Reference Service to provide assurance about the quality

of diagnosis and treatment provided by individual dentists. About 1 per cent. of such examinations are referred to health authorities for consideration of appropriate action. There is also an established procedure for patient complaints. A health authority may refer complaints or matters of concern, whether from the Board or from a patient, to a Dental Discipline Committee for investigation. Only in a small proportion of such cases is the dentist found to be "in breach" of NHS Terms of Service.

A health authority can also refer allegations of a disciplinary nature to the General Dental Council, the NHS Tribunal or the local police authority.

The General Dental Council exercises statutory functions under the Dentists Act 1984 in relation to dentists' professional conduct and fitness to practise.

Section 27 of the Act provides that dentists shall be liable to have their names erased from the Dentists Register if they have been convicted of a criminal offence or have been guilty of serious professional misconduct. It is an offence for an unregistered person to engage in the practice of dentistry.

The Council at its November meeting approved the publication of new ethical guidance for dentists under the title "Maintaining Standards". This new guidance will be issued to all dentists on the UK Register.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the former NHS dentist, Mr. McDonald. [18723]

Mr. Win Griffiths: No. To do so may prejudice the appellate role of the Secretary of State for Wales in respect of Dental Service Committee Appeals.

Vaccination Reward Scheme

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the National Vaccination Reward Scheme on the registration of children by GP practices. [18620]

Mr. Win Griffiths: No assessments have been undertaken. GPs are reimbursed for childhood vaccinations under the GP Target Payment Scheme. These targets are set at less than 100 per cent. in recognition of the fact that not all parents wish to have their children immunised.

Planning Regulations

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to review planning regulations in Wales. [17587]

Mr. Win Griffiths *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* Planning regulations are kept under continuous review. The key principles of planning policy are contained in Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy (May 1996) (PG(W):PP): that document is currently under review and a revised version is likely to be published in early 1998. PG(W):PP is currently supplemented by thirteen Technical Advice Notes (Wales) (TAN(W)s) covering particular subjects: a further ten TAN(W)s are planned for publication in 1998.

CELTEC

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 27 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *639,* what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of (i) redundancies and (ii) resignations of managers of CELTEC as a result of the reorganisation of the TEC. [19147]

Mr. Hain: I am advised that the transfer of the assets and liabilities of the Alkemy and Business Advance companies is shortly to be completed, and the staff who transfer will then be integrated into the TEC. Following this transfer CELTEC will be undertaking a detailed review of all its resources against its prospective business requirements for the 1998–99 financial year. The outcome of this review will be presented to the CELTEC Board in the New Year, at which time the TEC will be able to finalise its business plans and staffing needs. I will write to my hon. Friend at that time with further details, and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

The cost of any redundancies of staff currently employed by the Hightown Holdings Group of companies which are not transferring to CELTEC is a matter for Hightown Holdings to determine.

Accounting Officer

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what circumstances; and on what dates. [19217]

Mr. Ron Davies: There have been no such directions in the Welsh Office in the last five years.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to abolish Tai Cymru; and how he will make its functions democratically accountable. [19573]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Following the publication of the Government of Wales Bill, which makes provision for the winding up of Tai Cymru, I am pleased to announce that Tai Cymru and Welsh Office Housing Division will be merged to form an integrated Housing Department of the Welsh Office. This will initially be accountable to my right hon. Friend and ultimately to the Assembly.

Subject to the enactment of the Government of Wales Bill we propose that the new Housing Department will be formed on 1 January 1999 and will cover all the existing functions of the two organisations. I estimate that the staffing structure of the new organisation will produce long-term pay bill savings of approximately £55,000 per annum, about 20 per cent. of the current pay costs of the two organisations. There will be some short-term setting up costs.

I have today published a consultation paper on the organisation and role of the Housing Department and its relations with other bodies including an enhanced role for local authorities in planning the provision of housing in their areas. I have placed copies in the Library of the House.

Local Authorities (Best Value)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which local authorities in Wales will be involved in the Wales evaluation study to test the duty of best value; and if he will make a statement. [19571]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have received a report from the Best Value Project Group which I asked to evaluate the 26 proposals sent in by Welsh authorities. The Project Group concluded that 23 proposals had reached the stated quality threshold set out in its report and should be used to evaluate the impact of Best Value in Wales. There are 21 proposals from local authorities in Wales, one from a police authority, and one from a fire authority. The Project Group felt this would allow Best Value to be vigorously tested across the whole range of public services in Wales. I am happy to accept the Project Group's recommendations.

Three of the Welsh proposals have also been chosen to participate in the Best Value research programme commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

I am writing to all those who brought forward proposals and I will arrange for a list of those authorities accepted for both the Welsh and the English studies to be placed in the Library of the House.

The development of Best Value will help us deliver our Manifesto commitment to repeal Compulsory Competitive Tendering. Primary legislation will be required for this and the Government intends to introduce a Bill when Parliamentary business allows.

Ahead of this there is a need for a wide-ranging debate on Best Value involving local government, the private sector, trades unions and, most importantly, local people. I therefore propose to issue a consultation paper early in the New Year which will seek comments on this and other issues affecting local government in Wales.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Beatings

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been charged with offences in connection with paramilitary beatings in 1997. [16031]

Mr. Ingram: Between 1 January 1997 and 2 November 1997 one person was charged with an offence in connection with paramilitary assault.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to increase the representation of Catholics in major public sector organisations in Northern Ireland following the recent Fair Employment Commission report on public service employment in Northern Ireland. [17888]

Mr. Ingram: I welcome the overall increase in the Roman Catholic share of senior public sector posts and the recognition in the Fair Employment Commission's Report of this improvement.

It is for individual public sector bodies, as employers, to comply with their responsibilities under the fair employment legislation. This includes a duty to take action, within the law, to ensure fair participation in employment by members of both communities.

The report highlights the fact that the significant progress made by NI Government Departments in achieving fair representation among most of its work force, has yet to be reflected in the composition of senior grades. Several measures have already been taken to address this issue. These include the use of positive action advertisements, open advertising of posts, particularly chief executive posts, and the removal of various internal barriers so as to encourage a better flow of staff from lower to higher grades within and between Departments.

The Civil Service will continue to consult the Fair Employment Commission on affirmative action measures and the development of future goals and timetables for change in this area.

European Peace and Reconciliation Programme

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the projects receiving funding under the European Peace and Reconciliation Programme indicating the money allocated to each project between 1994 and 1997. [18135]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I will arrange to have placed in the Libraries of both Houses a list of all projects funded and the amounts allocated to them under the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in 1995, 1996 and the first six months of 1997. No projects were funded in 1994.

Belfast International Airport

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland Audit Office report into the privatisation of Belfast International Airport. [18131]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The privatisation of Belfast International Airport was authorised and carried out by the previous Government. The Northern Ireland Audit Office's Report will be considered by the Public Accounts Committee. The Government will respond to the Committee in due course.

Ambulance Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures will be taken to improve the ambulance fleet in Northern Ireland. [18133]

Mr. Worthington: In recognition of the particular problems faced by the ambulance service, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has received a further allocation of £500,000 in the current financial year in addition to its normal capital provision of £500,000 for urgent replacement of ambulance vehicles. The Trust has also been permitted to draw on £200,000 of its 1998–99 capital allocation to supplement those resources. In addition, the Trust is presently drawing up proposals for a major ambulance replacement programme to be tested for a private partnership under PFI. These measures should make a significant difference to the state of the ambulance fleet but I will keep the matter under review.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Further Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the per capita funding for further education students for each year from 1978–79 to 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [17395]

Dr. Howells: It is not possible to give figures since 1978–79 on a comparable basis. The following figures are the average funding per full-time equivalent student in further education in England (in £ cash rounded to the nearest £10) since the establishment of the Further Education sector:

1993–94: 3,080
1994–95: 3,040
1995–96: 2,920
1996–97: 2,860

These figures are based on an improved method of calculating full-time equivalent students.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of changes in unit costs of further education since 1978–79 and of their overall effect on funding requirements. [17396]

Dr. Howells: It is not possible to assess unit costs on a consistent basis going back as far as 1978–79. One of the objectives of the additional funding announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 12 November is to limit the pressure on unit costs to the costs arising from inflation.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of New Deal education and training on current facilities and infrastructure in colleges of further education; and if he will make a statement. [17401]

Dr. Howells: Further Education colleges will have the opportunity to bid for well over £100 million of new deal funds for next year.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the projected required funding for further education over the next three years. [17399]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced additional funding for further education in 1998–99 on 12 November. Decisions on funding for financial year 1999–2000 and beyond will be announced next summer in the light of the Government's comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received concerning the projected required funding for further education over the next three years. [17400]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend has received representations on further education from a number of colleges, national representatives bodies and members of the public.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will identify the college which is described in the Further Education Funding Council's annual report as having lost up to £335,000 on a business venture from which there was no benefit to the students of the college; and what action has been taken to prevent such a circumstances happening elsewhere; [17822]

(2) if he will identify the college which is described in the Further Education Funds Council's annual report as having spent £440,000 on provision which may not be eligible for Further Education Funding Council funding; and when the auditors will have determined whether the council's funding has been correctly applied. [17824]

Dr. Howells: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Further Education Funding Council to write to my hon. Friend concerning this matter.

National Disability Council

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to ensure public access to the agendas, council papers and minutes of National Disability Council meetings. [17740]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The National Disability Council (NDC) has a good record on openness. For example, it produces an annual report giving full information on its activities, writes to its partners during the year to keep them in touch with developments and undertakes wide public consultation before presenting Codes of Practice to Government on access for disabled people to goods, facilities, services and premises.

We will be considering how the NDC and other Non-Departmental Public Bodies which advise my Department might be made even more open in the light of comments made on the consultation document "Opening up Quangos" issued earlier this month by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representation Her Majesty's Government received from the National Disability Council *(a)* before and *(b)* after 3 May in respect of securing amendments to the Treaty of European Union in favour of the disabled. [17739]

Mr. Alan Howarth: As noted in its annual report for 1996–97, the National Disability Council (NDC) advised Government both before and after 3 May of its concerns that the Treaty did not sufficiently protect the interests of disabled people. It urged support for an amendment to Article 6a which had been proposed to combat discrimination based on various grounds, including disability. The NDC also encouraged amendment of Article 100a to ensure that measures designed to harmonise the single market did not inadvertently damage the interests of disabled people.

With support from the UK Government, an amendment to Article 6a was agreed at the Intergovernmental Conference in June. The Government also initiated and secured a declaration on Article 100a which requires the institutions of the European Community to take account of the needs of disabled people in drawing up single market measures. The NDC subsequently welcomed these positive steps forward for disabled people.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much the Government has spent on

advertising *(a)* on commercial radio, *(b)* on television and *(c)* in newspapers in relation to its policy on tuition fees for university students. [17939]

Dr. Howells: The cost for advertising, in relation to the policy on tuition fees for university students, is, for commercial radio, £222,209 and for the national press, £137,831. There has been no advertising on television.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many Welfare to Work places will be created in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* the North West, *(c)* the East Midlands and *(d)* the South West; and if he will make a statement. [17646]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We will offer help to everyone who becomes eligible for the new deal and sufficient places will be available to meet this commitment.

We are making good progress in Wales, the North-West, the East Midlands and the South West—as elsewhere—in the planning and implementation of the New Deal.

New Deal

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what obligations and responsibilities a private sector organisation given the lead role in a New Deal district, would have towards the local partners, particularly local authorities, involved in delivering the service within their local area. [18354]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We have invited bids from the private sector, under contract to the Employment service (ES) to lead the delivery of new deal in a total of ten locations. The bidding process will make clear that private sector organisations should consider carefully the particular needs within each locality and the key local partners, including local authorities, they need to work with to make new deal a success. The successful private sector lead organisation will need to continue to work closely with a range of local public and private sector bodies effectively to delivery new deal opportunities to clients.

Detailed arrangements for delivery will be a matter for discussion between the lead organisation and its partners. However, it is expected that in most cases these will take the form of a written contract, the terms and conditions of which will be binding on all parties.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance New Deal participants aged over 25 years and unemployed for more than two years will receive during the period before their six-month placement begins. [18710]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We are currently considering the detailed design of the new deal for people aged 25 years or over and unemployed for two years or more. We will make an announcement shortly.

Pupil Teacher Ratios

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local education authorities where the pupil teacher ratio in 1997 was below that in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1991 in maintained (i) nursery, (ii) primary and (iii) secondary schools. [18555]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The available information is shown in the following table.

Pupil teacher ratios in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools by local education authority area in England: 1974, 1979, 1991 and 1997

Position as at January

	1974			1979			1991			1997		
	Nursery	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Inner London[1]	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	18.7	14.9	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap
City of London	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	19.4	n/ap	n/ap	[2]14.0	n/ap
Camden	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	15.7	19.0	15.4	20.0	20.0	[2]14.3
Greenwich	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	18.0	19.6	15.9	26.4	21.1	16.0
Hackney	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	19.4	18.6	14.6	[2]12.3	19.5	14.9
Hammersmith	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	16.7	18.7	14.5	18.1	20.5	17.4
Islington	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	14.5	18.5	17.0	16.3	21.1	[2]15.7
Kensington and Chelsea	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	13.7	17.4	12.5	14.2	17.7	12.9
Lambeth	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	16.6	18.8	15.1	[2]13.6	19.8	[2]15.0
Lewisham	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	16.8	19.9	15.6	21.2	20.6	[2]15.2
Southwark	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	16.3	19.9	16.3	16.4	21.8	[2]15.8
Tower Hamlets	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	16.3	17.4	14.1	16.4	20.7	15.9
Wandsworth	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	17.4	17.7	14.4	18.1	20.5	15.5
Westminster	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	12.4	17.1	14.3	[2]11.7	18.6	14.9
Barking	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.3	15.5	n/ap	22.3	15.8	n/ap	22.7	[2]15.7
Barnet	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.5	15.5	17.4	21.0	15.1	19.2	[2]21.3	[2]14.8
Bexley	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	25.1	17.2	20.4	23.3	16.1	n/ap	[2]24.8	17.4
Brent	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	18.7	13.9	13.7	20.9	14.5	[2]13.6	21.9	15.2
Bromley	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.5	16.7	n/ap	23.5	16.1	0.0	[2]24.4	[2]16.3
Croydon	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.0	16.3	2.3	21.3	15.7	[2]17.1	23.0	[2]16.2
Ealing	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	20.4	15.6	15.1	20.4	14.6	[2]12.3	22.5	16.4
Enfield	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.0	16.8	n/ap	20.6	15.7	0.0	[2]23.2	[2]15.9
Haringey	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	20.9	16.0	14.8	21.8	14.1	[2]13.0	[2]21.1	[2]14.6
Harrow	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.1	16.1	n/ap	21.7	15.3	0.0	[2]20.7	[2]15.5
Havering	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.6	17.0	n/ap	22.6	15.5	0.0	23.8	[2]16.3
Hillingdon	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.0	16.5	20.2	22.5	15.5	[2]19.8	[2]22.6	[2]16.2
Hounslow	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.9	15.9	n/ap	20.9	15.5	n/ap	[2]21.5	15.8
Kingston upon Thames	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.1	16.1	16.6	22.3	14.6	[2]14.8	23.9	16.6
Merton	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.2	17.6	n/ap	18.4	14.4	n/ap	[2]21.7	[2]17.2

Pupil teacher ratios in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools by local education authority area in England: 1974, 1979, 1991 and [1]1997

Position as at January

	1974			1979			1991			1997		
	Nursery	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Newham	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.4	16.1	23.4	24.7	15.1	[2]18.2	[2]24.3	16.3
Redbridge	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.1	17.1	n/ap	23.6	16.4	0.0	[2, 3]22.9	[3]16.5
Richmond upon Thames	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.2	17.0	14.8	20.9	15.7	18.9	[3]21.7	17.0
Sutton	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.0	17.3	20.0	21.9	15.7	20.0	[3]23.9	[3]16.8
Waltham Forest	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.4	14.7	18.4	22.2	14.3	[2]18.3	[2, 3]21.7	15.6
Birmingham	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.9	16.5	22.5	23.5	16.0	[2]20.5	[3]22.7	[3]16.1
Coventry	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.7	16.0	20.6	22.7	14.2	[2]17.5	23.6	16.6
Dudley	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	25.5	18.0	31.8	21.3	14.0	41.0	[3]22.4	[3]16.5
Sandwell	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.4	16.4	19.7	22.6	14.2	[2]16.5	[3]24.0	16.8
Solihull	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.5	16.4	n/ap	22.9	15.2	n/ap	24.0	16.8
Walsall	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.6	15.8	28.9	21.0	14.5	[2]26.2	23.7	16.3
Wolverhampton	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.1	15.8	20.5	2.3	14.0	[2]20.2	22.4	15.9
Knowsley	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.4	16.3	n/ap	22.1	15.0	n/ap	23.7	16.6
Liverpool	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.1	16.1	17.9	22.4	14.9	18.7	23.6	16.7
St. Helens	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.8	16.2	17.9	23.0	14.8	20.5	[3]23.3	[3]15.6
Sefton	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.6	17.3	21.2	23.0	15.9	[2]18.9	[3]23.2	[3]16.3
Wirral	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.2	17.1	15.6	20.7	14.8	[2]15.0	[3]23.2	[3]16.2
Bolton	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	25.2	16.5	21.8	21.7	14.5	[2]16.6	[3]23.1	16.8
Bury	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.5	16.5	21.0	22.5	15.5	[2]16.3	24.2	17.2
Manchester	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.9	15.1	14.8	22.3	13.8	17.3	23.4	15.9
Oldham	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	25.2	17.6	n/ap	22.6	15.0	n/ap	[3]24.4	[3]16.0
Rochdale	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.9	15.4	20.6	23.6	15.2	21.3	24.7	16.7
Salford	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.5	16.2	22.4	22.3	13.7	24.4	24.0	16.4
Stockport	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	26.3	17.3	25.1	23.2	15.1	25.3	[3]24.05	[3]16.9
Tameside	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.1	16.5	13.0	23.0	15.3	17.2	25.4	17.8
Trafford	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.2	16.5	n/ap	23.9	15.1	n/ap	24.7	16.7
Wigan	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.6	16.1	15.2	22.7	14.6	20.5	23.1	[3]16.0
Barnsley	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.6	16.8	22.4	23.1	16.0	[3]22.3	25.5	17.8
Doncaster	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.2	16.6	n/ap	22.1	15.5	n/ap	24.4	16.6
Rotherham	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.0	17.4	19.4	21.6	14.6	20.0	24.0	[3]17.2
Sheffield	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.8	16.4	16.9	22.0	14.8	2.1	23.3	17.3
Bradford	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	20.4	17.6	15.7	20.4	15.8	16.6	23.0	18.1
Calderdale	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.7	17.6	n/ap	22.7	15.5	n/ap	24.3	[3]16.9
Kirklees	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.6	18.3	13.4	21.2	14.9	14.5	23.8	[3]17.4
Leeds	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.6	17.8	18.9	20.7	15.3	6.5	[3]24.1	[3]16.9
Wakefield	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.3	18.0	16.4	22.8	15.7	17.7	24.4	[3]16.9
Gateshead	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.2	16.5	18.3	21.0	14.9	19.8	22.3	[3]16.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	18.7	14.7	17.3	20.8	14.7	22.8	23.9	16.8
North Tyneside	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.1	16.2	22.1	21.2	15.2	[2]17.2	23.9	17.2
South Tyneside	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	20.3	16.0	18.0	21.4	15.0	[2]17.9	23.4	16.9
Sunderland	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.5	16.7	19.0	22.4	15.3	[2]18.6	[3]22.8	[3]16.3
Isles of Scilly	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	15.3	11.3	n/ap	15.1	7.9	n/ap	16.9	[3]9.3
Avon	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.2	17.0	18.5	22.4	16.0	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap
Bath and NE Somerset	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]—	[4]22.4	[4]16.6
City of Bristol	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]19.5	[4]23.0	[4]15.6
North Somerset	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]—	[4]23.8	[4]16.0
South Gloucestershire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	m/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]19.3	[4]24.2	[4]16.7
Bedfordshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.6	17.3	17.4	21.6	16.8	19.0	23.3	17.8
Berkshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.8	16.8	17.3	23.4	15.7	[2]17.3	[3]23.5	[3]16.6
Buckinghamshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.2	16.8	23.3	22.9	16.1	[2]21.2	[3]23.9	17.3
Cambridgeshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.3	16.7	18.5	23.0	16.1	19.1	24.4	17.4
Cheshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.5	17.0	21.4	24.2	16.4	24.2	[3]23.8	17.0
Cleveland	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.4	18.4	18.3	23.4	14.9	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap
Hartlepool	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]17.3	[4]25.2	[4]17.1
Middlesborough	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]n/ap	[4]23.7	[4]16.2
Redcar and Cleveland	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]n/ap	[4]24.3	[4]17.2
Stockton on Tees	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]14.3	[4]24.2	[4]17.1
Cornwall	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.2	16.9	2.9	23.3	16.3	[2]17.1	[3]23.7	17.4
Cumbria	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.1	16.5	21.8	22.2	15.0	[2]19.8	23.4	16.9
Derbyshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.7	17.5	18.5	21.7	14.1	[2]18.0	25.9	17.4
Devon	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.3	17.9	26.8	22.7	16.1	39.6	[3]24.1	[3]17.1
Dorset	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.7	17.5	n/ap	22.9	16.4	n/ap	24.6	17.7
Durham	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.5	16.9	20.5	22.3	16.1	21.0	24.1	17.4
East Sussex	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.4	17.5	19.9	22.2	15.8	[2]18.4	[3]22.8	[3]16.2
Essex	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.8	17.8	18.4	23.1	16.6	18.6	[3]23.0	[3]16.6
Gloucestershire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.4	17.4	n/ap	21.3	15.7	n/ap	23.6	[3]17.3
Hampshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.6	17.4	13.4	22.8	15.8	[2]12.5	[3]23.0	[3]16.6
Hereford and Worcester	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.2	17.7	n/ap	22.4	16.5	13.3	[3]23.2	17.8
Hertfordshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.5	15.9	20.2	22.0	15.5	[2]18.4	22.9	15.9
Humberside	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.1	16.8	23.0	22.6	15.7	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap

Pupil teacher ratios in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools by local education authority area in England: 1974, 1979, 1991 and 1997

Position as at January

	1974			1979			1991			1997		
	Nursery	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
City of Kingston Upon Hull	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]21.0	[4]25.5	[4]18.2
East Riding of Yorkshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]21.4	[4]25.5	[4]17.0
North East Lincolnshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]20.8	[4]25.0	[4]17.9
North Lincolnshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]n/ap	[4]24.6	[4]17.54
Isle of Wight	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.9	18.6	n/ap	22.8	16.9	n/ap	[2]22.6	[1]18.2
Kent	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.3	17.7	14.6	24.3	16.6	18.6	[2]23.9	[2]16.3
Lancashire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.7	16.6	18.6	23.1	15.7	[2]17.9	[1]24.4	16.7
Leicestershire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.3	16.4	22.9	22.9	15.0	22.9	23.5	17.2
Lincolnshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.7	17.0	22.2	23.5	16.2	[2]19.9	23.9	[2]15.9
Norfolk	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.8	17.6	17.9	22.1	15.4	19.1	[2]22.3	[1]15.7
North Yorkshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	22.5	17.1	22.2	22.4	15.3	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap
North Yorkshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]19.5	[4]23.5	[4]16.4
York	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	n/ap	[4]26.8	[4]24.3	[4]16.3
Northamptonshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.4	17.0	20.7	22.6	16.3	[2]18.6	[2]23.5	[1]16.8
Northumberland	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.4	17.5	25.5	23.5	16.7	28.3	24.5	18.6
Nottinghamshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.7	17.0	17.4	22.0	14.9	[2]15.0	24.8	17.3
Oxfordshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.2	18.0	21.0	22.6	16.6	[2]15.4	[2]23.6	18.1
Shropshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.8	17.0	14.0	21.4	15.0	21.3	24.4	[1]16.5
Somerset	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.6	18.6	n/ap	22.1	15.7	n/ap	[2]23.5	[1]18.0
Staffordshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.2	16.8	28.9	23.1	15.8	29.7	24.9	17.7
Suffolk	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.4	18.1	24.4	21.6	16.4	[2]22.9	[2]22.3	[1]16.6
Surrey	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	21.9	16.8	13.8	21.3	15.1	14.2	22.3	16.9
Warwickshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.1	17.0	21.0	21.7	15.5	21.1	24.5	17.4
West Sussex	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	24.3	18.5	21.5	22.1	16.2	[2]16.0	[2]22.7	[1]16.8
Wiltshire	n/av	n/av	n/av	n/av	23.9	17.7	n/ap	21.9	15.5	n/ap	[2]23.5	[1]17.0
England	22.5	24.9	17.6	20.2	23.1	16.8	19.1	22.2	15.6	[2]18.9	34.5	[1]16.7

n/ap = not applicable.
n/av = not available.
[1] No comparable data for ILEA.
[2] Lower than 1991.
[3] Lower than 1979.
[4] No comparable data for the new unitary authorities.

Special Schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of local education authority maintained special schools had acting head teachers at the most recent date for which figures are available. [18805]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* Information from a Local Government Management Board survey in October this year showed that about 9 per cent. of LEA maintained special schools had acting or temporary heads.

Teacher Training

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment under what statutory authority Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools has been given the power to inspect research findings in initial teacher training institutions; and what conditions are imposed by Government on Ofsted for the awarding of contracts to consultants to carry out such inspections. [18806]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* HMCI has no powers to inspect research findings in initial teacher training institutions and does not do so.

As a government department, Ofsted is expected to follow government guidance and best practice in procurement and contracting, and has an obligation always to seek best value for money.

I have asked Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member on both these points.

After-school Child Care

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what will be the structure and level of charges for the additional after-school child care places announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; [19027]

(2) what restrictions will be placed on eligibility for the additional after-school child care places announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; [19028]

(3) what estimate he has made of the proportion of the 1 million additional after-school child care places which will be taken up by lone parents currently receiving income support. [19029]

(4) what he expects to be the annual income from charges for additional after-school child care places announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and if the estimated costs of the scheme are gross of revenue from charges; [19030]

(5) how many additional after-school child care places he expects to be in place by *(a)* April 1998, *(b)* October 1998 and *(c)* April 1999; and when he expects the target of 1 million extra places to be reached. [19034]

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is too early to give detailed information of this kind. We expect that most of the funding will be allocated in response to bids and plans

which originate at local level. The precise nature of the projects supported will therefore vary according to local needs and circumstances. We shall be developing further guidance over the next few months. We expect the funding to be complemented by investment from other sources, such as employers. These projects are part of a wider National Child Care Strategy which will help parents, especially women, to balance family and working life and my right hon. Friend, Secretary of State for Education and Employment will make an announcement in the first part of next year.

School Places

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of the number of children *(a)* of primary school age and *(b)* of secondary school age, who are currently without a school place (i) in total and (ii) as a result of exclusion. [18645]

Ms Estelle Morris: Local education authorities have a duty to arrange suitable education for pupils who cannot attend school. In January 1997 these arrangements covered 25,000 pupils, including some pupils who were dually registered at a Pupil Referral Unit and at another school. We estimate that around half of these children were out of school following an exclusion. The majority of such pupils are of secondary school age. Additionally, it has been estimated that around 10,000 children are educated otherwise than at school under arrangements made by their parents.

Written Directions

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what circumstances. [19215]

Dr. Howells: No written directions have been sought in the past five years by permanent secretaries or other accounting officers in the Department for Education and Employment, nor by those in the former Employment Department or Department for Education.

Waiver Clauses

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement of Government policy on the use of waiver clauses in fixed-term contracts. [18630]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government recognise that there may be circumstances where a job which is for a fixed specific period should not necessarily attract the same benefits on termination as apply where an open-ended contract is terminated. However, the Government are also aware that there may be cases where waiver clauses are abused and they condemn such abuse.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council what assessment she has made of the operation of the arrangements under which the Minister without Portfolio answers oral questions on his duties related to the Millennium Dome. [18921]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: None. There has been only one oral question for the Minister without Portfolio.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the Scottish Office brief for the design of the Scottish Parliament and the brief to the transport consultants. [18134]

Mr. McLeish: We shall in due course make available the draft working brief for the design of the Scottish Parliament building. A copy of the brief for the transport and environmental impact assessment has today been placed in the Library.

Smoking

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of people who have died from smoking-related diseases in Scotland for each year since 1979; and if he will provide a breakdown by *(a)* sex, *(b)* age, *(c)* socio-economic class and *(d)* health board area. [17857]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* It is not possible to be precise, but in 1992 it was estimated that some 10,600 people in Scotland died each year from smoking-related diseases, including lung cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke. No later official Scottish estimate has been made. The figure was based on estimates of the proportions of deaths from smoking-related diseases that were directly attributable to smoking. It would not be appropriate to apply these general proportions to the various sub-groups mentioned in the Question.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the sum given since the commencement of the National Lottery in Northavon; and if he will list the individual awards. [18198]

Mr. Banks: To date 36 awards totalling £1,442,504 have been made to organisations in Northavon. I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information on Lottery awards is now available on the Department's website www.lottery.gov.uk.

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what National Lottery distributing bodies funding has been allocated to projects in each parliamentary constituency in the Anglia area; [18355]

(2) what National Lottery Charities Board funding has been allocated to projects in each parliamentary constituency in the Anglia area. [18348]

Mr. Banks: The Department holds Lottery awards information by Government economic region. I have arranged for a table showing the breakdown of awards by constituency in the Eastern region (which comprises Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Essex but excludes Greater London) to be placed in the Libraries of the House. Figures for the National Lottery Charities Board are included in this table.

Information on Lottery awards is now available on the Department's website www.lottery.gov.uk.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to amend the National Lottery Act 1993 so that convenience retailers may receive a return of more than 5 per cent. of sales. [18547]

Mr. Banks: The level of retailer commission is a commercial matter for the Lottery operator. The Government is concerned to protect the contribution which the Lottery makes to small retailers and the Director-General of the National Lottery will have this in mind when considering applications for the next operating licence.

Tourism

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he intends to take to promote employment in the tourist industry. [18858]

Mr. Tom Clarke: We shall continue to work with the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry to ensure that this fast moving and exciting sector reaches its full potential for generating wealth and employment. With the Tourism Forum, we are developing a comprehensive strategy for sustainable growth of the industry. Working Groups of the Forum are also looking at ways to improve staff management practices and to encourage more young people to consider a career in the sector.

In addition, Sector Challenge funding will, for example, enable the Springboard Project to go nationwide with its promotion of positive information about careers in the hospitality industry to potential recruits, and is supporting the British Hospitality Association's development of a code of practice and awards scheme to encourage quality.

PRIME MINISTER

Social Exclusion Unit

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Prime Minister which estates will be targeted by the social exclusion unit; and which local authority areas they come within. [18359]

The Prime Minister: The terms of reference for the social exclusion unit will be announced next week.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment Her Majesty's Government has made of the scope for future public support for the Royal Yacht Britannia after she is decommissioned. [18924]

The Prime Minister: Seven proposals for preserving HM Yacht Britannia are being considered. Most of these claim extensive public support for a particular proposal. This is being taken in to account in the assessment of the options. I hope that the announcement can be made soon.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public prime ministerial announcements. [18903]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Any policy announcement that should be made to the House has been made to the House.

Joint Intelligence Committee

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what is the function of, and what are the powers available to, the Joint Intelligence Committee; and if he will make a statement. [18693]

The Prime Minister: The Joint Intelligence Committee is responsible, subject to Ministerial approval, both for setting the UK's national intelligence requirements and for producing for Ministers and officials regular intelligence assessments on a range of situations and issues of current concern.

The role of the Joint Intelligence Committee, including its terms of reference, is described fully in the booklet "Central Intelligence Machinery". The booklet was published in 1996, but there have been no significant changes to the arrangements relating to the Joint Intelligence Committee since its publication. A copy of the booklet is available in the libraries of the House.

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister under what circumstances the Minister without Portfolio is required to gain clearance, and from whom, before holding meetings with persons about matters which relate to responsibilities of other members of the Government. [18920]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's role is to assist me and other ministerial colleagues in the strategic implementation and presentation of government policy. It is for him to hold meetings as necessary to enable him to fulfil that role.

Offshore Trusts

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will revise Questions of Procedure for Ministers to include recommendations relating to trusts in offshore tax havens. [19113]

The Prime Minister: I have already revised Questions of Procedure for Ministers, which has been retitled as the Ministerial code, a copy of which was placed in the library of the House in July 1997. The Code advises Ministers that they should ensure that there is no conflict of interest between their official duties and their private financial interests. I see no need to include specific guidelines about offshore trusts.

National Asset Register

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if assets held by *(a)* MI5, *(b)* MI6 and *(c)* GCHQ have been included in the National Asset Register. [18741]

The Prime Minister: As stated in the introduction, no information is given in the National Asset Register on assets owned by the security and intelligence services on grounds of national security. However, like other departments, the agencies will review their assets as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The CSR for the security and intelligence services was announced on 30 October and the terms of reference placed in the Library.

Food Safety

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the limits of responsibilities of the Minister without Portfolio for food safety issues. [18907]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on 28 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *668*.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) of 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *861*, and to the hon. Member for Lewes of 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *17–18*, on telephone tapping, if the policy applies to telephone interception and the use of electronic surveillance by MI6 and GCHQ. [18985]

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that the policy described in my answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *861*, and to the hon. Member on 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *17–18*, applies in relation to telephone interception and to the use of electronic surveillance by any of the three security and intelligence agencies.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Asil Nadir

33. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent efforts his Department has made to contact Asil Nadir; and if he will make a statement. [17700]

The Attorney-General: None. Asil Nadir remains a fugitive from justice. The Central Criminal Court has issued a warrant for the arrest of Asil Nadir and Interpol has been informed. The Serious Fraud Office intends to proceed against him on charges of theft when he returns or is returned to the jurisdiction.

Victim Consultation

34. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney-General what consultations his Department holds with victims before deciding whether or not to proceed with prosecutions. [17702]

The Attorney-General: The police are required in certain cases and encouraged in others to pass to the Crown Prosecution Service information about the views of the victim and the effect of the crime upon that person. That information is an important factor in deciding whether it is in the public interest to proceed with a prosecution.

Police Prosecutions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Attorney-General what prosecutions have taken place of police officers and other related parties in connection with the overturning on appeal of criminal prosecutions proven to be unsound in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [17696]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not keep statistics on particular offences it deals with. Consultation with relevant staff, however, suggests that there have been two cases, involving six defendants, in the last three years or thereabouts resulting in prosecutions, of which one case, involving four defendants, is still pending. There may be others.

Diplomatic Privileges

Mr. Baker: To ask the Attorney-General how many matters have been reported for prosecution under the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964 since 1967; and how many prosecutions have been undertaken. [18689]

The Attorney-General: None. The Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964 does not create any criminal offences.

Extradition

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the role of his Department in requests for extradition from the United Kingdom. [17699]

The Attorney-General: Extradition from the UK is essentially a matter for the Home Office although the Crown Prosecution Service, which I superintend, is typically asked to act on behalf of the requesting State.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bilateral Aid

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the proportion of the United Kingdom aid programme devoted to bilateral assistance. [18729]

Mr. Foulkes: In 1996–97, bilateral aid comprised 50 per cent. of DFID's programmes; multilateral aid was 47 per cent. The remaining 3 per cent. comprised mostly

administrative costs. (These figures are provisional subject to the forthcoming publication of British Aid Statistics.)

Development Policy

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her estimate of the cost of establishing a development policy forum and publishing its annual reports. [18943]

Mr. Foulkes: We are planning to hold the policy forum and publish the annual report towards the end of 1998. The forum will incur only minimal costs (stationery, postage etc.) plus the possible cost of a venue.

We have not yet decided on the exact form of the annual report and thus it is difficult to give a clear figure for the cost. However, a broad estimate would be between £40,000 to £50,000.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will take steps to rationalise the EU's development co-operation programmes into a single directorate during the UK Presidency. [18953]

Mr. Foulkes: Discussion is currently under way within the Commission on the establishment of a common services unit to handle aid administration for the external Directorates-General responsible for implementing Community aid programmes. The Directorates-General would retain responsibility for some aspects of the programmes but the exact division of tasks between them and the new structure has yet to be announced. Reorganisation of this sort is an internal management issue for the Commission, but member states have a legitimate interest in the effectiveness of the new arrangements. We will be keeping in close contact with the Commission and other member states about developments throughout the UK Presidency.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her estimate of the cost of the working group to be established by her Department to promote awareness of development issues. [18944]

Mr. Foulkes: The only expenditure directly associated with the working group will be the normal stationery and postage costs.

There will be some cost for the time of the staff administering the group but until we have a clearer idea of how much actual time will be involved it is difficult to make an estimate.

Kenya

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her recent visit to Kenya. [18967]

Mr. Foulkes: During her visit in October my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development met President Moi and Finance Minister Mudavadi. She explained Britain's commitment to the elimination of poverty in poorer countries and our intention to work with those Governments which are themselves committed to achieving this aim. As well as meeting their President and the Minister of Finance, she visited two projects assisting poor people in an informal settlement in the Kibera area of Nairobi: one of which is providing credit to enable people to start or expand small businesses, and one working with HIV positive people and AIDS orphans.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much bilateral aid the United Kingdom plans to provide to Zimbabwe in the current year; and what percentage of the total United Kingdom aid budget that represents. [19208]

Mr. Foulkes: We estimate that direct bilateral expenditure on current aid projets in Zimbabwe, including ATP projects, will be around £13 million during the financial year 1997–98. This would represent approximately 0.6 per cent. of the total multilateral and bilateral aid budget. The final aid expenditure figures will be published in British Aid Statistics next year.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on what date the Government decided to purchase or lease millennium-compliant computer systems; and when that decision was implemented. [18722]

Dr. David Clark: The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) provides model contract clauses for Departments and agencies to use when purchasing computer equipment and services.

In September 1996, revised Model Agreements were produced by the CCTA containing a clause on millennium compliance in each model contract, for immediate adoption.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* sections of Departments which will not be millennium compliant by 30 June 1999. [19198]

Dr. David Clark: According to plans submitted by Departments and agencies, Central Government business critical systems will be millennium compliant well before the end of 1999. The only such organisations not to specify a completion date before 30 June 1999 were:

Foreign and Commonwealth Office: (September 1999)

Historic Royal Palaces: (August 1999)

Royal Mint: (Well before the end of 1999)

Valuation Office: (End of 1999)

A number of the plans received also indicate that PC replacement plans may run into late 1999.

Further information can be gained from the plans, which are accessible via the Internet at:
(http://www.open.gov.uk/citu/cituhome.htm).

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimate he has made of the number of IT specialists who will be required by Government Departments to complete millennium compliance; and

which Government Departments have indicated that they have shortages of IT skilled personnel to complete millennium compliance. [19199]

Dr. David Clarke: Government Departments have submitted their plans for achieving millennium compliance for their computer systems, and those are available in the Libraries of the House and on the Internet.

I have written to colleagues asking them to specifically address the skills issue and requesting further information before the end of the month.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which Government Departments are now dealing with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and in each case at what date they will cease to deal with *(a)* and *(b)*. [19200]

Dr. David Clark: The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency in my Department has published detailed guidance on the action needed to deal with the Year 2000 date change problem. It is for individual departments and agencies, on a case by case basis, to manage their dealings with external organisations, having regard to the guidance.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contingency plans he has established against failures in millennium compliance in Government Departments. [19196]

Dr. David Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 1 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *3*.

Civil Service Gradings

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the Government's review of the working of government will include a review of the *(a)* transparency and *(b)* consistency of the Civil Service grading system. [18821]

Dr. David Clark: There is no single Civil Service grading system. As from 1 April 1996 pay and grading was delegated to departments and agencies for all Civil Servants outside the Senior Civil Service, enabling them to tailor pay and grading systems more closely to their business needs. We have no plans for a Civil Service wide review of grading systems.

Departments and agencies must evaluate their systems every three years, or earlier if they so wish. This is to ensure that they continue to reflect the key principles laid down in the Civil Service Management Code. OPS will work closely with departments and agencies on their evaluations, in support of the developing Better Government agenda.

For the Senior Civil Service (around 3,000 staff), there is a common pay framework based on job weight, comprising nine pay bands and a Permanent Secretaries' pay range. Within this framework, departments can develop their own management structures according to the needs of their organisation. There are no centrally recognised grades.

Public Appointments

Mr Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) of 28 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *668*, (1) if he will make it his policy to seek the consent of holders of public appointments to the publication of their individual ethnic origin; [19150]

(2) whether he will make it a condition of holding a public appointment that the holder should agree to the publication of information relating to the holder's ethnic origin; [19149]

(3) if applicants for membership of public bodies are required to state their ethnic origin; and if he will make a statement. [19148]

Dr. David Clark: The First Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Guidance emphasise the principle that public appointments should be made on merit. Individuals are selected because they have the skills, qualities and experience required by the public bodies in question. Disclosure of ethnic origin or a requirement to allow the publication of this information should not be a precondition of appointment.

In line with the Commissioner's Guidance, candidates for public appointments provide details of their ethnic origin on the basis of voluntary self-classification. This information is collected on the understanding that it is treated as confidential and will be used only for statistical purposes as part of the process to monitor the characteristics of those appointed to serve on public bodies.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Integrity Project

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total cost to date of the benefit integrity project, including staff training; and what have been the total savings. [16561]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to rebuild integrity in, and public support for, the Social Security system and the way in which public money is spent. We need to focus on those who are properly entitled to benefit. This is why we have set up the Benefit Integrity Project.

The administration of this programme is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. he will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 3 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the total cost to date of the Benefit Integrity Project, including staff training and the total savings.

The total cost of the Benefit Integrity Project, including staff training, is £3,459,986.00 as at 31 October 1997.

The savings at 31 October 1997 are £5,414,785.00. This level of savings has been calculated using the Department's standard method of assessment and takes into account increases to benefit entitlement as well as decreases. The project is expected to continue for two years, by which time we expect to achieve savings of approximately £74,000,000.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the extra money for pensioners on income support will be paid out before the end of December. [18737]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* Payments will not be possible before the end of December. Legislation is currently being drafted and will be referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee shortly. Once they have cleared the draft Regulations they will be laid before the House. As soon as they come into force the process of payment will commence. Payments will be made in time to help with heavy winter fuel bills.

Lone Parents

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the reasons for the control groups for the New Deal for lone parents starting in September. [18631]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The control groups for the New Deal for Lone Parents did not start in September.

Data for control areas which are comparable to the pilot areas have been collected since the New Deal for Lone Parents began in July 1997, and will be used in the full evaluation of the scheme in due course.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents in the United Kingdom are currently *(a)* receiving income support and *(b)* receiving child benefit. [19146]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

We are able to provide information for Great Britain only.

As at February 1997, there are 1,020,000 Lone Parents in receipt of Income Support. The Department estimates that in 1996–97 there were about 1.7 million lone parents in Great Britain. Their rate of take-up of Child Benefit has not been separately measured, but within the whole population take-up has been estimated at about 99 per cent.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children in the United Kingdom are *(a)* under the age of five years and *(b)* five-years-old or over, in lone parent families. [19040]

Mr. Keith Bradley: For 1995–96, it is estimated that in Great Britain, 0.8 million children under the age of five years and 2.0 million children aged five-years-old or over were living in lone parent families. A child is defined as an individual aged under 16 or an unmarried 16 to 18 year old on a course up to and including "A" level standard (or up to and including "Highers" in Scotland). A lone parent family is a non-pensioner single adult aged 16 or over with children.

Note:

The 1995–96 financial year is the latest period for which data are available.

Source:

The data are taken from Households Below Average Income (HBAI) based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS).

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated total reduction in the cost of support for lone parents as a result of the changes proposed in the Social Security Bill for 1998–99 and each of the four subsequent years. [19041]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The estimated net savings from the measure contained in the Social Security Bill to removal entitlement to the lone parent rate of Child Benefit for new cases are in the table:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Savings	£5 million	£15 million	£25 million

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost of support for lone parents

under the New Deal for 1998–99 and each of the four subsequent years. [19042]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The anticipated costs of the New Deal for Lone Parents for 1998–99 are £30 million. Funding is available only for the next three years as follows:

1999–2000: £40 million

2000–01: £39 million

2001–02: £41 million.

The total will comprise £150 million over the life of the Parliament. In addition, there will be £50 million to improve financial help with the cost of child care in the In-Work benefits.

As announced in the Green Budget on 25 November Lone Parents making a new claim for Income Support from April 1998 will be offered the help to work that is provided by the New Deal for Lone Parents.

An extra £25 million has been allocated from October 1998 to the New Deal for Lone Parents for those whose youngest child is under 5 and who are seeking support from the New Deal.

Accounting Officers

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what circumstances; and on what dates. [19214]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There have been no such directions issued in the last five years.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Medical Negligence

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on the use of a no-fault compensation scheme for medical negligence in place of legal aid for common law claims. [18280]

Mr. Hoon: I have not, so far, received any representations on this subject.

Divorce

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on compulsory mediation in those divorce cases which involve children. [18213]

Mr. Hoon: Mediation, by definition, is a voluntary process and as such can take place only if the parties agree to mediate.

Judges

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of Her Majesty's judges in England and Wales are able to speak and understand the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement. [18211]

Mr. Hoon: There are a total of 37 of Her Majesty's judges in England and Wales who are understood to be able to speak and understand the Welsh language.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people from ethnic minorities are currently appointed full-time judges in England and Wales. [18207]

Mr. Hoon: The attached table sets out the figures for holders of full-time judicial office believed to be of ethnic minority origin. The figures are believed to be correct, but as the ethnic origin of candidates for judicial office was not sought before October 1991, the data may be incomplete.

Judicial office holders of ethnic minority origin as at 1 November 1997

Post	*Total*	*Of ethnic minority origin—Black/Asian*	*Of ethnic minority origin—other*	*Total of ethnic minority origin*
High Court Judges	93	—	—	—
Circuit Judges	552	4	2	6
District Judges	336	1	3	4
Stipendiary Magistrates	90	2	—	2
Chairmen of Industrial Tribunals (Full-time)	78	3	—	3
Full time Chairmen Social Security Appeals Tribunals	61	1	1	2

Pensions Appeal Tribunal

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received regarding the workings of the Pensions Appeal Tribunal of the War Pensions Agency. [18145]

Mr. Hoon: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Tim Loughton, dated 4 December 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about representations concerning the Pensions Appeal Tribunals. The Court Service is responsible for the administration of the Pensions Appeal Tribunals. They are wholly independent of the War Pensions Agency, which is an Executive agency of the Department of Social Security.

Since April, I have answered five letters on the subject from Members of Parliament, including one addressed to the Parliamentary Secretary, one to the Secretary of State for Social Security and one to the Chief Executive of the War Pensions Agency.

In the same period, staff in Court Service Headquarters have replied to 14 letters from members of the public. Of these, four were addressed to the Lord Chancellor, eight to the Court Service, one to the Home Secretary and one to the Open Government Unit.

Courts Martial

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of reviewing Queen's Regulations and the system of service courts martial. [19114]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Military Law

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many times since 1 May the Lord Chancellor has contacted the MOD in respect of cases brought under military law; and if he will make a statement; [19219]

(2) if he will list the occasions on which the Lord Chancellor or his officials have contacted the Ministry of Defence since 1 May by *(a)* letter, *(b)* e mail and *(c)* orally in respect of disciplinary proceedings concerning Major Joyce; and if he will publish (i) that correspondence and (ii) minutes of such oral communications. [19220]

Mr. Hoon: In respect of disciplinary proceedings concerning Major Joyce, these communications remain confidential. Neither the Lord Chancellor nor his officials have contacted the Ministry of Defence in respect of any other cases brought under military law.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in respect of the Territorial Army in the present Strategic Defence Review; and if he will make a statement. [18365]

Dr. Reid: We have received many written submissions to the Strategic Defence Review about the Territorial Army and the other Reserve Forces. We have placed in the Libraries of both Houses copies of those submissions whose authors have agreed that we should do so. In addition we have received a number of letters from hon. Members concerning various aspects of the Territorial Army. All of these inputs are being taken fully into account in work on the future role and structure of the Reserve Forces.

Departmental Property

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military service properties in the United Kingdom are for sale. [18650]

Mr. Spellar: There are currently some 230 sites with the Defence Estate Organisation for disposal. This excludes small parcels of land, sites which are vacant or in the process of closing but are not yet ready for disposal and housing units in the Annington Homes portfolio.

Nimrod

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the advantages of upgrading the current Nimrod aircraft in advance of the introduction of Nimrod 2000. [18593]

(2) what estimate he has made of the reduction in operating costs of Nimrod aircraft that could be achieved through use of improved technology; [18615]

(3) what assessment he has made of the capability of the current Nimrod aircraft to meet military threats before replacement by Nimrod 2000. [18617]

Mr. Spellar: The UK's ability to meet evolving military threats is continually assessed and steps are taken as necessary to address any significant shortfall in operational capability. In addition, operating costs are kept under constant review; new technologies and upgrades are introduced where they are affordable and provide the same or better capability with lower running costs.

Foreign Equipment Purchases

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of foreign military equipment purchased by the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [18584]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the value of foreign military equipment purchased by the United Kingdom in each of last three years, since this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The information is contained in our annual publication 'UK Defence Statistics' in Table 1.14—Imports of Defence Equipment. Copies of this publication are available from the House of Commons Library. For your convenience I attach a copy of the table.

The table is compiled from HM Customs and Excise data and refers to deliveries of defence equipment which have passed through UK Customs. The equipment concerned falls under those headings in the UK Tariff and INTRASTAT Common Nomenclature categories which have been identified as covering purely military equipment.

I hope you find the information useful.

1.14 (1.12) Imports of Defence equipment[1]

Current prices (£ million)

	1975	*1980*	*1985*	*1990*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Identified[2] imports	50	147	246	627	634	1,023	1,126	1,433	1,527
Split by commodity									
Armoured fighting vehicles and parts	5	7	10	12	34	42	29	83	82
Military aircraft and parts	—	2	18	316	282	769	950	1,137	1,240

1.14 (1.12) Imports of Defence equipment[1]

Current prices (£ million)

	1975	*1980*	*1985*	*1990*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Warships	—	—	—	—	25	—	—	—	1
Guns, small arms and parts	6	32	40	36	48	41	36	71	46
Guided weapons, missiles and parts	25	65	119	190	163	167	107	134	124
Ammunition	14	20	35	27	34	4	3	5	9
Radio and radar apparatus	—	21	11	32	35	—	—	—	—
Optical equipment and training simulators	—	21	13	15	13	—	1	3	25
Split by origin[1]									
NATO countries and other Europe	46	141	220	471	503	798	862	1,162	1,205
Asia and Far East	4	5	16	12	12	77	93	102	112
Latin America and Caribbean	—	1	—	—	4	4	6	3	5
Others	—	—	10	145	115	144	165	166	205

Source:
DASA (Financial).
Notes:
[1]Compiled from Customs and Excise data. They refer only to deliveries of defence equipment which have passed through UK Customs. They relate only to those headings form the UK Tariff and form the INTRASTAT Common Nomencisture which have been identified as covering purely military equipment. Exports totals differ from figures for Defence Sales which are based on new contracts signed.
[2] During the period covered by the tables, changes were made to the list of "identified" Defence equipment by:(a) parts of guided weapons and missiles being added from 1987.
(b) parts of military aircraft being added from 1988.
(c) military aircraft and parts being identified as "other than civil" rather than "military" from 1993 and
(d) military radio/radar apparatus, optical and infrared equipment and simulators other than ground flying trainers being deleted from 1993.
Further details are given in Defence Statistics Bulletin 4.
1. Based on figures from the Society of British Aerospace Companies. They relate only to those items where the official commodity classifications do not distinguish between military and civil aerospace equipment. These are liable to alter from year to year in line with changes to the classifications. Exports for collaborative projects are excluded.
2. Signed during the year for equipment and services. Figures taken from the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) publication "The World Defence Export Market", compiled from a regular DESO survey of the defence industry.

1.15 (1.13) Defence balance of payments: invisible transactions

Current prices (£ million)

	1985	*1990*	*1992*	*1993*[1]	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Net balance	–1,246	–2,037	–1,804	–1,521	–1,709	–1,691	–2,076
Total debits	1,620	2,541	2,321	2,033	2,164	2,057	2,284
Expenditure[2]							
Germany	872	1,373	1,207	1,007	1,060	1,038	1,307
Other NATO countries	286	572	506	591	604	684	734
Mediterranean	113	169	147	183	124	135	145
Hong Kong	92	112	93	83	62	6	1
Other areas	258	316	368	169	314	194	97
Total credits	374	504	517	512	455	366	207
Receipts							
Receipts from US Forces in UK	142	153	187	155	172	136	115
Other receipts[3]	232	351	330	357	283	230	92

Notes:
[1] From 1993, the basis of the table has changed, as some administrative data formerly used to construct the table were no longer available. The table now shows figures, produced for the Office for National Statistics as a component of the UK Balance of Payments, which cover more receipts. More details are given in Defence Statistics Bulletin 4.
[2] Based on drawings of foreign exchange made to support our forces overseas.
[3] A mix of sales and receipts from other governments and international organisations for services provided overseas.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what fixtures, fittings and equipment he plans to remove from the Royal Yacht Britannia on her decommissioning. [18878]

Dr. Reid: Final decisions have yet to be taken. Following paying off, the Royal Collection and other Royal items will be removed for safe keeping. The Palace has indicated that it will be prepared to consider the loan or replication of certain items, subject to adequate safeguards, to a successful preservation group. Likewise the Royal Navy would be prepared to discuss with a preservation group what naval items could be kept.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce his decision on the future of the Royal Yacht Britannia. [18926]

Dr. Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) on 1 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 6.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* representations and *(b)* proposals he has received on the future use of the Royal Yacht Britannia; and from whom. [18925]

Dr. Reid: The Government have received a large number of representations and proposals on the future use of the Royal Yacht. It is not practical to quantify a total. These have been reduced to a shortlist of seven preservation proposals which have been assessed in detail. These are:

Bankside Consultants Ltd. (Britannia 2000 Ltd.)

Clyde Heritage Trust

Forth Ports plc

Lords of the Isles Ltd.

Peel Holdings plc (Manchester Ship Canal Company)

Portsmouth City Council in consortium with Flagship Portsmouth

Swift International Developments Ltd.

The Government hope to be able to make an announcement about the future of Britannia shortly.

Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will identify by name, rank and unit, the *(a)* Chilean and *(b)* Turkish military, security, police, paramilitary and special forces personnel who attended the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition. [13673]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* I have placed in the Library of the House a list of all overseas Government representatives who are recorded as attending RNBAEE 1997 as guests of the Government. The list excludes representatives of London Embassies who are routinely invited to such events.

Trident

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of the Trident nuclear programme *(a)* for each of the past five years and *(b)* since the programme was first purchased by the United Kingdom. [19232]

Mr. Robertson: The acquisition cost of Trident in each of the past five years has been as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1992–93	993
1993–94	892
1994–95	703
1995–96	403
1996–97	372

These figures are at outturn prices for the relevant year. The total expenditure on procuring Trident up to 30 September 1997 was £8,820 million, also at outturn prices.

The cost of operating Trident has been estimated at £200 million a year over the 30 year lifetime of the system. We are looking at the basis upon which cost estimates have been calculated in the light of operating experience and as part of the wider Strategic Defence Review.

Courts Martial

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends reviewing Queen's Regulations and the system of service courts martial; and if he will make a statement. [19115]

Dr. Reid: The court-martial system was reformed on 1 April 1997 by a series of measures included in the Armed Forces Act 1996. The reforms were wide ranging and affected the pre-trial, trial and post-trial stages of the court-martial system. The purpose of these reforms was to reinforce the independence of the court-martial, principally by reducing the apparent influence of the chain of command, whilst preserving its necessary involvement.

The reforms meet the European Court's concerns about the shortcomings of the system. The ECHR has recognised our actions, noting

"with satisfaction that the UK authorities had made changes to the court-martial system with a view to ensuring the observance of their Conventional commitments".

Although we are not taking any further steps at present to improve the procedures, we are aware that we cannot afford to be complacent. The system is kept under review and will, of course, be looked at as part of the process of preparing for the next quinquennial Armed Forces Bill.

Queen's Regulations are a form of secondary legislation which contain much of the detail relating to provisions in the primary legislation. They also contain other administrative and disciplinary measures to assist with the overall command and administration of the armed forces. As with the primary legislation, these regulations are kept constantly under review and amended when necessary.

Written Directions

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what contexts; and on what dates. [19213]

Mr. Spellar: No formal directions to MOD accounting officers have been sought or given since 1 May 1997. Under the previous administration, one direction was given within the past five years, in March 1995 in the context of the procurement of medium support helicopters for the Royal Air Force.

Defence Intelligence Staff

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the present functions of the Defence Intelligence Staff; and how many staff are employed therein. [18918]

Mr. Spellar: The function of the Defence Intelligence Staff is to provide timely and accurate intelligence warning, assessments, and intelligence and geographic support in the most cost-effective manner to MOD Ministers and Central Staffs, the Permanent Joint Head Quarters, NATO and other Government Departments as directed. It employs 4,589 in the headquarters, the Agencies and other parts of the Armed Forces.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights have taken place for each year since 1967 between RAF Brize Norton and the United States in which special nuclear materials have been carried. [18922]

Dr. Reid: The number of flights carrying special nuclear material each year between UK and US depends on programme requirements which are confidential between the two governments. I am therefore withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Major Eric Joyce

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions and on what dates *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have met Major Eric Joyce. [19039]

Dr. Reid: To the best of our knowledge, no Defence Minister has met Major Eric Joyce since 1 May 1997. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State have never knowingly met him prior to that date.

Over six years as an Opposition Defence Spokesman prior to 1 May 1997 I met a great many Members of all three Services at all ranks. To the best of my recollection, I met Major Joyce twice: once during the second half of 1995 and again in May 1996.

RAF Watton

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the ownership, *(b)* management and *(c)* future use of the site and buildings at the former RAF Watton. [19001]

Mr. Spellar: The MOD owns the freehold interest in the site of the former RAF Watton, Norfolk. The former airfield is under the management of the Army and used as an Army Training Area; the two areas for disposal namely, the former Technical and Border Radar Sites, are in the stewardship of the Defence Estate Organisation.

The two sites in disposal have been offered for sale on the open market through local marketing agents. An agreed Planning Brief provides for residential use on the Border Radar Site and part residential use on the technical site. Unfortunately these proposed uses cannot be confirmed until the outcome of the Public Planning Inquiry into the Breckland District Local Plan is known sometime in mid-1998.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

E-mail

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, of 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *441*, if she will list the e-mail addresses of *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* senior officials and *(c)* chief executives of agencies for which she is responsible. [15880]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 13 November 1997]:* The addresses are as follows:

(a) Ministers

Margaret Beckett; tlo.beckett@tlo.dti.gov.uk

Lord Clinton-Davis; tlo.clinton-davis@tlo.dti.gov.uk

John Battle; tlo.battle@tlo.dti.gov.uk

Ian McCartney; tlo.mccartney@tlo.dti.gov.uk

Lord Simon of Highbury; tlo.simon@tlo.dti.gov.uk

Nigel Griffiths; tlo.griffiths@tlo.dti.gov.uk

Barbara Roche; tlo.roche:@tlo.dti.gov.uk

(b) Senior Officials

Michael Scholar; tlo.scholar@tlo.dti.gov.uk

Sir Robert May; robert.clay@osct.dti.gov.uk

(c) Agency Chief Executives

I have asked the Chief Executives of the Agencies to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 4 December 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about The Insolvency Service's e-mail address.

The Service currently has no e-mail address, either for myself or the Agency as a whole.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 4 December 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question 97/1503 on electronic mail addresses on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency.

My E-Mail address is:

nortonj@ra.gtnet.gov.uk

I am more than happy to accept mail by this route rather than conventional post or fax.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 20 November 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the President of the Board of Trade about the e-mail addresses of Ministers, senior officials, and chief executives of agencies. My e-mail address is PAUL HARTNACK@PATENT.GOV.UK.

Letter From John Holden to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 4 December 1997:

I have been asked to respond to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the e-mail addresses of Chief Executives of Agencies for which she is responsible.

There is currently no e-mail address for the Chief Executive of Companies House. It is expected that an e-mail address for the Chief Executive will be publicised within approximately 6 months as part of a wider external and internal communications initiative which should maximise its utility to customers and public.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 4 December 1997:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade, for named day reply on 13 November, about e-mail addresses of Ministers, senior officials and Chief Executives of agencies. I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service.

At present I do not have an e-mail address.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 4 December 1997.

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about e-mail addresses. I do not yet have an e-mail address, but the Agency is currently setting up addresses for a number of its staff and I hope to be able to publish them very soon.

Funeral Industry

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring she has instigated concerning whether undertakings received from providers of funeral services following recommendations by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission *(a)* have been and *(b)* have not been carried out; and what further action she intends to take to ensure that such undertakings are carried out. [16704]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 19 November 1997]:* Following the MMC's report on the acquisition by Service Corporation International (SCI) of Plantsbrook Group plc, SCI gave an undertaking on 18 December 1996 to divest individual funeral directors' businesses in 10 specified localities, together with undertakings about the future conduct of its business. SCI sold the funeral directors' businesses on 4 April 1997. On 3 November 1997, I accepted a variation to the undertakings given by SCI to allow it to acquire Birkbeck Securities Ltd. (Birkbeck) on condition that SCI disposed of the funeral directing business of Birkbeck's subsidiary, H. Copeland and Son Ltd. within six months. That business has now been sold by SCI.

The task of monitoring the continuing behavioural undertakings is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT). His duties in this respect are set out in Section 88(4) of the Fair Trading Act 1973. He is under a duty to advise Ministers if it appears to him that an undertaking has not been, or is not being fulfilled.

It is now about one year since the undertakings were given by SCI. I understand that the DGFT is not aware of any evidence that SCI is failing to comply with the undertakings. However, his officials will shortly be undertaking a review of the situation in order to verify that the undertakings are being carried out.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what statistics her Department collates on the ownership and company status of funeral director companies and their subsidiaries; and if she will make a statement. [18742]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Department does not collect such information.

The statistical information collected by The Office for National Statistics (ONS) on service sectors such as funeral direction does not cover the level of detail requested. The larger firms in the sector are required to report financial information to Companies House but many smaller firms in the sector do not have to do so. A number of funeral directors are also likely to be beneath the VAT threshold.

Turkey (Military Equipment)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences for sale of military equipment to Turkey have been refused in the last three years. [17860]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 26 November 1997]:* Between 1 January 1994 and 25 November 1997, 11 applications were refused for standard or open individual licences to export to Turkey goods controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule I to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (the so-called "Military List"). This does not include applications from which these goods or this destination were removed before a licence was issued.

Applications for individual export licences refused between 1994 and 25 November 1997

	1994	*1995*	*1996*	*1997 to 25 November*
Standard individual export licences	1	1	1	2
Open individual export licences	0	2	4	0

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she was consulted over the recent change of policy on tobacco sponsorship. [16940]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 20 November 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that this was a collective decision made in the normal way. It has been the practice of successive governments not to give details of the internal handling of individual decisions.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's policy on the British coal industry. [18068]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* The Government's policy is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices. I believe that the British coal industry can continue to make a significant contribution to meeting that objective. Since taking office, we have taken several steps to correct the bias against coal we inherited from the previous Administration.

Post Office

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to increase the provision of post office services in urban areas and estates. [18851]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Decisions on the level of service provision and the location of individual post offices are an operational matter for the Post Office.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she last met the Chief Executive of the Post Office; and how often she has met him. [19227]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade met the Chief Executive of the Post Office on 22 July and I have met him on several occasions since May.

Industry Council

Jacqui Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Industry Council held in Brussels on 13 November. [19651]

Mrs. Beckett: The Council reached political agreement on the Draft Article 94 Regulation on State Aid. This will enable the Commission to bring forward state aid block exemption regulations under which member states would not need to seek prior approval for individual aid schemes and awards and in return would publish details of these state aids in the Official Journal and submit annual reports to the Commission.

A constructive first discussion of the new shipbuilding aid regime took place. The Council agreed on a two step approach to replacing the Seventh Directive on shipbuilding aid. Step one, previously agreed at the Industry Council in Luxembourg on 24 April, would involve the extension of the current regime on which the first exchange of views took place. The Commission's proposed new regime would end operating aid in 2000, introduce regional investment and innovation aid and tighten criteria for restructuring and closure aid.

The Commission presented its Communication on the treatment of ECSC funds after expiry of the Treaty in 2002. It felt that the simplest solution was for outstanding reserves to be transferred to the Communities under the Commission's supervision to be used for coal and steel sector research in line with the conclusions of the Amsterdam European Council. The Commission's proposals met with general approval. However some member states suggested that an independent foundation should be established to manage the assets and the research programme. Another suggested that further work was needed on the roles of the Commission and member states in managing the funds with further reflection on the impact of future Community enlargement. The Council concluded that the Communication should be referred to Coreper for further work leading to a more detailed discussion at a future Council.

The Presidency introduced its note on the future competitiveness work programme, continuing into the UK and Austrian presidencies. I mentioned that I planned to hold a competitiveness dinner on 6 May to which I will invite Industry Ministers and members of the Competitiveness Advisory Group. Austria will use informal Industry Council to involve representatives of small and medium enterprises.

Debates also took place on research and development, Aerospace and the Information Society. The Council agreed the conclusions on Electronic Commerce. There were presentations on SMEs, the Construction Industry

Acquired Rights Directive

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment the Government have made of the effect of the judgment in the Suzan case in the European Court of Justice on its policy towards the acquired rights directive; and if she will make a statement. [19211]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government are currently reviewing their policy on the Acquired Rights Directive and will shortly be issuing a public consultation document setting out and seeking views on all relevant issues, including the implications of the Suzan judgment.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what awards have been made in respect of petroleum production licences for blocks 204/14 and 204/15 west of Shetland. [19650]

Mr. Battle: I am pleased to announce the award of petroleum production licences for blocks 204/14 and 204/15 in the Atlantic Frontier area to a group of companies comprising ARCO British Ltd., Conoco UK Ltd., British-Borneo Oil and Gas Ltd. and Ranger Oil (UK) Ltd.

We received six very strong applications for these blocks, which were offered for licensing by a Notice in the Official Journal of the European Communities, C205 of 5 July 1997. All six met the award criteria set out in the Notice, but the work programme submitted by the ARCO consortium offers the best scheme for timely and thorough exploration of the full range of prospects in both blocks.

After applications for the blocks had been received, a Note was received from the Danish Government reserving its position regarding a possible claim to a small part of the North West corner of block 204/14. Our response to the Note stated that the UK has no doubts about its sovereign right to licence the block. Both the Danish and Faroese Governments have been kept fully advised about the designation and offer of the area concerned. All six applicants were informed about the Note and all confirmed that they wished their applications to proceed.

Council for Science and Technology

Mr. Coaker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she will publish the Council for Science and Technology's recent advice on research issues arising from the Dearing Committee's report on higher education. [19652]

Mrs. Beckett: In the past, the Council for Science and Technology has been accused of being a rather secretive body. We wish to change this perception and raise its public profile. In future there will be a presumption in favour of publishing detailed advice from the Council.

When I gave evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on 29 October I said that we would shortly publish the Council's advice on the research issues arising from the Dearing Committee's report. I can now confirm that we are publishing this advice today. I must however make it clear that it represents the views of the independent members of the Council, not necessarily mine or other

The Council's advice will feed into our broader consideration of the research aspects of the Dearing recommendations and we will be issuing policy statements in due course. The timing of these will depend on a number of factors, including the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

More generally, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Science, Industry and Energy and I are now considering how to revitalise the Council as a key source of advice on science and technology issues and will make an announcement on this as soon as possible.

I have arranged copies of the Council's advice to be placed in the Library of the House.

Toys (Safety)

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information her Department has collated to establish the number of children who have become ill from coming into contact with toys containing cyclobutanone. [18910]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: No accidents involving toys containing cyclobutanone have been identified in my Department's Home Accident Surveillance System, nor have any been drawn to the attention of the DTI from any other source. If the hon. Member has such evidence I would be grateful to receive it.

HEALTH

Fair Trade (Coffee and Tea)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement by the Secretary of State for International Development, 5 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 332, if he will instruct officials to serve coffee and tea furnished by suppliers who adhere to fair trade standards in his Department. [15491]

Ms Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave him on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *617*. All procurement decisions in the Department are based on the Government's policy of value for money.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of community health councils; and what matters were discussed. [18300]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health met with representatives of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales (ACHCEW) on 1 July 1997 and discussed a range of National Health Service matters which they raised.

My noble Friend the Baroness Jay, Minister of State, has agreed to meet representatives of ACHCEW on a six monthly basis and expects to meet them again early in the new year.

Wigan and Bolton Health Authority

Mr. Cunliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the accident and emergency services of the Wigan and Bolton Health Authority with particular

Mr. Boateng: This is a matter for the health authority. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently approved a change to the opening hours of the minor injuries unit at Leigh Infirmary. Wigan and Bolton Health Authority has been allocated £1.4 million in winter pressures money and will use this additional funding to increase the capacity of the hospitals and social services departments in the district to deal with rising numbers of emergency admissions.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional funding his Department is providing for research into the causes and prevention of breast cancer. [18525]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are committed to encouraging breast cancer research. The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). Since 1995–96, the Council has supported 81 projects on breast cancer with a total cost of £13 million. Six projects were also supported in MRC Units at a cost of £1.4 million in 1995–96.

The Department of Health's Policy Research Programme (PRP) is currently funding studies into breast cancer with a total cost of £2.4 million. In addition, the PRP provides support of £420,000 per year to the Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit at the Institute of Cancer Research, which deals largely with breast cancer screening. Recent commissions include a contribution of £573,000 to the UKCCCR's (United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research) Breast Radiotherapy Fractionation Trial (the START trial) and over £100,000 to evaluate the East Sussex and Leeds/Wakefield pilot projects currently being established for breast screening in women aged 65 to 69.

The NHS National Cancer Research and Development Programme is currently funding studies into breast cancer totalling some £500,000.

Breast Screening Services

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has for improving the *(a)* breast screening service and *(b)* symptomatic breast service. [18511]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are committed to providing high quality breast services.

In the light of the recent failure of the breast screening programme in Exeter, the Government have announced wide ranging action on the organisation and management of cancer screening, to strengthen quality assurance, eliminate weaknesses in the management of screening, and restore public confidence. In addition to this, we are funding research into ways to improve the standard of the breast screening service offered to women. This includes pilot schemes to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the screening programme to invite women aged 65 to 69 routinely for screening; and research into the possible benefits of screening women more frequently than every

We intend to improve all cancer services and fully endorse the recommendations set out in the Calman/Hine document "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services". As a first step we have made available £10 million of extra resources specifically for breast cancer services. The additional funding is supporting over 300 initiatives around the country to improve the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. Particular emphasis has been given to supporting projects that give rapid access to diagnostic services through the provision of one-stop clinics, speeding access to treatment by reducing waiting times and the provision of high quality care delivered in line with published guidance by specialist multi-disciplinary teams.

Head Lice

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of cases of head lice in schools for each health authority in England for each of the last five years; [18714]

(2) what advice is issued by his Department to health authorities to deal with the problem of head lice in schools; [18715]

(3) what his Department has done to promote best practice in dealing with head lice in schools. [18713]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the number of cases of head lice in schools is not collected centrally. In April 1996, the Department of Health launched a poster and leaflet campaign "The Prevention and Treatment of Head Lice". So far, over 1.5 million copies of the leaflet have been sent to parents, teachers and health professionals. The Department's publication, "Child Health in the Community: A Guide to Good Practice", issued to health and local authorities in September 1996, includes guidance on best practice in dealing with head lice in schools. We shall continue to work with the Department for Education and Employment to promote best practice, focusing on a "whole school approach"—where action is taken at the same time to detect and treat every case of head lice within the school thus minimising opportunities for re-infestation. This approach is actively promoted by the voluntary organisation, Community Hygiene Concern, whose efforts we support through grant aid. In addition Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, who have local responsibility for public health programmes, are currently working on a review document on head lice.

Departmental Press Office

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the changes he has introduced to his Department's press office. [18728]

Mr. Boateng: Good, effective, modern and reliable communication, including the provision of a good, effective, modern and reliable press office, is an essential duty of Government. The Department's Press Office is always looking for ways to improve its services to Ministers. Ministers are always looking for ways to improve communication and the provision of information to the general public and with hon. and noble Member of both Houses. Since 1 May, Ministers and the press office have been constructively working

Meningitis

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to increase public awareness of meningitis; [18879]

(2) what sums his Department has spent in each of the last three years on increasing public awareness of meningitis. [18880]

Mr. Boateng: The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) holds an annual press briefing for journalists to raise public, professional and media awareness of meningitis. CMO also writes to all doctors each year giving advice on the early diagnosis of suspected cases of meningococcal infection and stressing the need for immediate antibiotic treatment and urgent referral to hospital. The Department of Health contributes to the many articles in newspapers and the medical press, and television and radio programmes that appear during the winter increase in cases.

This year's briefing took place on 3 November. This year, we have also revised the Department's information leaflet entitled "Knowing about meningitis and septicaemia" available to the public from GPs' surgeries. Meningococcal infections peak with most cases in children under one year, and there is a second smaller peak in late teenagers. Extra information is, therefore, targeted in these areas. The Health Education Authority (HEA), funded by the Department, produces the leaflet "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations", which includes advice on recognising the signs and symptoms of meningitis and is provided to new parents. The HEA also produce a leaflet targeted at students, "Look out for your mate", which is distributed to colleges and universities. The Department provides funding to both the National Meningitis Trust and the Meningitis Research Foundation to support their valuable information work. Both organisations took part in this year's press briefing.

It is not possible to identify the amount spent on public awareness of meningitis separately as it is a key theme of the Department's, the HEA's and the meningitis charities', information campaigns at this time of year. The costs of preparing, printing and distributing leaflets and posters such as "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations" and "Look out for your mate" are subsumed within the HEA/DH contract covering immunisation awareness. Around one million copies of "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations", which is updated annually, are produced each year and around 1.2 million "Look out for your mate" leaflets and posters were distributed this year. 250,000 copies of the Department's leaflet were printed this year.

Barnardos

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the change in policy by Barnardos to allow former children access to their personal files; and if he will provide a section 64 special project grant to Barnardos in support

Mr. Boateng: There have been no representations to the Department concerning the change in policy by Barnardos to allow former children access to their personal files. No application for Section 64 funding has been received from Barnardos for a project of this nature.

Anti-Smoking Initiatives

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made in the current year for anti-smoking initiatives. [19105]

Mr. Boateng: In 1997–98, the Government are funding an adult smoking campaign costing £5.5 million being run by the Health Education Authority. A teenage smoking campaign costing £1 million is being run by Brewer Blackler Limited.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the second report of Parliament on the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme. [19653]

Mr. Milburn: The second Report to Parliament on the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme was published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people in the Ashford (Middlesex) Hospital NHS Trust area had been waiting for treatment for more than *(a)* 24 months, *(b)* 18 months and *(c)* 12 months on (i) 31 March and (ii) 30 September; [18416]

(2) how many people in the St. Peter's (Chertsey) Hospital NHS Trust area had been waiting for treatment for more than *(a)* 24 months, *(b)* 18 months and *(c)* 12 months on (i) 31 March and (ii) 30 September; [18417]

(3) how many people in the West Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust area had been waiting for treatment for more than *(a)* 24 months, *(b)* 18 months and *(c)* 12 months on (i) 31 March and (ii) 30 September. [18420]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is given in the table.

Ordinary admissions and day cases

Trust	Over 12 month waiters		Over 18 month waiters		Over 24 month waiters	
	On 31 March 1997	*On 30 September 1997*[1]	*On 31 March 1997*	*On 30 September 1997*[1]	*On 31 March 1997*	*On 30 September 1997*[1]
Ashford Hospital NHS Trust	324	418	6	6	0	0
St. Peter's Hospital NHS Trust	466	486	0	0	0	0
West Middlesex University NHS Trust	192	289	0	37	0	0

[1] Figures for 30 September are provisional.

Hospital Mergers

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the criteria in respect of *(a)* financial savings, *(b)* waiting list reduction, *(c)* increase in treatments and *(d)* reduction in managerial staff numbers he will use in his decision on the proposed merger between the Ashford (Middlesex) and St. Peter's (Chertsey) Hospital NHS Trust. [18419]

Mr. Milburn: Any proposal to merge National Health Service trusts will be considered on its own merits. Most importantly, they must lead to benefits for patients in improved health care. We have set a minimum target of £500,000 management savings which must be realised in the first two years of merger and be reinvested in patient care.

Fundholding

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by practice *(a)* the underspend and *(b)* the overspend of general practitioner fundholding practices in the West Surrey Health Authority area in each year since 1993. [18418]

Mr. Milburn: Information is not held centrally on expenditure from general practitioner fundholder budgets at practice level. Such information can be obtained directly from the practices concerned.

The table details the number of GP fundholders showing retained savings (net of any savings voluntarily returned to their health authority before audit) or overspending in Surrey in each financial year from 1993–94 to 1995–96, and the total level of retained savings or overspends made on their budgets. These data are taken from GP fundholders' accounts. Audited data for 1996–97 are not yet available.

General practitioner fundholding accounts

	Number of funds making savings	*Savings retained from budget (£000)*	*Number of funds overspending*	*Overspends incurred on budget (£000)*
Surrey Family Health Services Authority				
1993–94	21	1,559	9	522
1994–94	26	1,380	15	1,085
West Surrey Health Authority:				

General practitioner fundholding accounts

	Number of funds making savings	*Savings retained from budget (£000)*	*Number of funds overspending*	*Overspends incurred on budget (£000)*
East Surrey Health Authority 1995–96	5	250	6	171

Source:
GP fundholder audited accounts.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by *(a)* health authority area and *(b)* social services authority area the number of hospital beds blocked by patients waiting for social services placements. [18516]

Mr. Boateng: Information collected on delayed discharge, by health authority, has been placed in the Library. This information is not collected centrally on a social services authority basis.

Accounting Officers

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what circumstances; and on what dates. [19216]

Mr. Boateng: Health Ministers have not issued any such directions in the last five years.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with groups and individuals opposed to xenotransplantation. [18912]

Mr. Boateng: No formal discussions have taken place with groups or individuals opposed to xenotransplantation. A wide range of opinions were received in response to a consultation exercise held between 25 January 1996 and 29 March 1996 by the Advisory Group on the Ethics of Xenotransplantation and detailed in its report, "Animal Tissue into Humans". Views were sought during a further consultation period which began in January 1997 with the publication of that report. The United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority has offered the Government advice on the responses and issues arising from this latest consultation exercise. This is presently under consideration.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total cost to the National Health Service of millennium compliance. [19201]

Mr. Boateng: Information is not available to estimate accurately the total costs of millennium compliancy. The best estimate available from industry and other sources is to between £200 and £300 million. This does not include expenditure in resolving the embedded chip problem for which no estimates are currently available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Flooding (Thames and Medway Estuaries)

8. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the impact of rising water levels on the potential for flooding in the Thames and Medway estuaries. [17672]

Mr. Morley: The Department's current guidance to flood defence operating authorities is that an allowance of 6 mm a year should be made for relative sea level rise due to global warming and vertical land movements when assessing the need for further coastal defence measures in the south of England.

Less Favoured Areas

11. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from farmers in the less-favoured areas; and if he will make a statement. [17675]

Dr. John Cunningham: I and my Ministerial colleagues have received many representations from farmers in the less-favoured areas. We are considering the case the industry has made for increasing the rates of Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance and I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Hill Farming

12. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next proposes to meet hill farmers in Northumberland to discuss farm incomes. [17676]

Dr. John Cunningham: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is planning to visit Hexham later this month to meet local farming representatives.

17. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he has taken to improve *(a)* the incomes and *(b)* the security of hill farmers. [17681]

Mr. Morley: An announcement will be made shortly on support for hill farmers.

Environmental Initiatives (Norfolk Broads)

Mr. Morley: We have just announced new targets for protecting and enhancing the grazing marsh land of the Broads by increasing the uptake of the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme.

Organophosphate Sheep Dips

14. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made towards a moratorium on the use of organophosphates in sheep dips. [17678]

Mr. Rooker: No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. The Government act on the advice of the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee, which has recently reaffirmed its advice that, provided they are used safely, there is no scientific justification for withdrawing organophosphate sheep dips from the market.

We constantly remind users of the need to follow instructions and advice as to procedure in use of such authorised products.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to implement recommendations made in the 1997 Veterinary Products Committee Report, with particular reference to those relating to the use and purchase of organophosphorous sheep dips. [18164]

Mr. Rooker: New guidance from the Health and Safety Executive will be sent to all registered sheep farmers in the New Year. It will emphasise the importance of the Certificate of Competence in the Safe Use of Sheep Dips. It will explain practical measures for planning and carrying out dipping, including the steps necessary under the Control of Substances to Health Regulations 1994 (COSHH) to assess the risks and decide what precautions are needed, and will advise on safe disposal of used sheep dip.

In parallel, the National Proficiency Tests Council is reviewing its testing scheme for the Certificate of Competence and will incorporate the recommendations of the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC).

Other recommendations of the VPC, relating to supply of organophosphate (OP) dips by veterinarians, labelling, disposal, research and reviews of non-OP dips and other OP veterinary medicines, have been implemented or are being actively pursued.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people have notified his Ministry or the Department of Health to date that they are suffering from the toxic side effects of exposure to organophosphate sheep dips; and if he will make a statement. [18208]

Mr. Rooker: The Department of Health does not keep records of human suspected adverse reactions (SARs) to organophosphorus sheep dips. The Committee on Safety of Medicines Adverse Reactions Appraisal Panel for human SARs are published annually and are available in the Library of the House. The Panel's Report for 1996 will be published shortly. It will show that, for the 11 years up to December 1996, there were 602 reports of human SARs to organophosphorus sheep dips.

Common Agricultural Policy

15. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his main objectives are in respect of CAP reform. [17679]

Dr. John Cunningham: I want to secure a market oriented policy with less costly farm support decoupled from agricultural production; a better deal for consumers and more emphasis placed on target environmental and rural development objectives.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reforms to the Common Agriculture Policy the Government propose; and what account will be taken of rural development policy and its impact on the rural economy. [18794]

Mr. Rooker: The Government want to secure a market oriented policy with less costly farm support decoupled from agricultural production; and more emphasis placed on targeted environmental and rural development objectives.

Biodiversity

16. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to achieve biodiversity targets. [17680]

Mr. Morley: Actions taken by the Department are set out in a paper prepared for the UK Biodiversity Group "MAFF's Role in Implementing the Biodiversity Action Plans". I have today placed a copy in the Library of the House.

Food Imports

18. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of United Kingdom food imports could be grown in Britain; and what success the United Kingdom has had in reducing such imports. [17682]

Mr. Rooker: Provisional figures indicate that last year the UK was 69 per cent. self-sufficient in terms of food and feed products or materials that could be grown in season, in the UK. This figure shows a reduction of about 4 per cent. on the average in recent years, mainly as a result of reduced output and exports of beef and higher levels of imported meat and meat products.

Access to Open Country

19. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on access to open country. [17683]

Dr. John Cunningham: My Department has received

Milk (Dioxin Levels)

20. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will establish a continuing survey of dioxin levels in milk in North-East Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [17684]

Mr. Rooker: Samples of cows' milk from farms in the north-east Derbyshire area have been analysed regularly since 1991, when elevated levels of dioxins were first discovered. Samples taken in July 1997 from 19 farms in the Bolsover area showed that levels of dioxins in the milk have fallen and are now generally similar to those found in other parts of the UK. The need for further surveys will be reviewed next year in the light of the results from samples taken in October this year and the next survey planned for July 1998.

Environmentally Friendly Farming

22. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to encourage environmentally friendly farming. [17686]

Mr. Morley: The Government are working with conservation and farming organisations to improve the efficiency and targeting of agri-environment schemes. Existing schemes are regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, we are also developing new initiatives. The pilot Arable Stewardship scheme, which will be introduced next year, is aimed at restoring the wildlife interest of arable farmland areas and includes measures for reversing the loss of plant and animal species which are largely dependent on arable crops. We have also established, through the National Agri-Environment Forum, a working group to address the environmental issues associated with the uplands.

In addition, the Organic Conversion Information Service helps farmers decide whether organic farming would be appropriate for them, as well as providing more detailed advice for those considering conversion. We are reviewing the rates and structure of aid, under the Organic Aid Scheme, for those considering conversion to organic farming. We are also considering, in consultation with farming and conservation organisations, the practicality of drawing up a Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Wildlife and Landscape.

For the future, the Government see a continuing and increasing role for environmental incentive schemes as part of a reformed CAP.

Food Labelling

23. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to improve food labelling for consumers. [17687]

28. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the Government's policy on improving food labelling information for consumers. [17693]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to our hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 6 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *339*.

Abattoirs

24. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the provision of abattoirs. [17688]

Mr. Rooker: There are currently 29 abattoirs operating the Over Thirty Months Scheme (OTMS) in the UK. These were awarded contracts in July 1997 following a competitive tender exercise run by the Intervention Board. It was necessary to reduce the number of abattoirs participating in OTMS as numbers of cattle entering the scheme diminished.

The plants were chosen on the basis of objective criteria, principally proximity to the main production areas, hygiene standards and value for money. Together, they provide more than enough capacity to handle the number of animals now expected to come forward under the OTMS, with an allowance which can be factored in to cope with seasonal fluctuations.

Some journey times may have increased, but in general, all cattle are travelling no further to abattoirs than they were prior to the OTMS and in many cases the distances are shorter. Also, the number of livestock markets participating in the scheme has not changed, so access for farmers should not have been seriously affected.

Although there are no OTMS abattoirs in Sussex, sufficient capacity is available in the South East to handle effectively all cattle presented under the scheme in the area.

Food Safety

25. **Mr. Lepper:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spends on *(a)* food safety and *(b)* standards surveys; and how much he expects to spend in the current year. [17689]

Mr. Rooker: The Department spends about £8.5 million on food surveys of which more than 95 per cent. is on food safety. Microbiological surveillance accounts for £413,000 with the remainder funding the food chemical surveillance programme. A similar level of spend is expected for the current year.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to improve standards of food safety. [17691]

Mr. Rooker: We are already taking such steps by the establishment of the Food Standards Agency and other related measures.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the number of food samples submitted each year from 1990 to date to public analysts for analysis; and if he will make a statement. [18911]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested forms part of our statistical return to the EU Commission, which is published and copies of which are placed in the Library of the House. However, the specific information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of samples (UK figures)*
1996	62,350
1995	63,726

Year	Number of samples[1] (UK figures)
1994	65,162
1993	67,959
1992	65,398
1991	46,976
1990	[2]—

[1] These are official samples only, i.e. those taken for the purpose of enforcement of the Food Safety Act 1990. They do not include samples taken for surveillance or other purposes, for which information is not held centrally.
[2] No data collected.

Fruit Harvest

27. **Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from fruit growers regarding problems experienced with the present year's harvest. [17692]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has received a number of representations in writing from Members on behalf of fruit growing constituents and from individual growers. In addition the matter was discussed when my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary met the Horticultural Executive of the National Farmer's Union in July and subsequently visited fruit growers in Kent.

Beef Ban

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards the lifting of the beef ban. [17690]

Dr. Jim Cunningham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen, West and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger).

Rabies Committee

Mr. Malins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the composition of the Kennedy Committee of Inquiry into rabies and quarantine has been finalised; and what is the target date for it to report. [18351]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *410–11*.

Live Animal Exports

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *117*, to which countries the pigs exported for breeding from January to October 1997 were exported. [18494]

Mr. Rooker: The computer records of animal health UK export certifications show the countries concerned as Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Barbados, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Chile, China, Columbia, Cyprus, Denmark, Falkland Islands, France, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Japan, Malaysia (Peninsula), Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Russia, United States of America, Venezuela, Vietnam.

The information is provisional and subject to change.

Agenda 2000

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to which elements of the Agenda 2000 proposals he plans to propose amendments. [18801]

Mr. Rooker: The Government will respond to the Commission's formal legislative proposals once they have been published.

Cattle Passports

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a breakdown of the cost elements and the amounts involved which he used to determine his current published estimated costs of a computerised cattle passport. [18831]

Dr. John Cunningham: The cost of a cattle passport under the Cattle Tracing System has not yet been determined, although it is expected to be in the range of £5 to £10. The current estimated costs of the Cattle Tracing System are broken down as follows:

	£ million
Set-up cost	
Database development	3.5
Project management	2.3
British Cattle Movement Service (Accommodation)	3.4
British Cattle Movement Service (Equipment and Services)	3.8
Total	13
Annual running costs	
Staff costs	3.2
Accommodation, administration and consumables	3.0
Common services and depreciation	2.8
Office supplies (including cost of "freepost" system for reporting cattle movements)	6.0
Total	15

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated establishment cost of his proposed computerised cattle passport scheme; which MAFF locations will be involved in operating it and what will be their annual running costs; and what are the estimated running costs of the new scheme for each of the first three years of its operation. [18829]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Cattle Tracing System will not only provide cattle passports, but also a computerised register of all cattle in Great Britain, their location and their movement history. The estimated establishment cost is around £13 million. It will be operated by the British Cattle Movement Service, which will be part of my Department, based at Workington in Cumbria. The estimated running costs of the system for each of the first three years of operation are likely to be around £15 million per year.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what charges will be made for the cattle passport scheme; what will be the costs of *(a)* its establishment and *(b)* its administration; and if these will be recovered in full from farmers. [18940]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Minister to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) today.

Unpasteurised Cows' Milk

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the advice from the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food on the sale of raw cows' milk for drinking consumption. [18717]

Dr. John Cunningham: The advice of the Committee is unequivocal. This is why I have arranged public consultation on a proposal to ban the sale in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of raw cows' milk for drinking. We will reflect further when the results of public consultation are available.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors underlay his decision to consult interested parties on the sale of unpasteurised cows' milk for drinking consumption. [18716]

Dr. John Cunningham: After careful consideration of the issues, the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food expressed concern about the microbiological quality of unpasteurised cows' milk for drinking and recommended that the sale of such milk be banned in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Such sales are already banned in Scotland.

This is a matter of public health concern and I considered it appropriate to consult interested parties on a proposal to ban its sale.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ministerial announcements have not been made, in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18893]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Announcements made by the Department have followed established Parliamentary procedure. This practice is our policy.

Ostriches

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for changes in the regulations governing the slaughter of ostriches. [18539]

Mr. Morley: I am not proposing any changes to the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 which set down detailed rules governing the methods of slaughter or killing of farmed animals including ostriches.

Ostriches may be slaughter on farm, or in premises specifically licensed to handle ostriches under the Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995. We are also considering the possibility of amending the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 to permit ostrich slaughter in red meat abattoirs which meet specific structural requirements.

Correspondence

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to reply to the letter of the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk dated 3 September, on the subject of the export of poultry meat to China; and if he will make a statement on his timetable for responding to letters from hon. Members on constituents' concerns. [19116]

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend the Minister replied to the letter regarding the export of poultry meat to China on 2 December.

This Department endeavours to reply to letters from hon. Members and peers within 15 working days. This Department received about 6,000 letters between January and October this year and 77 per cent. of these received a reply within this target.

Tobacco Subsidy

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had on the EU subsidy to tobacco producers with the Commission of the European Union. [17664]

Mr. Rooker: The Commission is in no doubt about UK views and the depth of our concern. We expect new proposals next year. We will continue to press for the greatest possible reform.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 5 December 1997

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Passports

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people will be involved in running his proposed computerised cattle passport scheme; and if he will publish a breakdown of the grades involved, together with their salary bandings. [18830]

Dr. John Cunningham: The British Cattle Movement Service will operate the Cattle Tracing System, providing a register of all cattle in Great Britain, their location and their movement history. Once it is fully operational, it will comprise an estimated 261 staff. The anticipated breakdown by grade and the salary bands are given in the following table.

Grade	*Estimated number*	*Salary band (£)*
6	1	32,100–51,256
7	1	26,100–41,718
SEO	1	20,700–32,812
HEO	6	16,300–22,147
EO	24	10,093–17,715
AO	153	8,285–10,695
AA	61	6,612–8,050
SGB2	14	6,612–8,050
Total	261	

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under his proposed computerised cattle passport scheme *(a)* how many passports are estimated to be issued annually and *(b)* how many passports he estimates will be issued in each of the scheme's first three years. [18828]

Dr. John Cunningham: It is estimated that between 2.5 million and 3 million passports will be issued annually.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his proposals for the cattle passport scheme. [18939]

Mr. Rooker: On 30 July I announced that the Government was setting up a computerised cattle tracing system (CTS) which would be fully operational in 1998. The system will be administered by a new public sector organisation, the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), which will manage cattle movements and respond to database queries. On 7 October I also announced that the Government had decided to centralise the issue of cattle passports at the BCMS. The new scheme will give the UK one of the most advanced cattle tracing systems in Europe.

Vitamin B6 Supplements

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of his decision to restrict the general retail sale of higher dose vitamin B6 supplements on *(a)* consumers, *(b)* manufacturers and *(c)* retailers. [18969]

Mr. Rooker: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy has advised that 1.4 mg of vitamin B6 per day is enough to meet the needs of almost all individuals, even those with high needs. The proposed maximum limit of 10 mg per daily dose on the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements sold under food law is more than seven times greater than this amount. Those who need higher doses for the treatment of medical conditions will continue to be able to obtain them from pharmacies and on prescription.

Information on the impact of the proposed controls on manufacturers and retailers has been requested from relevant trade associations. This will be included in the regulatory assessment which will accompany the draft regulations that will give effect to the controls.

Farming

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to further regulate farming; and if he will make a statement. [19259]

Mr. Rooker: Farming will continue to be regulated where necessary for the implementation of national and EU policies. All regulations introduced will be carefully examined in line with the Government's policy for better regulation to ensure that they are simple, helpful and fair, taking account of the needs of businesses, the citizen and the environment.

Food Safety

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* agencies and *(b)* committees which report to his Department on food safety. [19358]

Mr. Rooker: The agencies of the Department which undertake work concerned with food safety are:

The Pesticides Safety Directorate

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate

The Meat Hygiene Service

The Central Science Laboratory Agency

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency

The committees that report to the Department on issues relevant to food safety are listed below. Most of these committees also report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes

Advisory Committee on Pesticides

Veterinary Products Committee

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

Food Advisory Committee

Consumer Panel

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent by his Department on food safety in the last year for which figures are available. [19354]

Mr. Rooker: In 1996–97 expenditure on food safety matters totalled £28.13 million. A detailed breakdown of expenditure and receipts is shown under the entries for programmes PP1:01, 1:02, 1:03, 1:07 in Chapter 3 and in Table 33 in Chapter 8, of the MAFF/IB Departmental Report 1997, a copy of which may be found in the Library of the House.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the advantages of replacing the current HLCA with an area-based instrument for farmers in less-favoured areas. [19357]

Mr. Rooker: Under current EC rules, compensatory allowances provided to livestock farmers in the less-favoured areas may be paid only per head of eligible livestock. The Commission's proposals in Agenda 2000 indicate that they are considering transforming compensatory allowances into a basic instrument to maintain and promote low-input farming systems. However, replacing HLCAs with an area-based instrument would not, on its own, necessarily fulfil this objective.

The pros and cons of an area-based instrument are one of the issues being addressed in an evaluation of the HLCA scheme in England, being undertaken by Drew Associates and Exeter University on behalf of the Ministry. That report will be published shortly. Other similar studies are in hand in respect of the other constituent parts of the UK. The Government is also considering HLCAs as part of its Comprehensive Spending Review and will further consider the options in the light of the Commission's detailed proposals following Agenda 2000.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers from *(a)* the Czech Republic and *(b)* the Slovak Republic have arrived (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) at the port of Dover in each month since 1 May. [17137]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table. Overall data for the month of November are not yet available, but provisional figures indicate that only five Czechs/Slovaks applied for asylum on arrival at Dover during November.

Applications[1] for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, from nationals of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, May to October 1997

Number of principal applicants

	Applications for asylum of whom: applied at			
	Port	*Dover*	*In-country*	*Total*
Czech Republic				
May 1997	5	5	*	5
June 1997	15	10	—	15
July 1997	30	30	5	30
August 1997	25	20	10	30
September 1997	15	10	*	15
October 1997	85	70	*	85
Total	170	145	15	190
Slovakia				
May 1997	[2]15	15	*	[2]15
June 1997	25	15	—	25
July 1997	20	15	*	20
August 1997	35	35	10	50
September 1997	55	55	*	55
October 1997	85	65	—	85
Total	235	195	15	255

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Revised.

Community Safety

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contribution county-based organisations will be expected to make to district-based community safety organisations and partnerships. [18937]

Mr. Michael: The Crime and Disorder Bill will place a joint obligation on local authorities and the police service to develop strategies for reducing crime and disorder in each district, borough and unitary local authority area in England and Wales. Where the two tier structure of local Government still exists, county councils will have an obligation to participate in this process on an equal basis.

The Bill will also give the Home Secretary power to designate by Order other key local agencies which must be involved. At county level or wider, these are likely to include police authorities, probation committees and health authorities.

Nothing in the Bill will prevent the developments (or continuation) of county-based co-ordination of the district strategies if that is what the partners locally want. The legal obligation, however, will be to produce strategies based on district, borough and unitary authority areas.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what future role the Crime Prevention Panel has, with particular reference to community safety. [18938]

Mr. Michael: Crime Prevention Panels and their equivalent for young people, known as Youth Action Groups, have done some enormously valuable work over the years. I am determined that the knowledge and experience which they have amassed should not be lost as we move towards the creation of new statutory crime prevention partnerships. Some Crime Prevention Panels may merge into the new partnerships; that will be a matter for local decision. But where they do not, we intend to

require the local authorities and the police, in discharging their new obligations, to invite them—along with a wide variety of other agencies—to participate in the process.

Children and Vulnerable Adults

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he intends to implement Part V of the Police Act 1997; [18998]

(2) what plans he has to give voluntary organisations working with children and vulnerable adults access to the criminal records of prospective staff and volunteers. [18999]

Mr. Michael: We are reviewing the provisions of Part V of the Police Act 1997 in the light of our top priority in this area which is the protection of children and vulnerable adults. As we promised when the provisions of Part V of the Act were debated in the House, we will consult voluntary organisations before reaching a decision.

Criminal Injury Compensation

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the four-year limit for claiming criminal injury compensation. [19342]

Mr. Michael: The time limit for submitting claims to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, which administers the new, tariff-based compensation scheme introduced on 1 April 1996, is two years. The operation of the scheme as a whole is monitored on a continuing basis, but there are no plans to make any changes until the findings of the current comprehensive spending review have been considered.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parades and Marches

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 14 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *693*, concerning compensation claims arising from disturbances during July, what is the time scale for the completion and payment of the outstanding *(a)* criminal injury and *(b)* criminal damage claims. [18197]

Mr. Ingram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Compensation Agency under its chief executive, Mr. D. A. Stanley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. A. Stanley to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 2 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question regarding the timeframe for the completion and payment of compensation claims arising from disturbances during July.

The speed with which the necessary information to support a case becomes available can influence the time taken to resolve the claims. However, the Agency has key performance targets for the average time taken to make decisions in criminal injury and criminal damage claims of 59 weeks and 19 weeks respectively. It is expected that the July claims will be processed within this time-scale.

Down District Council (Employees)

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the perceived religious denomination of employees of Down District Council. [18711]

Mr. Ingram: In common with all other specified Public Authorities, Down District Council is required to monitor the religious composition of its work force on an annual basis. The latest available monitoring information is contained in the FEC's Seventh Annual Monitoring Report which was published in March 1997. That document shows that the composition in 1996 was:

	Number	*Per cent.*
Protestant	70	28
Roman Catholic	180	72
Other	7	—
Total	257	

Mr. Andy Wood

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the financial settlement given to Mr. Andy Wood following his removal as head of the Northern Ireland Information Service. [18665]

Marjorie Mowlam: Mr. Wood remains a Civil Servant. The financial arrangements between the Department and Mr. Wood are a private matter for them.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what duties Mr. Andy Wood, former head of the Northern Ireland Information Service, is carrying out on behalf of *(a)* the Northern Ireland Office; and *(b)* the Home Office; what is the nature of the work; and how long he is expected to be employed. [18664]

Marjorie Mowlam: Mr. Wood is conducting a joint Home Office/Northern Ireland Office project concerning the handling of the media during major incidents. It is expected that he will conclude the project during the first half of 1998.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members her Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19315]

Clare Short: My Department has employed two special advisers since 1 May 1997. Their combined annual salary totals £53,592. They have claimed no other benefits. Prior to 1 May, DFID was not a Cabinet Department and had no special advisers.

No task force members or review body members have been employed since 1 May 1997, or in the period immediately before that, other than staff carrying out policy and management review functions as part of their

continuing work. Members of the business community and other figures in public life have contributed to the work of my Department without charge.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Responsibilities

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Minister in her Department is responsible for liaising with the Department for International Development on WTO matters. [18946]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the right hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) on 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *646-47*. Responsibility for WTO matters falls to my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if she will make a statement about her Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18901]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Since 1 May, my Department has made 455 announcements by press release, including a number relating to public speeches. All major announcements are made to Parliament first when it is sitting, excluding certain market-sensitive decisions. Recent announcements include the extension of the fossil fuel levy to imported electricity, the review to modernise partnership law and the Bill to introduce the National Minimum Wage. Press briefings are usually held to give further explanation to announcements, after they have been made public.

TREASURY

Euro (Information Campaigns)

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sums he is seeking from the European Union to finance information campaigns about the euro; and what plans he has for expenditure of such sums. [19205]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The Government has applied to the European Commission for financial assistance towards the cost of producing and distributing the Treasury's business guide "Practical Information for Business". The European Commission has approved the request in principle.

The Government is currently engaged in a dialogue with the European Commission on future financial assistance to help inform business and the wider public about preparation for EMU.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's estimate of the number of additional *(a)* accountants and *(b)* other staff who will need to be employed by central government as a result of the switch to resource accounting and budgeting. [19157]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The move to resource accounting and budgeting will mean that there is a greater need for skills in finance and accountancy throughout government departments, and at all levels. It is for individual departments to decide on how best to meet this need, whether through development, training or recruitment. There are no central estimates of the amount of additional staff, if any, who will be employed as part of this process.

Productivity

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his oral statement of 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 773, what was the source document of his statement that United Kingdom's productivity today is 20 per cent. less than that of the United Kingdom's main competitors. [18543]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor's statement that UK productivity is some 20 per cent. below our main competitors was based on OECD sources. Figures on productivity levels can be found in "Labour productivity comparisons in selected OECD countries", published by the OECD, June 1996. Further information can be derived from OECD Economic Outlook, June 1997 and OECD Employment Outlook, July 1997.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor for the Exchequer, pursuant to his pre-Budget report, paragraph 4.19, what was the percentage of *(a)* skilled and *(b)* semi-skilled manual workers suffering from (i) low literacy and (ii) low numeracy in (A) France, (B) Germany, (C) Japan and (D) the USA in 1996. [19159]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Government is committed to raising literacy and numeracy levels to ensure that Britain has a flexible labour force capable of competing effectively in the global economy. The table compares literacy and numeracy levels in Britain, Germany and the USA. Figures for France and Japan are not available on a consistent basis.

Percentage of workers suffering from low literacy and low numeracy (1996 figures)

	Managerial and professional		*Skilled craft workers*		*Machinery and assembly line*		*Sales and service*	
	Low literacy	*Low numeracy*	*Low literacy*	*Low numeracy*	*Low literacy*	*Low numeracy*	*Low literacy*	*Low numeracy*
Britain	6	6	24	21	22	20	17	21
Germany	1	2	7	3	12	11	6	5
USA	5	4	30	29	35	30	27	25

Source:
International Adult Literacy Survey, Office for National Statistics and Statistics Canada.

Airport Tax (Charities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Chernobyl Children Lifeline in respect of the waiving of airport tax for charitable purposes; and what response he has made. [18855]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government has received numerous written representations from the Chernobyl Children Lifeline requesting that the children they help be exempt from air passenger duty when they leave the United Kingdom.

UK registered charities already benefit from a range of tax reliefs such as gift aid and the payroll scheme. These encourage charitable donation by focusing on what people give rather than what charities spend. Additionally, in his last Budget the Chancellor announced a review of the taxation of charities and invited contributions from interested parties. Although the main focus of the review will be the current VAT arrangements, all aspects of the tax system will be taken into consideration.

Incapacity (Tax Allowances)

Audrey Wise: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many husbands currently receive a tax allowance for incapacitated wives, and a what costs; [18823]

(2) what is his estimate of the number of women who would be entitled to a tax allowance for an incapacitated husband if the present provision for men with incapacitated wives were to be extended to women with incapacitated husbands; and what is his estimate of the cost. [18822]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that in 1997–98 around 10,000 husbands with children and a totally incapacitated wife receive the additional personal allowance. This costs about £5 million.

It is not possible to provide a reliable cost of extending this allowance to wives with incapacitated husbands and children.

Windfall Tax

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the impact of the windfall tax. [18796]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Since the Budget announcement on 2 July, representations have been received from some 16 companies and organisations, 25 members of the public and from one hon. Member. The contents of these representations are treated as confidential, although it is open to those involved to make their views public.

SCOTLAND

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1988–99 planned expenditure. [15249]

Mr. Dewar: Expenditure on publicity and advertising for the years requested is shown in the tables:

The Scottish Office

	£
1993–94	1,366,000
1994–95	2,256,000
1995–96	1,770,000
1996–97	3,564,000
1997–98 (year to date)	1,842,000

The only figures currently available for 1997–98 are spends to date.

Agencies

	£
1993–94	508,000
1994–95	869,000
1995–96	1,008,000
1996–97	1,026,000
1997–98 (year to date)	643,000

The only figures currently available for 1997–98 are spends to date.

Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies

	£
1993–94	9,433,000
1994–95	12,161,000
1995–96	13,987,000
1996–97	14,631,000

Figures for 1997–98 spend to date and full year estimate are not currently available.

The greater part of the expenditure by the 38 Scottish NDPBs is incurred by the Scottish Tourist Board (promoting Scotland as a tourist destination), Scottish Enterprise (promoting economic development in Scotland and publicising Local Enterprise Companies), and Scottish Natural Heritage (promoting and raising awareness of Scotland's natural heritage). In 1996–97 spend by these organisations was £8.7 million, £2.5 million and £1 million respectively.

Detailed budgets for 1998–99 have yet to be agreed.

Sentence Reviews (Manslaughter)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions he has attempted to increase the length of a sentence applied for manslaughter; and in what proportion of cases he has been successful in each year since 1990. [19258]

Mr. McLeish: The Lord Advocate has, since 1993, had the power to appeal against sentences which appear to him to be unduly lenient, or in the case of certain disposals, inappropriate.

He has exercised the power on three occasions in respect of sentences or other disposals imposed following convictions for culpable homicide.

The first such appeal, taken in 1995, was refused. The second appeal, taken in 1996 was allowed by the High Court of Justiciary, as was the third, taken in 1997.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Immigration (Punjab)

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the applications for entry clearance to the UK received at the embassy in New Delhi were from people living in the Punjab in the last year for which figures are available. [18655]

Mr. Fatchett: It is not possible to provide an accurate figure for the percentage of entry clearance applications received in the High Commission in New Delhi from people living in the Punjab. The High Commission's computer system does not hold this information and to conduct a manual sift would incur disproportionate cost.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take to ensure that any information material on Economic and Monetary Union funded by the Government will be impartial as to the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. [19128]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made clear, our intention is to provide information on EMU to help business and the public prepare for the single currency. We have no intention of funding propaganda on the euro's advantages or disadvantages.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government has any plans to fund information material on Economic and Monetary Union. [19131]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Yes. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made clear, some public money will be spent on providing information to help business and the wider public prepare for the euro.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take to ensure that any information campaign on Economic and Monetary Union funded by the European Commission will be impartial as to the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. [19129]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The conditions attached to the PRINCE budget line, which includes the information programme on the euro, stipulate that the money should not be used for measures which could be regarded as propaganda.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in obtaining funding from the European Commission for information material on Economic and Monetary Union. [19133]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have applied to the Commission for financial assistance towards the cost of producing and distributing the Treasury booklet "EMU: Practical Information for Business". The Commission has approved this request in principle. We are currently engaged in a dialogue with the Commission about future financial assistance to help inform business and the wider public about EMU.

Northern Cyprus

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent remarks by Sir David Hannay on the Turkish population in Northern Cyprus. [19022]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Nothing in Sir David Hannay's remarks in his interview with the Greek Cypriot newspaper *Phileleftheros* on 14 November implied, or was intended to imply, a shift in our policy over non-recognition of the so-called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", which remains unchanged.

BBC World Service

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances, and by whom, staff employed by the BBC World Service are subject to vetting. [18913]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* A limited number of BBC World Service staff are security checked by the World Service to enable them to have limited and authorised access to some official documents and to facilitate discussion with Government Departments. Several employees at BBC Monitoring are security cleared for the same reasons.

Kurdish Members of Parliament

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to persuade the Turkish authorities to release imprisoned Kurdish members of parliament. [18744]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have made a number of representations to the Turkish government about the imprisonment of the four Kurdish former DEP (Democracy Party) Members of Parliament. We have repeatedly stressed that the conviction of elected politicians for the non-violent expression of their opinions can only damage Turkey's international standing.

We have been encouraged by recent reports, from Turkey that imply that one of the MP's, Ms Leyla Zana, may soon be released on health grounds.

Holocaust Victims (Gold)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the internal report into the theft of gold from victims of the Holocaust was first made available to ministers in his Department. [19260]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This department published two reports containing information from the British archives on Nazi gold in September 1996 and May 1997. Both reports contain details of the theft of gold by the Nazi regime from governments and individuals. Separately, a draft joint DTI/FCO report about the treatment of enemy property held in the UK during and after World War II was delivered to the office of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 1 December. It will be published as soon as possible.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Millennium Projects

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he is having with London borough councils on their role in Millennium projects. [18575]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department has established a Millennium Co-ordination Group and a number of sub-groups to ensure that interested bodies are involved at all stages of the millennium planning process. The London sub-group includes representatives from the Association of London Government, (who represent the Greater London Boroughs).

I recently had the honour of addressing a conference organised by the Association of London Government which brought together representatives of the London Boroughs and the private and voluntary sector to discuss "London: the Millennium City".

My Department also liaises on a regular basis with the Association of London Government Millennium Festival Steering Group, which brings together public, private and voluntary sector organisations, to discuss how best to facilitate the organisation of events.

National Lottery

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of the number of applications to the National Lottery distributing bodies made to date from organisations in the Romford constituency; and if he will make a statement; [18357]

(2) how many bodies in the Romford constituency have had applications to the National Lottery distributing bodies turned down. [18356]

Mr. Banks: To date organisations in the Romford constituency have made 83 applications to the Lottery distributing bodies. Of these, applications 7 were successful, 75 were unsuccessful and 1 is still being considered. Details are set out in the following table. The seven successful applications have a total value of £322,032. Decisions on applications are a matter for the distributing bodies.

Distributing body	*All applications*	*Awarded*	*Rejected*	*In progress*
Sports Council	3	1	2	0
Arts Council	6	3	3	0
Heritage Lottery Fund	0	0	0	0
Millennium Commission	1	0	1	0
Charities Board	73	3	69	1
Totals	83	7	75	1

Regional Theatres

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much public funding has been made available to the *(a)* Liverpool Everyman, *(b)* Liverpool Playhouse, *(c)* Manchester Royal Exchange, and *(d)* Birmingham Repertory theatres in each year since 1994–95; and from what sources; [18401]

(2) what discussions his Department has held with the Arts Council, North West Arts and other public bodies concerning funding for *(a)* the Everyman and *(b)* the Playhouse theatres, Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [18402]

Mr. Fisher: The Department's funding for the arts is channelled through the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Boards. Ministers do not intervene in the decisions they take. The following table details the information requested:

	1994–95 £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*1997–98* £
Liverpool Everyman				
Regional Arts Board/Arts Council	233,780	170,000	227,000	250,000
Local authority funds	60,810	47,158	100,000	82,800
City Challenge funds	1,350	38,151	—	—
Lottery capital	—	99,000	—	—
Liverpool Playhouse				
Regional Arts Board/Arts Council	430,000	430,000	430,000	530,000
Local authority funds	270,562	266,272	375,000	205,000
Lottery capital	—	—	—	—
Manchester Royal Exchange				
Regional Arts Board/Arts Council	1,333,250	1,333,250	1,863,250	1,333,250
Local authority funds	199,400	199,400	229,400	199,400
Lottery capital	—	—	3,200,000	17,110,250
Birmingham Repertory				
Regional Arts Board/Arts Council	796,000	900,000	900,000	870,000
Local authority funds	887,137	1,022,500	982,589	955,000
Lottery capital	—	—	—	—
Lottery stabilisation	—	—	—	1,500,000

[1] Birmingham Repertory Theatre have received a lottery award under the Arts Council's Stabilisation scheme of £5,700,000 spread over four years.

BBC Archive Collection

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the management by the BBC of its archive collection; and if he will make a statement. [19143]

Mr. Fisher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received representations from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) and from three members of the public, and as a result made inquiries of the BBC. The management and organisation of the BBC's Information and Archives Department are matters for the Corporation itself, but it is obliged under the Royal Charter and Agreement to establish and maintain archives containing material relevant to the objects of the Corporation, and to make the archives available to the public with or without charge. The BBC has assured the Department that it is continuing to meet its archival responsibilities under the Charter and Agreement.

Libraries (Training)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what provision has been made in the current year by library authorities for training in information and communication technology skills for serving and other librarians. [19104]

Mr. Fisher: Expenditure on training is not separately identified in the CIPFA Public Library Statistics, which are the main source of financial information on public libraries. However, a recent report by the Library and Information Commission indicates that the sums involved are likely to be relatively small.

Millennium Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to extend the lifespan of the Millennium Commission. [19166]

Mr. Chris Smith: On 1 October 1997 I announced that the Millennium Commission would receive approximately £2 billion over its lifetime, including £449 million for the Millennium Experience. This is to ensure that the Millennium Commission will have sufficient resources to meet its commitments to the New Millennium Experience Company. On current forecasts of lottery income it will be necessary to continue the funding life of the Millennium Commission until sometime in 2002 to meet this commitment.

Radio Rights

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report* column *180,* if he will make a statement on progress with his review of the issue of live radio rights; and if the will make a statement. [18853]

Mr. Fisher: On 25 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns *455-56,* my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced an advisory group to assist him in his review of the listed events under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. The group will consider questions such as the availability of rights to live radio rights to major sporting events before making its recommendations.

Sports Coverage

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1997, *Official Report* column *180,* what assessment he has made of the arrangements for news access to major sporting events; and if he will make a statement on the practice of local radio stations making exclusive deals with more than one local football club in respect of *(a)* the public interest and *(b)* the coverage of simultaneous matches. [18852]

Mr. Fisher: The news access code was signed by a number of broadcasters in 1996. Breaches have been rare and the only difficulties of which we are aware have involved events shown on pay-per-view terms. On 25 November 1997, *Official Report* columns *455-56,* my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced an advisory group to assist him in his review of the listed events under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. If interested parties believe that the news access code is not functioning satisfactorily, they will no doubt bring this to the attention of the group.

The advisory group will have an opportunity to consider the question of radio access to listed events before making its recommendations, but there is no statutory provision providing for restrictions on the broadcasting of events or the disposition of radio broadcasting rights beyond the normal operation of competition law.

HEALTH

Vitamin B6 Supplements

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Minister for Public Health was involved in the recent decision to limit the general retail sale of vitamin B6 supplements; and what representations she received on this matter from representatives of Glaxo-Wellcome. [18971]

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health was involved in the decision to limit the general retail sale of vitamin B6 supplements after studying advice from the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) and the Food Advisory Committee (FAC); there were no representations on this matter from representatives of Glaxo-Wellcome.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those members of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment who participated in the formulation of the recent advice which he received on the safety of vitamin B6 supplements; which were specifically experienced in the field of nutrition; and if he will list in the case of each of those individuals any links which they have with the pharmaceutical industry. [18970]

Mr. Boateng: All members of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment participated in the formulation of the recent advice on the safety of vitamin B6 supplements. Details of the members' expertise and a list of their financial interests have been placed in the Library.

Long-term Care Charter

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the introduction of the Government's proposed long-term care charter will be accompanied by additional resources; and what consultation about the charter the Government plans with private and voluntary sector service providers. [14299]

Mr. Boateng: Work on the Charter, which is at an early stage, will set out what people can expect from health, housing and social services. We intend to consult widely—including with voluntary and independent sector organisations—as it is developed. When finalised, the Charter should inform the decisions that local authorities make about the use of the resources allocated to them.

Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the NHS Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group and prioritisation of major capital schemes. [19800]

Mr. Milburn: I am today announcing the establishment of the National Health Service Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group (CPAG). The Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group will assist Ministers to prioritise on a national basis all future major NHS capital projects worth over £25 million. The terms of reference and membership of the group have been placed in the Library.

In future, major capital projects will take place where they are most needed. The development of major schemes will be determined on a national basis, in response to patients' needs, as it should be, not, as it has been, on the basis of market forces, regardless of the wider interests of patients or the NHS.

The Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group's first exercise will be to prioritise those projects wishing to go forward in the next wave of the Private Finance Initiative, following on from the 15 major PFI hospital projects already given the go-ahead. Guidance is being issued today to the NHS Executive regional offices on this process, and all NHS regional offices will examine, with their local NHS trusts and health authorities, the major proposals in their region, to determine which meet the greatest health service need. Each regional office will then be responsible for submitting two schemes to the Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group for national prioritisation and recommendation to Ministers. I plan to announce the next wave of major PFI schemes next spring.

The prioritisation process will be as open and fair as possible. Details of the criteria for assessing health service need that will be used by the regional offices and CPAG have been placed in the Library.

Projects which meet a clear need but are not suitable for PFI will be considered alongside other proposals, in a separate prioritisation exercise next summer for the limited amount of public capital available.

The establishment of the NHS Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group and the launch of the second tranche of major capital schemes clearly demonstrate our commitment to modernising the NHS, and to creating a genuinely national heath service, with new hospitals built where they are needed most and where they will deliver the greatest benefit to patients.

Smoking

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds his Department makes available to assist people who wish to stop smoking. [19355]

Mr. Boateng: In 1997–98, the Government are funding a Health Education Authority run adult smoking education campaign costing £5.5 million. As part of the campaign, £700,000 is being given to Quit to operate the Quitline—telephone helpline—which offers smoking cessation advice, counselling and support.

In addition, a wide range of health professionals, notably general practitioners, routinely offer cessation advice and support. These costs cannot be separately identified.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ECT treatments were carried out in England and Wales in the last year; and what proportion of these were given to people compulsorily under the Mental Health Act 1983. [19293]

Mr. Boateng: Reliable information on the number of people receiving Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT) in England is not available centrally. During 1996–97 2,378 second opinions were given for ECT under Section 58 of the Mental Health Act 1983 by doctors appointed by the Mental Health Act Commission. This figure does not include patients who gave their consent for this treatment. Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on official hospitality for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997. [15242]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Expenditure on official hospitality for the Cabinet Office (including expenditure for the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service), its agencies and non-departmental public bodies every year since 1992 is shown in the table:

Period	*Cabinet Office* £	*Agencies* £	*COI* £
1997–98[1]	18,789	8,901	8,168
1996–97	69,401	12,248	21,792
1995–96	73,250	10,578	15,789
1994–95	43,477	16,626	9,200
1993–94	49,285	6,843	5,905
1992–93	55,034	241	4,640

[1] Figures for 1997–98 cover the period 1 May—30 September 1997.

The request for details on expenditure on official hospitality in earlier years is unavailable.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on overseas travel for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997; and if he will provide a breakdown to show (1) air fares and (2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. [15243]

Dr. David Clark: Expenditure on overseas travel by Cabinet Office (including the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service), its agencies and non-departmental public bodies every year since 1992 is shown in the table:

Period	*Cabinet Office* £	*Agencies* £	*COI* £
1997–98[1]	385,622	278,440	3,043
1996–97	1,500,244	224,709	67,213
1995–96	1,805,089	424,128	134,261
1994–95	1,257,026	314,415	65,078
1993–94	1,500,705	288,976	60,009
1992–93[2]	824,204	n/a	n/a

[1] Figures for 1997–98 cover the period 1 May–30 September 1997.
[2] Agencies and COI figures are not available.

The details on expenditure on overseas travel in earlier years and on the breakdown between air fares and other expenditure is unavailable.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15245]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by the Cabinet Office (including the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of the Public Service), its agencies and non-departmental public bodies every year since 1993 is shown in the table:

Period	*Cabinet Office* £	*Agencies* £	*COI* £
1997–98[1]	1,383,967	108,000	21,000
1997–98[2]	331,588	47,313	16,000
1996–97	1,404,481	98,309	35,000
1995–96	559,578	186,843	0
1994–95	596,437	156,428	0
1993–94	475,908	23,191	0

[1] Figures cover Full Year Estimate for 1997–98.
[2] Figures cover 1997–98, year to date.

Planned expenditure for 1998–99 is not held at this detailed level.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Family Mediation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what funding has been made available by the Lord Chancellor's Department to family mediation services other than National Family Mediation since June 1996; and for what purpose. [18339]

Mr. Hoon: The UK College of Family Mediators has received £49,500 to date towards the production of a directory of mediators, judicial seminars and publicity projects. The Family Mediators Association will shortly receive £50,000 to enable it to help its members meet the Legal Aid Board's franchise specification.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements are *(a)* in place and *(b)* being arranged by the Legal Aid Board for publicising the family mediation pilot project under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996. [18340]

Mr. Hoon: Each pilot mediation service has been provided with initial funding for publicity. In addition, the Legal Aid Board has distributed leaflets and posters to the public and all key referral agencies in each of the pilot areas and is supporting the development of local publicity initiatives.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Legal Aid Board's publicity material for the pilot projects under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996 will be issued; and what is the budget for the provision of the publicity. [18341]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board has already issued publicity material for Phase I and continues to do so. Between £50,000 and £60,000 has been spent by the Legal Aid Board on publicity to date.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the total budget for the family mediation pilot projects currently being run by the Legal Aid Board under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [18345]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board's expenditure on developing, administering and researching Phase I and on the development of Phase II of the family mediation pilot project is estimated to be in the region of £500,000 for 1997–98.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what funding has been made available to National Family Mediation by the Lord Chancellor's Department since June 1996; what was its purpose; and if he will make a statement. [18338]

Mr. Hoon: National Family Mediation has received £99,400, made available by this Department, to finance various projects aimed at the training of mediators and the development of mediation services. These contracts are managed by the Legal Aid Board.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much funding has been provided by the Lord Chancellor's Department to the UK College of Family Mediators for the production of a commercial directory of the college's membership; and if he will make a statement. [18337]

Mr. Hoon: £10,000 was provided by this Department to enable the UK College to complete publication of the directory of mediators. This contract is managed by the Legal Aid Board.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the budget for the family mediation pilot projects being conducted by the Legal Aid Board under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996 is being paid direct to mediation organisations and individual mediators for the provision of mediation services. [18336]

Mr. Hoon: On the basis of current volume estimates, approximately £2 million will be paid directly to mediation services for the provision of mediation in 1997–98.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the total cost of the Legal Aid Board's research into the family mediation pilot project under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996. [18335]

Mr. Hoon: The estimated cost of the family mediation pilot research project in 1997–98 is £300,000.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the publicity material issued by the Legal Aid Board in connection with the pilot projects under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996 will be available in the Welsh language. [18342]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board's leaflets publicising Phase I of the family mediation pilot project are available in Welsh.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice his Department has sought of the Welsh Language Board as to compliance with current Welsh language legislation in preparing publicity material under Part III of the Family Law Act 1996 with particular reference to the activities of the Legal Aid Board; and if he will make a statement. [18343]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board's publicity leaflet has been translated into Welsh by translators recommended by the Welsh Language Board.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of processing appeals under the habitual residence test in each year since its introduction; what is the average cost incurred in considering the case of an applicant who exhausts the appeals processing; and if he will make a statement. [14606]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Independent Tribunal Service does not routinely maintain statistics relating to categories of appeals such as habitual residence test appeals. Information regarding the total cost of processing habitual residence test appeals could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information regarding the average cost incurred in exhausting the appeals process is not available.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to change the habitual residence test in respect of British residents returning to the United Kingdom after *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term employment or unemployment within the European Union. [17936]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government is evaluating the operation of the habitual residence test as part of its wide-ranging review of the major components of the social security system. The impact of the test upon UK nationals returning to this country forms part of this work.

Student Loans

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on Government policy relating to the consideration of student loans as income in assessment for benefits. [16849]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The primary source of funding for students is the student support system, not Social Security benefits. Most full-time students are not eligible for benefits.

It is a condition of the income-related benefits that a person should take up any available income, including a student loan, before having recourse to benefits. Student loan income is subject to a weekly £10 disregard. To ignore completely the availability of a student loan in calculating benefit entitlement would operate unfairly against the majority of students who are not entitled to these benefits, as well as being contrary to the general principles governing income-related benefits.

Benefits

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the actual expenditure on *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* other benefits to the unemployed for financial years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and 1997–98. [16920]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Unemployment Benefit/Jobseeker's Allowance (contributory based)[1]	1,102	999	619
Family Credit	1,441	1,739	2,047
Other benefits to the unemployed	7,541	7,272	6,541

[1] The figures underly and are consistent with those published for unemployed people in Table 5 of the March 1997 Departmental Report.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the predicted levels of unemployment that were used to set the budget for *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* other benefits to the unemployed for the financial years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [16954]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The predicted levels of unemployment used to set the budget for all benefits in Great Britain averaged 2.4 million in 1995–96; 2.1 million in 1996–97 and 1.8 million in 1997–98.

Source:
March 1995, 1996 and 1997 Departmental Reports.

Income Statistics

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current average net incomes for *(a)* two and one-parent families with dependent children, *(b)* childless non-pensioner couples and *(c)* single non-pensioners in each decile of income; and how these have changed in real terms in each five-year period over the past 30 years. [16697]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Our objective is to improve living standards for the many, not just the few, and we aim to offer educational and employment opportunities for all.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables. These show the average net equivalised household incomes and changes over time for individuals by family type. The income distribution is disaggregated into deciles separately for each family type. Income is as defined and measured in the Department's Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series, based on household income adjusted for household size; HBAI data are not available for years before 1979 or for every year since then.

Income before housing costs (£ per week equivalised)

	Decile group medians										*Total*
	Decile 1	*Decile 2*	*Decile 3*	*Decile 4*	*Decile 5*	*Decile 6*	*Decile 7*	*Decile 8*	*Decile 9*	*Decile 10*	*population (mean)*
Two and one parent families with dependent children 1994–95 (£ per week)	99	131	157	183	215	243	275	320	383	547	267
Change 1988–89 to 1994–95 (per cent.)	5	6	5	2	5	5	6	8	7	8	6
Change 1979 to 1988–89 (per cent.)	0	0	6	14	19	22	26	30	37	47	28
Childless non-pensioner couples 1994–95 (£ per week)	124	188	237	279	314	352	396	455	550	780	384
Change 1988–89 to 1994–95 (per cent.)	12	7	7	8	6	6	6	7	9	15	9
Change 1979 to 1988–89 (per cent.)	–4	8	11	11	16	20	25	31	39	47	30
Single non-pensioners 1994–95 (£ per week)	99	144	179	214	253	293	334	384	466	653	313
Change 1988–89 to 1994–95 (per cent.)	1	3	0	–2	1	5	6	5	8	12	6
Change 1979 to 1988–89 (per cent.)	–3	–2	5	14	16	18	21	28	32	43	24

Income after housing costs (£ per week equivalised)

	Decile group medians										*Total*
	Decile 1	*Decile 2*	*Decile 3*	*Decile 4*	*Decile 5*	*Decile 6*	*Decile 7*	*Decile 8*	*Decile 9*	*Decile 10*	*population (mean)*
Two and one parent families with dependent children 1994–95 (£ per week)	69	97	119	149	178	206	236	273	332	481	226
Change 1988–89 to 1994–95 (per cent.)	–3	–1	–4	1	4	6	7	7	8	10	6
Change 1979 to 1988–89 (per cent.)	–9	–5	4	10	14	18	19	23	26	32	21
Childless non-pensioner couples 1994–95 (£ per week)	90	156	206	244	281	313	350	404	491	699	340
Change 1988–89 to 1994–95 (per cent.)	3	3	5	7	7	6	6	7	10	15	9
Change 1979 to 1988–89 (per cent.)	–10	8	12	13	17	19	22	25	29	33	24
Single non-pensioners 1994–95 (£ per week)	52	102	142	184	222	259	302	348	421	605	275
Change 1988–89 to 1994–95 (per cent.)	–29	–9	–8	–5	0	3	5	6	9	12	5
Change 1979 to 1988–89 (per cent.)	–19	–9	3	13	14	17	19	22	24	31	20

Notes:
1. For 1988–89 the information is provided for two calendar years combined; 1994–95 represents the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96 combined.
2. The survey does not track the same people over time; those at a particular point in the distribution in one year are not the same people as in another year.
3. All estimates are subject to sampling error. Numbers can also be affected by the choice of equivalence scale used to adjust household incomes for household size.

Source:
Households Below Average Income—July 1997 prices.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security is she will assess the advantages of restoring the entitlement to state benefits to asylum seekers. [17526]

Mr. Keith Bradley: An interdepartmental review led by the Home Office is currently considering all aspects of arrangements for asylum seekers, including the provision of accommodation and support throughout the entire asylum process. The aim is to identify more effective arrangements for the handling of claims and the provision of support, consistent with the Government's commitment to ensure swift and fair decisions on asylum cases.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the operation of the Benefits Agency Medical Services *(a)* generally and *(b)* in respect of sufferers of ME. [18315]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A project is currently being undertaken to consider transferring the work of the Benefits Agency Medical Services to the private sector. Contractorisation could provide an opportunity to modernise working practices and provide a better value to the taxpayer and better service to people claiming benefits. This supports our commitment to modernise the delivery of Social Security to make it better, simpler and more efficient.

We are looking at all aspects of provision for sick and disabled people as part of our comprehensive spending review. We recognise that people with fluctuating conditions, such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, have particular needs and will be considering what changes are necessary to current procedures to ensure they are treated sensitively and fairly.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much extra in NICs he estimates will be raised from employers as a result of the decision not to index the earnings brackets for the three lower rates of employers' NICs. [19362]

Mr. Denham: No employer will pay more.

If the earnings brackets for the three lower rates of employers' secondary Class 1 National Insurance contributions were increased by £5 from April 1998, the total amount of contributions paid by employers in respect of 1998–99 would be reduced by an estimated £125 million in a full year.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

DEFENCE

Eurofighter

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Eurofighter programme will be subject to the Strategic Defence Review. [18860]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 28 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *694*.

West Indies Guardship

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Department for International Development concerning the West Indies guardship. [19361]

Dr. Reid: I have nothing to add to the oral answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development on 12 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 896.

International Development White Paper

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Minister in his Department is responsible for liaising with the Department for International Development on the proposals affecting his Department in the White Paper "Eliminating World Poverty". [18942]

Dr. Reid: Issues of relevance to the Ministry of Defence in the International Development White Paper do not fall solely within the responsibilities of any one Minister.

Royal Naval College

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the *(a)* terms of reference and *(b)* objectives of the Greenwich Foundation. [19017]

Dr. Reid: The Greenwich Foundation is a registered charitable company limited by guarantee whose objectives are

"to preserve for the benefit of the nation the Royal Naval College site, buildings and monuments as being of historical, architectural, and artistic importance (including to their immediate environment), and to educate the public thereon".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated costs of *(a)* repairing dilapidations and *(b)* the removal of Crown immunity at the Royal Naval College. [19018]

Dr. Reid: Detailed negotiations are continuing between the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Greenwich Foundation and Greenwich Hospital on the quantum of a dilapidation settlement. No final figure has yet been agreed.

The detailed effect of the removal of Crown exemption and resulting costs are still being assessed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the state of readiness of the Royal Naval College in the year 2000. [19021]

Dr. Reid: Defence use of the site will cease in mid-1999. Planning for the Royal Naval College thereafter will be a matter for the Greenwich Foundation, on the assumption that it has assumed responsibility for the site. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will continue to be required to approve occupation, as required by section 30 of the Armed Forces Act 1996.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Royal Naval College. [19019]

Dr. Reid: The Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College is working closely with Government and Greenwich Hospital to conclude arrangements which will allow it to take responsibility for the Royal Naval College as Defence use ceases. The Foundation is negotiating with the University of Greenwich and others on the future occupation of the buildings.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the new occupant for the Royal Naval College. [19020]

Dr. Reid: The Greenwich Foundation is in discussion with potential occupants, including the University of Greenwich and Trinity College of Music. Once the Foundation is satisfied that it can assume responsibility for the site and is content to sub-let to particular occupants, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will need to approve these under the terms of section 30 of the Armed Forces Act 1996. Announcements on occupation would be likely to be made by the Foundation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to meet the Chairman and trustees of the Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College. [19016]

Dr. Reid: No meetings are currently scheduled. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has made it clear that he is ready to meet with representatives of the Foundation as necessary, as he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and their respective officials have previously done on many occasions.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the running cost for the Royal Yacht Britannia *(a)* in total and *(b)* excluding engine maintenance costs in the last year. [18927]

Dr. Reid: Total outturn running costs for the Royal Yacht Britannia for the last financial year (1996–97) were £10.446 million, of which the cost excluding engine maintenance costs was £10.028 million.

Hunting

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which hunts were issued licences to hunt on his Department's land for the *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 hunting sessions; and if he will make a statement. [14440]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his reply, 6 November 1997, c. 329]:* Unfortunately, an error has been identified and the reply should be amended accordingly:

1995–96

Delete:

Glyn and Celyn Hunt.

1996–97

Delete:

Glyn and Celyn Hunt.

Add:

Essex and Suffolk Hunt.

Taunton Vale Hunt.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the licences granted to hunt on his Department's land in the hunting sessions *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 broken down into local authority area; and if he will make a statement. [14445]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his reply, 6 November 1997, c. 327–28]:* Unfortunately, an error has been identified and the reply should be amended accordingly.

1995–96

Delete:

Glyn and Celyn Hunt.

1996–97

Add:

Essex and Suffolk Hunt—Colchester Borough Council.

Taunton Vale Hunt—South Somerset District.

Delete:

Glyn and Celyn Hunt.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which hunts currently have a licence to hunt on his Department's land; to which areas of land licences apply; and if he will make a statement. [14441]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his reply, 6 November 1997 c. 326]:* Unfortunately, an error has been identified and the reply should be amended accordingly.

Avon Vale Hunt—Delete Sennybridge Training Area. Insert Salisbury Plain Training Area.

Royal Artillery Hunt—Delete Sennybridge Training Area. Insert Salisbury Plain Training Area.

South and West Wiltshire Hunt—Delete Sennybridge Training Area. Insert Salisbury Plain Training Area.

Add Essex and Suffolk Hunt—Colchester Training Area.

Add Taunton Vale Hunt—Insert Merryfield Airfield.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those areas designated as sites of special scientific interest where his Department has issued a licence to hunt; and if he will make a statement. [14443]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his reply, 6 November 1997 c. 325–26]:* Unfortunately, an error has been identified and the reply should be amended accordingly.

Delete:

Glyn and Celyn Hunt—Blaencilieni.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Burden of Proof Directive

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations the Government has made to its European Union partners concerning the definition of subsidiarity and proportionality used in the Burden of Proof directive. [17220]

Mr. Alan Howarth: There is no definition of subsidiarity or proportionality in the draft Directive on the Burden of Proof, although there is a reference to those principles in Recital 20. The Government believes the draft Directive complies with the principles. At the European Council in June in Amsterdam the UK stated its intention to accede to the social provisions of the new Treaty. The European Council agreed that the United Kingdom would henceforth be asked to express its viewpoint during discussions on Directives. The UK's views have accordingly been taken into account in this Directive: in particular, recital 15 was inserted to reflect legal practices in this country.

Tourism Industry (Graduates)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what data he has collated on the number of graduates entering the tourism industry. [17168]

Dr. Howells: The latest available data show that, in 1996, of the 109,700 first degree graduates in the UK who obtained employment in the UK, 6,900 gained employment in the tourism industry.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many colleges of higher and further education run tourism-related courses; and how many students are involved. [17167]

Dr. Howells: The available data for higher education establishments in the UK relate to students studying catering and institutional management which covers subjects such as cookery and baking as well as travel and tourism. The figures show that in 1996–97 17,800 students were studying hotel and institutional management in 56 higher education establishments. The available data for further education colleges cover England and use a different subject classification which specifically identifies travel, tourism and leisure. The figures show that in 1995–96 there were 50,000 students studying travel, tourism and leisure in 380 further education colleges.

Higher National Diplomas

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students are currently studying for higher national diplomas; and what percentage of these students are receiving free tuition. [17312]

Dr. Howells: The latest data are given in the following table.

Major source of tuition fees for HND students in HEIs in the UK 1996–97

Percentages

Major source of tuition fees	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
No award or financial backing (pays own fees)	5.0	50.0
LEA/SOEID/DENI award[1]	90.4	1.6
Institutional waiver/no fees	0.3	3.8
Other sources of support[2]	1.6	37.0
Not known	2.7	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0
Total (numbers)	50,346	2,799

[1] Awards from English and Welsh local education authorities, Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, and Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

[2] Including Research Councils, other government departments, overseas sources, UK industry and commerce, and students' employers.

Training Providers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that training providers are properly supervised. [17454]

Dr. Howells: The supervision of training providers is carried out by TECs/CCTEs in line with their contactual obligations to the Government Office. These include standards for TECs to follow in their negotiations and contracting with training providers. The providers are in turn required to comply to rigorous standards set and monitored by the TEC covering financial controls, health and safety, quality assurance and management information.

We have also recently announced the establishment of the Training Standards Council, which will oversee the inspection of Government funded training from next April. This will involve external inspection of the quality of training delivered by training providers, and will provide further public assurances in this area of public funding.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence to involve the Army Cadets, Sea Cadets and Air Cadets in the welfare to work New Deal proposals; [17139]

(2) if he will list the youth organisations he has consulted in respect of the Welfare to Work New Deal proposals. [17411]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Bob Russell, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the New Deal in respect of discussions with the Ministry of Defence about the Cadet Forces, and your request for a list of youth organisations that have been consulted. There are areas that fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I am pleased to say that the Employment Service has forged close links with the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments in the run up to the roll out to the New Deal. Contact have been at both national and local level.

The Ministry of Defence are keen to be involved in the New Deal and, whilst thus far it has largely been in the context of mainstream forces recruitment, other local initiatives are being developed. The Ministry of Defence see New Deal as a useful stepping stone for young people who want to join the forces, but may not be able to meet pre-entry requirements without further support. Discussions have not specifically covered the Cadet forces but we would be very open to any proposals as to how they could be involved.

You also asked for a list of youth organisations consulted on the New Deal proposals. As you will be aware, we have consulted widely at national, regional and local level. While we have not kept centrally a list of all the organisations that have taken part in the consultation process, they have included many with a particular interest in young people. At the national conferences, for example, there were representatives from the Prince's Youth Business Trust, the Prince Youth Volunteers, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, the National Youth Association and the YMCA. Many other organisations will have taken part in consultations at regional and district level.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he will take to ensure that black and Asian young people benefit from the Government's welfare to work proposals. [18718]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government is committed to ensuring that the New Deal with actively promote equality of opportunity and outcome for young people of all ethic and racial groups. Delivery arrangements for each element of the programme—the Gateway, the four options and follow through support—will promote racial equality and are based on detailed consideration of how best to deliver provision for young people from ethnic minorities.

Press Releases

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his policy in respect of the faxing of press releases on the day of release to Opposition party spokesmen; what changes have been introduced since 1 May and if he will make a statement. [16297]

Dr. Howells: It is the policy of my right hon. Friend to provide press releases of major significance to Opposition party spokesmen on the day of release. Delivery can be by fax or hard copy, depending on which method is most suitable. Copies of all press notices are placed in the House of Commons library on the day of publication and are available on the Department's Web site the following day. There has been no change of policy since 1 May.

Local Education Authorities

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the education budget set by each local education authority in England for each of the last three years for which information is available; [17894]

(2) what percentage of the potential schools budget for each local education authority in England was delegated to schools in the last three years for which information is available; [17906]

(3) what was the potential schools budget for each local education authority in England and for the last three years for which information is available; [17908]

(4) what was the general schools budget for each LEA in England for the last three years for which information is available; [17909]

(5) what was the level of funding for Service, Strategy and Regulatory activities in each English LEA budget for each of the last three years for which information is available. [17910]

Mr. Byers: The information, contained in a number of tables, sets out, for each local education authority in England, its education budget, General Schools Budget, Potential Schools Budget and the proportion of the PSB delegated to schools, for the years 1995–96 to 1997–98. Data on services strategy and regulation are available only from outturn returns; 1995–96 is the latest year for which figures are available.

A copy of the tables has been placed in the Library.

Employment Service

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what extra training has been given to Employment Service staff involved in the delivery of the New Deal programme for under-25s at the Gateway stage. [17299]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Stephen Hesford, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the training of Employment Service staff delivering the New Deal for under 25s at the Gateway stage. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Extra training will be given to all Employment Service staff involved in the delivery of the New Deal. The main training priority will be Personal Advisers who will be fully involved in the Gateway and staff involved in marketing and taking vacancies. Team Leaders and other front line Jobcentre staff who are involved in the New Deal process will also receive training.

All of our training events and materials contain important information about the changes which we are making to the way we work in order to deliver the New Deal to the required standard. Specifically, they build on the principles of working in partnership, improving customer service and making quality a fundamental part of New Deal.

In addition to this, training has already been delivered to District managers which focuses on working in partnership, contracting for the New Deal, and partnership presentational skills.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *160,* (1) what are the staffing levels in each Portsmouth jobcentre; [18159]

(2) what proportion of the unemployed served by the jobcentres are aged 16 to 24 years. [18161]

Mr Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewes to Mr. Michael Hancock, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions (Official Report, column 160 in which you asked for information about the proportion of unemployed people, served by the Jobcentres in Portsmouth, who are aged 16 to 24 years and the levels of staffing in each of those Jobcentres. These are issues that fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The proportion of clients aged 16 to 24 years who were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance up to the end of October 1997 at Portsmouth North Jobcentre was 27 per cent., or 401 actual clients, and at Portsmouth Central Jobcentre the proportion was 25 per cent., or 704 actual clients.

The Portsmouth North Jobcentre currently employs the equivalent of 28.5 staff and Portsmouth Central Jobcentre employs the equivalent of 39.4 staff.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *160,* what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Employment Service's use of the preferred supplier system; and what indicators were used to measure its performance. [18160]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Michael Hancock, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your further question (Official Report column 160) relating to the assessment of the effectiveness of the Employment Service's use of the preferred supplier system, and the indicators used to measure its performance. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It might assist you if I explain in more detail how the preferred supplier system works. It is a form of pre-selection, whereby organisations who wish to be considered for inclusion on an Invitation to Tender list are invited to complete a questionnaire seeking information about such matters as their financial standing, their track record, their quality systems and their health and safety policies. The Employment Service Region then evaluates this information and makes a selection of organisations to be on its list

of preferred suppliers for programme services in that Region. When contracts fall due to be retendered, tenders are invited from among those organisations on that list. The preferred suppliers exercise is repeated at regular intervals to keep it up to date and to provide opportunities for new entrants to the market. The alternative would be to undertake considerably larger competitions, which would be more costly both for the taxpayer and for the competing bidders.

As I said in my previous reply, I am satisfied that the system is effective in helping both the Employment Service and potential contractors to make the best use of their resources. The preferred suppliers technique, which is followed by many public sector organisations and is fully in line with Government procurement practice, is an established way of minimising the expense of competitive tendering for all concerned while achieving good value for money for the taxpayer. I have, however, asked my head of procurement to undertake an assessment of the system, including an assessment of whether it would be possible to devise indicators to measure its performance.

If, in the meantime, there are particular issues relating to the operation of this approach about which you have concerns, I would of course be very willing to look into them.

I hope this is helpful.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schoolchildren were designated as having special educational needs in each of the last 10 years; if he will provide a breakdown as to their acuteness; and what proportion of those children have been educated at exclusively special educational needs schools in each of those years. [18146]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the number of children with statements of SEN in January of the years 1991 to 1996 and expresses the number of children in maintained and non-maintained special schools at each January as a percentage of all children with statements. Information on the numbers of pupils with statements was collected from special schools for the first time in January 1991. Information on the full range of children with SEN, including those with less severe, needs who do not have a statement, is available only for January 1996, when the total number of children identified by schools as having SEN (including those with statements) was 1.2 million.

Pupils with statements of Special Educational Need in England: 1991 to 1996

Position in January each year

	All schools[1]	*Special schools*[2]	*Per cent.*[3]
1997	234,629	92,356	39
1996	227,324	93,268	41
1995	211,307	90,932	43
1994	194,541	88,511	45
1993	178,029	87,892	49
1992	160,759	84,132	52
1991	153,228	85,632	56

[1] Includes pupils in nursery, primary, secondary, special and independent schools. Pupil Referral units and City Technology Colleges.

[2] Includes pupils in maintained and non-maintained special schools but excludes pupils in Independent Special schools.

[3] The number of pupils with statements in maintained and non-maintained special schools expressed as a proportion of the number of pupils with statements in all schools.

Higher Education Teachers

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons the United Kingdom Government reserved its position on section 9 of the UNESCO Recommendation on the status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel; and if he will make a statement on the alterations to that recommendation sought by Her Majesty's Government. [18485]

Dr. Howells: The UNESCO General Conference adopted the Recommendation with UK support, but with the following reservation expressed by the United Kingdom and supported by Australia, New Zealand, Spain and France:

> The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Spain and France strongly support the recommendation's aims of securing academic freedom and human rights for higher-education teaching personnel. These Member States also strongly support the principles in Section IX "Terms and Conditions of Employment". However, because the drafting of this section appears to go, in such great detail, into areas that are properly the responsibility of individual Member States and institutions, these Member States reluctantly place a reservation on this section.

On the advice of the UNESCO Secretariat, the UK Government did not seek alterations to the text of the Recommendation.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance he has given to local authorities to ensure that the extra money announced in the budget for 1998–99 for education is spent on schools. [18407]

Mr. Byers: The Secretary of State has written to the Leaders of the local authorities that are responsible for education, to emphasise that the £1,017 million increase in recurrent resources announced by the Chancellor in his Budget has been made available for the people's priority of raising standards in our schools. Officials have also discussed with representatives of the Churches and Local Government organisations the principles and criteria for the allocation of the first two phases of capital funding under the New Deal for Schools. The Government wishes to work in partnership with local authorities, and these increases in funding demonstrate that.

Teachers' Holidays

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans the Government has to reduce teachers' holiday entitlements; and what assessment he has made of the effect of those plans on his programme for recruiting new teachers. [19181]

Mr. Byers: Any such proposal would have had to be referred to the School Teachers' Review Body, which would have had to consider it and make recommendations in its report which is due in February next year. No such proposal was referred to the Review Body.

Class Sizes

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the average class sizes in each of the schools listed in the 1997 GCSE league tables. [18332]

Mr. Byers: Information on class sizes for individual schools is not published centrally.

Teacher Training

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* postgraduate and *(b)* undergraduate ITT places were unfilled in (i) 1996 and (ii) 1997. [18554]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Recruitment to ITT in 1996

	UG	*PG*
Primary		
Targets allocated to providers by TTA	7,018	4,492
New entrants	7,619	4,862
Number of unfilled places	0	0
Secondary		
Targets allocated to providers by TTA	3,081	15,689
New entrants	2,492	13,556
Number of unfilled places	589	2,133

Table 2: Recruitment to ITT in 1997

	UG	*PG*
Primary		
Targets allocated to providers by TTA	6,637	4,386
New entrants	7,072	4,677
Number of unfilled places	0	0
Secondary		
Targets allocated to providers by TTA	3,335	15,834
New entrants	2,543	13,423
Number of unfilled places	792	2,411

Data for 1997 are provisional.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the unfilled places on school-centred initial teacher training courses as a percentage of all places in each subject in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [18553]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

1996

	SCITT		
	Target	*Entrants*	*Percentage under recruitment*
Primary	165	170	0
Maths	81	38	53.09
English	63	55	12.70
Science	91	75	17.58
Modern languages	33	25	24.24
Technology	103	41	60.19
History	18	19	0
Geography	28	20	28.57
PE	44	49	0
Art	7	5	28.57
Music	12	6	50.00
RE	49	27	44.90
Other	8	8	0
Total Secondary	537	368	31.47

Pupil Grades

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the percentage of schools in each local education authority where both the proportion of pupils achieving five A*–C and five A*–G grades was lower in 1997 than in 1994. [18552]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* The following list gives the percentage of schools in each local education authority where both the proportion of 15-year-old pupils achieving five A*–C and five A*–G grades at GCSE was lower in 1997 than in 1994.

	Per cent.
Camden	7
Greenwich	5
Hackney	14
Hammersmith and Fulham	8
Islington	7
Kensington and Chelsea	0
Lambeth	0
Lewisham	17
Southwark	6
Tower Hamlets	0
Wandsworth	0
Westminster	0
Barking and Dagenham	11
Barnet	22
Bexley	15
Brent	6
Bromley	10
Croydon	4
Ealing	6
Enfield	14
Harringey	14
Harrow	8
Havering	0
Hillingdon	28
Hounslow	0
Kingston upon Thames	8
Merton	17
Newham	0
Redbridge	5
Richmond upon Thames	30
Sutton	18
Waltham Forest	9
Birmingham	6
Coventry	12
Dudley	17
Sandwell	21
Solihull	11
Walsall	20
Wolverhampton	17
Knowsley	0
Liverpool	8
St. Helens	0
Sefton	29
Wirral	14
Bolton	28

	Per cent.
Bury	6
Manchester	5
Oldham	10
Rochdale	5
Salford	14
Stockport	11
Tameside	14
Trafford	10
Wigan	10
Barnsley	18
Doncaster	25
Rotherham	9
Sheffield	15
Bradford	18
Calderdale	19
Kirklees	16
Leeds	17
Wakefield	9
Gateshead	18
Newcastle upon Tyne	6
North Tyneside	13
South Tyneside	6
Sunderland	0
Isles of Scilly	0
Berkshire	17
Cambridgeshire	23
Cheshire	11
Cornwall	26
Cumbria	26
Devon	15
Essex	15
Gloucestershire	11
Hereford and Worcester	25
Hertfordshire	12
Isle of Wight	0
Kent	12
Lancashire	10
Lincolnshire	14
Norfolk	8
Northamptonshire	18
Northumberland	13
Nottinghamshire	17
Oxfordshire	15
Shropshire	19
Somerset	11
Suffolk	9
Surrey	19
Warwickshire	6
West Sussex	27

Schools (New Deal)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the schools which will receive the first grants under the New Deal for Schools. [19176]

Mr. Byers: More than 2,000 schools will be receiving grant from the first round of New Deal for Schools. I have placed a complete list of all the successful projects in the libraries of both Houses.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team since 2 May, specifying in each case *(a)* the participating Minister or Ministers, *(b)* the destination of the trip, *(c)* the purpose of the trip and *(d)* the cost of the trip; and if he will make a statement. [15232]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Details of the Ministerial trips and their associated costs made by my colleagues and myself and accompanying Departmental officials since 2 May are as follows:

(a) The participating Minister or Ministers	*(b) The destination of the trip*	*(c) The purpose of the trip*	*(d) The cost of the trip* £
Deputy Prime Minister	The Hague, Netherlands	Attend the Marshall Plan Commemoration on behalf of the Government	1,570
Deputy Prime Minister	Luxembourg	Attend meeting of EU Transport Ministers	2,701
Deputy Prime Minister	USA	Attend United Nations General Assembly Special Session	18,235
Deputy Prime Minister	Calcutta, India	Representing the Prime Minister at the funeral of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. (Costs include flight costs for the Royal party)	99,500
Deputy Prime Minister	Luxembourg	Attend meeting of EU Environment Ministers	826
Deputy Prime Minister	Washington, USA	Meeting with US Vice President Al Gore	
Deputy Prime Minister	Japan	Ministerial discussions in preparation for the Climate Change Convention	38,964
Deputy Prime Minister	New Delhi, India	Ministerial discussions in preparation for the Climate Change Convention	
Deputy Prime Minister	Japan	Ministerial discussions in preparation for the Climate Change Convention	
Deputy Prime Minister	New Zealand	Ministerial discussions in preparation for the Climate Change Convention	Costs yet to be finalised
Deputy Prime Minister	Australia	Ministerial discussions in preparation for the Climate Change Convention; and attend Anglo-Australian trade promotion conference/events	
Minister of Transport	Luxembourg	EU Transport Council	5,431
Minister of Transport	Germany	Attend meetings with German Minister concerning UK Presidency	2,353
Minister of Transport	Israel	Trade Mission	3,371
Minister of Transport	Luxembourg	EU Transport Council	5,080

(a) The participating Minister or Ministers	(b) The destination of the trip	(c) The purpose of the trip	(d) The cost of the trip £
Minister of Transport	Paris, France	Attend meeting with French Minister concerning UK Presidency	1,409
Minister of Transport	Vienna, Austria	UN/ECE Conference on Transport and the Environment	3,823
Minister for the Environment	Luxembourg	Attend meeting of EU Environment Ministers	8,000
Minister for the Environment	New York, USA	Attend UNGASS (United National General Assembly Special Session)	7,302
Minister for the Environment	Brussels, Belgium	Meeting with MEPs	4,917
Minister for the Environment	Luxembourg	Attend meeting of EU Environment Ministers	
Minister for the Environment	Luxembourg	UK Presidency visit	4,929
Minister for the Environment	Copenhagen, Denmark	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	Oslo, Norway	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	Washington, USA	Attend Climate Change Meeting	11,755
Minister for the Environment	Tokyo, Japan	Attend Ministerial discussions in preparation for the Climate Change Convention	7,994
Minister for the Environment	Rome, Italy	UK Presidency visit	4,606
Minister for the Environment	Dublin, Ireland	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	Paris, France	UK Presidency visit	5,250
Minister for the Environment	Bonn, Germany	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	Stockholm, Sweden	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	Lisbon, Portugal	UK Presidency visit	7,659
Minister for the Environment	Madrid, Spain	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	The Hague, Netherlands	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for the Environment	Vienna, Austria	UK Presidency visit	
Minister for Local Government and Housing	Denmark	Attend meeting with Danish Housing and Construction Minister	1,774
Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning	Noordwijk, Netherlands	Planning Conference	1,045
Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning	Brussels, Belgium	Meeting with Commissioner Wulf-Mathies	1,311
Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning	Limassol, Cyprus	Planning Conference	4,965
Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning	Rotterdam, Netherlands	Regeneration Conference	802
Minister for London and Construction	New York, Boston, and Washington, USA	Factfinding trip on US mayoral systems	10,315
Minister for London and Construction	Amsterdam, Netherlands	EU Housing Ministers Meeting	632
Minister for London and Construction	Jordan and Egypt	Construction Trade Delegation to promote British trade overseas	5,529
Minister for London and Construction	Cologne, Germany	Factfinding trip on German Mayoral systems	768
Minister for London and Construction	Madrid and Barcelona, Spain	Factfinding trip on Spanish Mayoral systems	2,437
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	Bilbao, Spain	European Health and Safety Conference	1,767
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	Bonn, Germany	GLOBE EU Conference	1,401
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	Florence, Italy	International Conference on "Energy Efficiency in Household Appliances"	1,383

Pedestrianisation

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has in addition to PPG6 and Local Transport Note 1/87 to promote the benefits of pedestrianisation; and if he will make a statement. [18882]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The benefits which pedestrianisation can bring to a town and community are generally well established and appreciated by highway and planning authorities. The measures involved are set out in PPG6 "Town Centres and Retail Developments" and Local Transport Note 1/87 "Getting the Right Balance". Schemes should be individually tailored to meet local needs.

Where full pedestrianisation is neither feasible nor desirable, there may be a case for giving greater priority to pedestrians and improving the pedestrian environment in town centres. It is for individual authorities, taking into account the needs and views of local people, to examine the merits of full or partial pedestrianisation of a town centre. As part of this process they should ensure reasonable access, particularly for disabled people. Authorities should also keep schemes under review and modify them if need be.

Railtrack

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations his Department has received since 1 May on the effectiveness of the service provided by Railtrack; and if he will make a statement on its operation. [19224]

Ms Glenda Jackson: For the seven-month period to 1 December 1997, my Department has received 179 representations about railway issues involving Railtrack. The recent modification to the company's network licence places Railtrack under a stronger duty to keep up to date with its programme of maintenance, renewal and improvement and gives the Rail Regulator enforcement powers if Railtrack fails to deliver its programme without good reason.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to ensure that Railtrack invests in track and signalling improvements. [19235]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A recent modification to Railtrack's network licence establishes a new general duty in respect of maintenance, renewal and development of the rail network. It also places obligations on Railtrack to consult the train operating companies and to publish the criteria by which it will determine the priority and timing of different works. In addition, the licence now gives the Rail Regulator powers of investigation and enforcement to ensure that Railtrack's programme objectives have been met.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18891]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* My Department aims, where it is appropriate and Parliament is sitting, to make all major policy announcements in the House.

We endeavour to make all announcements in the most effective way. This may involve using a combination of communication vehicles.

Since 1 May the Department has issued 527 news releases, including those which relate to speeches and other announcements. Copies are placed in the library of both Houses and are available on the POLIS information system, as well as on the Department's Internet website.

Lead Water Mains

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to promote the replacement of the remaining lead water mains. [19282]

Angela Eagle: Many lead pipes owned by water supplies will need to be replaced to comply with the new mandatory standard of 10 µg/l for lead in drinking water, which will be introduced by the EC Drinking Water Directive when it is adopted. Political agreement to the new Directive was achieved in October 1997.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when it became automatic for planning appeals for proposed developments involving more than 150 houses or flats to be called in for his own determination. [19037]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* Planning appeals for proposed developments involving 150 or more houses are recovered for determination by my right hon. Friend under criteria set out in paragraph 36 of the Government's response to the Fifth Report from the Environment Committee, Session 1985–86 (Cmnd. 43). This was published in December 1986.

Housing (East Sussex)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations the Government has received about the identified demand and planned provision for new homes in East Sussex. [19291]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Since the East Sussex Structure Plan Review was placed on formal deposit in October 1996, we have received written representations from three local environmental protection groups and two individual residents objecting to the level of housing provision proposed in the Plan.

Structure Plan (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he received notification of the new structure plan accepted by Gloucestershire County Council; if he intends to accept the reduced figure in respect of the building of new houses between 1991 and 2011 in the plan; and if he will make a statement. [19118]

Mr. Caborn: The Secretary of State has not yet received the deposit draft of the Gloucestershire Structure plan which I understand the County intends to publish on 12 January, although he received a copy of the consultation draft published in May 1996.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the content of the plan because of the Secretary of State's formal role on planning matters.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his oral statement of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns 157–64, if he will provide a breakdown of the £130 million for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation; and what criteria will determine the allocation of that transitional relief. [19457]

Mr. Raynsford: Initial bids from all authorities eligible to participate under the Local Government Reorganisation Costs Scheme for 1998–99 have now been received and are currently being evaluated. Details of initial maximum amounts of Supplementary Credit Approvals to be allocated will be announced shortly before Christmas.

Particular priority under the 1998–99 scheme will be given to eligible costs incurred by those authorities reorganising in 1998. The criteria of eligibility under the scheme cover expenditure in all areas where transitional

costs are expected to occur: staff and consultancy, redundancy and compensation, accommodation, information technology and other costs.

Out-of-town Supermarkets

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he proposes to make changes to the planning policy guidelines on out-of-town supermarkets. [19295]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government, in its response to the Fourth Report from the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment on Shopping Centres (Cm 3729), has endorsed the planning policy guidance in PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Developments. The only further clarification that we wish to make is that proposals for extensions to existing out-of-centre supermarkets, and other developments covered by PPG6, should be subject to the same tests as other out-of-town developments.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency will give a substantive reply to the letter of 12 August from the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire. [19468]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A substantive reply was sent on 3 December. The Chief Executive has apologised for the unacceptable delay in replying.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 December 1997

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Cigarettes

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will take steps to discourage sales of House of Commons branded cigarettes. [18613]

Mr. Dennis Turner: It would be very unusual if a Chairman of the Catering Committee sought to discourage the sale and consumption of items sold as gifts and souvenirs from the Refreshment Department outlets. However, I accept fully that the situation with cigarettes is unique. In the previous Parliament I understand that the view of the Committee was that for as long as the smoking of tobacco products was legal, it was acceptable for the Department's outlets to sell cigarettes. My Committee will consider this subject in due course, and no doubt hon. Members will make representations about it.

Westminster Hall Cafeteria

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will allow participants of guided tours to use Westminster Hall Cafeteria; and if he make a statement. [18719]

Mr. Dennis Turner: On 12 July 1994, the House approved the First Report of Session 1992–93 from the previous Catering Committee, "Refreshment provision for line of route visitors". One recommendation was that the area currently occupied by the Westminster Hall Cafeteria should be converted to a visitor centre, which would provide light refreshments and toilet facilities for the public, but that this should take place only once a suitable alternative has been found for the present lunchtime users.

Initial discussions between Officials have been held regarding the proposed nature of a visitor centre, and their proposals will be put before my Committee by Easter 1998. However, I do have to advise my hon. Friend that in excess of 500 people, mainly staff, have lunch daily in the Westminster Hall Cafeteria; the other outlets currently available to staff would not be able to accommodate the extra customers if the Westminster Hall Cafeteria was closed before the opening of the new Cafeteria in Portcullis House, which I understand, will not be until 2001. Therefore, it will not be possible to open a visitor centre before then.

Blood Donor Sessions

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if she will arrange for regular blood donor sessions to be held within the Palace of Westminster. [18720]

Mrs. Roe: The North London Blood Transfusion Service operates a two day clinic very near the House in HM Treasury or the Cabinet Office once every six months, when arrangements are made for hon. Members, their staff and staff of the House who wish to do so to give blood.

Both a lack of space and an insufficient donor base preclude holding a dedicated clinic on the Parliamentary Estate.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many car parking spaces are provided for *(a)* ministers, *(b)* hon. Members, *(c)* employees and *(d)* visitors in the House of Commons car parks. [19458]

Mrs. Roe: Details of the number of car park spaces, and who is entitled to use them, are given in the Serjeant at Arms leaflet "Car Parking" dated Spring 1997. I have asked for a copy to be sent to the hon. Gentleman.

Hearing-impaired People

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee (1) what the procedures are by which a deaf member of the public can be provided with sign language interpretation of the proceedings of the House within the Strangers Gallery; [18955]

(2) what the procedures are by which a member may be provided with *(a)* a sign language interpreter and *(b)* a portable induction loop in order to facilitate communication with deaf or hard of hearing visitors to the Palace of Westminster and associated buildings. [18956]

Mrs. Roe: Portable induction loops can be provided on request to the Serjeant at Arms Office. Forty eight hours notice should be given whenever possible. The House does not provide sign language interpreters; however, arrangements are made for interpreters accompanying deaf members of the public to operate from a suitable place in the Gallery.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will list those publicly accessible rooms within the Palace of Westminster and associated buildings which are fitted with an induction loop to assist persons who wear hearing aids. [18957]

Sir. Sydney Chapman: The Accommodation and Works Committee has responsibility only for those areas of the parliamentary estate administered by the House of Commons. There are no publicly accessible rooms in outbuildings administered by the House of Commons which are fitted with induction loops. Induction loops are installed in the following places within the Palace of Westminster administered by the House of Commons:

The House of Commons Chamber—the floor and galleries;

All Committee Rooms administered by the House of Commons, with the exception of Nos. 7, 13 and 16;

The Grand Committee Room.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Visas (India and Pakistan)

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for visitors' visas to the United Kingdom were received between January and October at the posts in *(a)* Bombay and *(b)* Islamabad; and how many of these applications were refused. [18667]

Mr. Fatchett: Between January and October there were 53,059 applications in Bombay to visit the UK, of which 3,742 were refused; and 22,645 applications in Islamabad, of which 4,044 were refused.

Correspondence

Sir Archie Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons he has not replied to the letter from the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell of 1 July concerning his constituent Mr. Ramik Shah. [18884]

Mr. Fatchett: The right hon. Member's letter of 1 July was passed to the Home Office for reply since the question of special vouchers falls within its remit. I understand that a Home Office Minister will be replying shortly under file reference IMG/97 366/1205/1.

Tibet

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise the conditions of the Tibetan people with the Chinese Government; and if he will make a statement. [19014]

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of China concerning human rights in Tibet. [19341]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Tibet. We take every opportunity to raise the issue of human rights with the Chinese authorities, both nationally and with our European Union partners. Both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I did so most recently when we met the Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister in London between 3 November and 6 November.

China and Tibet

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will promote talks between the Chinese authorities and the Tibetan Government-in-exile during the United Kingdom EU Presidency, and encourage the European Union to host such talks. [18743]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* In our dialogues with China, both bilateral and at EU level, we have sought to encourage talks between the Chinese Government and the Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama. We will continue to do so.

Nigeria

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the Vision 2010 project in Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [19348]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are in regular contact with several members of the Vision 2010 Committee. Our High Commission in Nigeria attended the launch of the Vision 2010 report on 27 November. The Report sets out a blueprint for economic reform in Nigeria. We will be following closely the implementation of its recommendations.

Algeria

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will promote talks during the United Kingdom Presidency of the EU between the French and Algerian Governments and other European Union member states on abuses of human rights in Algeria. [18745]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* The EU already raises with the Algerian Government its concerns about allegations of human rights abuses. We will continue to monitor the situation closely during our Presidency of the EU.

Indonesia (Police Training)

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his statement in Jakarta on 29 August, what proposals he *(a)* has made and *(b)* plans to make to the Indonesian Government to provide assistance with police training. [19296]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* Detailed proposals are still being worked out; we shall make an announcement in due course.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the lecture on modern policing methods by British police experts in Indonesia, announced in his statement in Jakarta on 29 August, took place; and where. [19297]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* We have not yet finalised arrangements for the proposed lectures.

Sudan

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those resolutions Her Majesty's Government has *(a)* tabled and *(b)* supported in the United Nations General Assembly concerning the Government of Sudan between January 1992 and November 1997. [19597]

Mr. Fatchett: The United Kingdom has supported the following United Nations General Assembly resolutions about Sudan:

GA RES 47/167 (18 December 1992)

GA RES 48/201 (21 December 1993)

GA RES 49/21 (20 December 1994)

GA RES 50/58 (22 December 1995)

Emergency assistance to Sudan.

GA RES 47/147 (18 December 1992)

GA RES 48/147 (20 December 1993

GA RES 49/198 (23 December 1994)

GA RES 50/197 (22 December 1995)

GA RES 51/112 (12 December 1996)

The situation of human rights in Sudan.

The United Kingdom co-sponsored all the human rights resolutions, but not those on emergency assistance.

Iraq

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since the ending of the war in the Gulf the Iraqi regime has been offered the opportunity of selling oil to buy food and medicines; and if he will make a statement. [19706]

Mr. Fatchett: Iraq refused the benefits of SCRs 706 and 712. Because Iraq at first would not co-operate in implementing SCR 986 the implementation of the resolution was delayed until December 1996.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government in Zimbabwe on their policy towards private farmland; and if he will make a statement. [19119]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *303*.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19364]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The following is the information:

	Ministers	*Employees*	*Visitors*
London	5	96	15
Elsewhere in the United Kingdom	—	900	30

EU Projects (Funding)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much funding of European Union projects for 1996 operated through the actions ponctuelles. [17263]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply. A very small amount of the European Community Budget—less than 1 per cent. of the total—was spent on non-significant actions (including "actions ponctuelles") in 1996.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what initiatives Her Majesty's Government propose to take following the visit to Edinburgh of the delegation of the United Nations Legal Affairs Office to make inquiries on behalf of the United Nations about the Scottish legal system with a view to discussing a Lockerbie trial with Libya, the Arab League and the Organisation of African States. [19674]

The Prime Minister: We took the initiative to invite the United Nations to send legal experts to visit Scotland to witness at first hand the fairness and impartiality of Scottish justice, and to discuss the modalities of attendance at a trial in Scotland by international observers.

It remains the Government's view that Libya should comply with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions by surrendering the two accused for trial in Scotland or the United States, since any other solution will reflect quite wrongly on the quality and standards of justice in either jurisdiction.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the role of the Lord Chancellor and his responsibilities as Chairman of the Cabinet Committee responsible for the future constitutional arrangements for the United Kingdom following the creation of a Scottish Parliament. [18018]

The Prime Minister: The proceedings of Cabinet Committees necessarily remain private but it will be clear that my right hon. and noble Friend, the Lord Chancellor and his Committees are doing an excellent job in delivering the Government's constitutional reform programme. That will be an on-going task until we have completed the modernisation of the political system in this country.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Colman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the terms of reference and work programme of the Social Exclusion Unit. [20004]

The Prime Minister: I today launched the Social Exclusion Unit at Stockwell Park School Lambeth. Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. The Government have policies that are targeted at reducing all of these individually, but Government programmes have been less good at tackling the interaction between these problems or preventing them from arising in the first place.

The purpose of the unit is to help break this vicious circle and co-ordinate and improve Government action to reduce social exclusion by first improving understanding of the key characteristics of social exclusion, and the impact on it of Government policies; and, secondly, by promoting solutions, encouraging co-operation, disseminating best practice and, where necessary, making recommendations for changes in policies and machinery or delivery mechanisms. The unit will not cover issues

which are of interest to one Department only, or duplicate work done elsewhere. It will focus on areas where it can add value and address the long-term causes of exclusion.

I have asked the Unit to focus on the following priorities in its first phase to July 1998:

(a) Truancy and School Exclusion: to make a step change in the scale of truancy and exclusions from school, and to find better solutions for those who have to be excluded—with a report to Ministers by Easter.

(b) Street living: reducing to as near zero as possible the numbers sleeping rough in towns and cities—with a report to Ministers by Easter.

(c) Worst estates: developing integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, bad schools, etc.—with a report by June.

I will chair one summit involving key interests on each of these topics, starting with one on school exclusion and truancy at Stockwell Park School this morning.

In addition, in its first phase, the unit will focus on improving mechanisms for integrating the work of departments, local authorities and other agencies at national level and on the ground, so money spent on excluded groups is used more effectively and has more chance of meeting its objectives. There will be a first report to Ministers by the end of June next year. Secondly, it will feed in to the Comprehensive Spending Reviews any recommendations for redirection of priorities arising from the unit's initial work. Finally, it will draw up key indicators of social exclusion, recommending how these can be tracked to monitor the effectiveness of Government policies in reducing social exclusion and will report to ministers by the end of June.

The unit should draw on its experience with these first tasks to make recommendations on possible targets for the second half of 1998. Particular areas could include identifying key preventive interventions with children and young people; probing aspects of exclusion which disproportionately affect particular ethnic minority groups; options for improving access to services, public and private, for low income areas or individuals; and ways to encourage and focus individual and business involvement in tackling social exclusion. The unit will discuss those and other areas with interested groups before making recommendations.

The unit is part of the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. It will report to me and work closely with the No. 10 Policy unit. It will be staffed by civil servants from other Whitehall departments and secondees from local authorities, voluntary bodies and other main agencies. It is being set up for an initial period of two years and its future will then be reviewed. The Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will consider how best to tackle social exclusion, taking account of the particular needs and characteristics of their respective communities. The Social Exclusion Unit will work closely with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish offices and the unit's findings will be made available to these departments.

I will steer the work of the unit personally and chair regular meetings with relevant Ministers to review the initiative. Policy decisions will be cleared through the appropriate Cabinet Committee, and implemented by the departments. I will report to Parliament next summer on the work of the unit and on the forward agenda. Any policy changes proposed will have clear targets and evaluation plans. To build on the unit's cross-departmental focus, I have nominated a network of Ministers in the Departments most affected, to draw together exclusion issues in their own departments, and to help present and guide the unit's work as follows; the Minister for Local Government and Housing, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Bradley), the Minister for School Standards, the Minister for Public Health, the Minister without Portfolio, the Minister of State, Home Office, the Paymaster General, the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry.

The unit will draw extensively on outside expertise and research, and lock into relevant external networks to hear views from local authorities, business, voluntary organisations and other organisations/individuals with experience of dealing with exclusion. The unit will adopt an outward-facing and open approach, participate in relevant seminars and conferences, seek out existing good practice and encourage its wider dissemination.

Copies of a leaflet setting out the purpose, priorities, working methods and staff in the unit have been placed in the Library.

Early-Day Motions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if hon. Members holding the office of PPS have been requested not to sign early-day Motions critical of the Government; and if he will make a statement. [18909]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The principles which govern the behaviour of Parliamentary Private Secretaries in the House are set out in paragraph 46 of the Ministerial Code, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House in July 1997.

Cleaner Vehicles

Mr. Brake: To ask the Prime Minister what account he took of the publishing opinions of Mr. Keith Taylor, Chairman of ESSO, in appointing him to his task force on cleaner vehicles; what assessment he made of their consistency with the Government's policy on global warming; and what consultations he had with the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions prior to the appointment. [19152]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The Government have a clear commitment to addressing climate change. The Cleaner Vehicles Task Force aims to create a new partnership between Government and the private sector to promote environmentally friendly vehicles that people actually want to drive and buy. It will draw on a cross-section of industry, including the oil industry, and I welcome the participation of a wide range of interests. The members of the Task Force's steering group were nominated by the Minister for Transport, in close consultation with the Science, Energy and Industry Minister and officials from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Coal Industry

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish a ministerial committee to consider the future of the coal industry, with public membership and terms of reference. [19221]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* No.

E-Mail

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 10 November 1997, from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, *Official Report*, column *441*, if he will list his e-mail address along with those of *(a)* his senior officials and *(b)* his political advisers. [15863]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 November 1997]:* No.10 Downing Street has a website on the Internet.

It is not the current practice to publish the e-mail addresses of my staff.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on overseas travel for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93 (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997; and if he will provide a breakdown to show (1) air fares and (2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. [15275]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* For this purpose, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 5 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *377*.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on official hospitality for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997. [15274]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* For this purpose, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 5 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *376–77*.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98 year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15277]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* For this purpose, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 5 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *377*.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Construction Industry (Health and Safety)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions have taken place against employers for unsafe and dangerous working practices in the construction industry so far in 1997; and if he will make a statement. [18571]

Angela Eagle: I regret that this question cannot be answered accurately in the form in which it has been asked. Between 1 January 1997 and 31 October 1997, there were 376 convictions obtained in proceedings instituted by HSE in the construction industry. These figures, which are only provisional, include all those prosecuted. Some offences may have been committed by the self-employed who by their actions put other workers, or members of the public, at risk. In addition, offences by those such as clients and designers, who may have had no direct control of working practices, but who may have failed to play their part in overall risk management and control, are included. To eliminate these cases from the figures and revise the reporting period would involve disproportionate cost.

The best guide to the pattern of recent prosecutions in the construction industry is provided by Table A1.26 of Health and Safety Statistics 1996–97, which was published recently. A copy of Page 170 of the publication is attached for information.

The protection of the health and safety of all those working in, or affected by, the construction industry is a high priority. The prosecution of those who breach health and safety law and the penalties the courts impose are important aspects of achieving this protection.

Table A1.26: Proceedings instituted by HSE by result and by industrial sector 1992–93—1996–97[1]

Standard Industrial Classification (Sic 92)	*Section year*	*Agriculture, hunting forestry and fishing A,B*	*Extractive and utility supply industries C,E*	*Manufacturing industries D*	*Construction F*	*Service industries G–Q*	*Unclassified —*	*All industries —*
Informations laid	1992–93	284	46	850	702	268	7	2,157
	1993–94	276	50	664	531	253	19	1,793
	1994–95	227	48	663	630	222	13	1,803
	1995–96	162	24	645	598	287	51	1,767
	[12]1996–97	85	40	483	414	234	—	1,256

Table A1.26: Proceedings instituted by HSE by result and by industrial sector 1992–93—1996–97[1]

Standard Industrial Classification (Sic 92)	*Section year*	*Agriculture, hunting forestry and fishing A,B*	*Extractive and utility supply industries C,E*	*Manufacturing industries D*	*Construction F*	*Service industries G–Q*	*Unclassified —*	*All industries —*
Convictions	1992–93	239	40	780	573	226	7	1,865
	1993–94	227	45	585	415	217	18	1,507
	1994–95	173	42	589	494	188	13	1,499
	1995–96	114	21	558	476	241	41	1,451
	[1]1996–97	73	35	416	339	189	—	1,052
Average penalty per conviction (£)	1992–93	357	4,469	1,512	1,300	1,776	397	1,390
	1993–94	604	11,638	[2]2,973	[4]3,384	[5]3,939	922	[6]3,103
	1994–95	794	9,420	[7]3,042	[8]2,697	3,322	1,962	[9]2,873
	1995–96	1,095	5,595	2,678	2,232	3,389	2,820	2,572
	[1]1996–97	1,194	1,903	[10]8,068	[11]5,354	[12]5,592	—	[13]5,421

[1] = Provisional.
[2] Approximately 300 informations held over from 1995–96 have been transferred to the new computer system but have not yet been validated and, therefore, are not included in the provisional statistics but will be added when final data is released.
[3] Includes fine of £250,000 against Hickson and Welch and the fine of £100,000 against GEC Alsthom Engineering Systems Ltd. The average fine without these convictions would be £2,383.
[4] Includes the fine of £150,000 against J. Murphy and Sons Ltd. The average fine without this conviction would be £3,030.
[5] Includes the fines of £250,000 against Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. The average fine without this conviction would be £2,799.
[6] Includes the fines of £250,000 against Hickson and Welch and Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, the fine of £150,000 against J. Murphy and Sons Ltd. and the fine of £100,000 against GEC Alsthom Engineering Systems Ltd. The average fine without these convictions would be £2,612.
[7] Includes the fine of £100,000 against The Balmoral Group. The average fine without this conviction would be £2,877.
[8] Includes the fine of £200,000 against BP Chemicals. The average fine without these convictions would be £2,677.
[9] Includes the fine of £200,000 against BP Chemicals and the fine of £100,000 against The Balmoral Group. The average fine without these convictions would be £2,677.
[10] Includes the fine of £500,000 against Lloyds Register of Shipping, the fine of £750,000 against Fartygsentreprenader AB (part of the Mattson Group), the fine of £250,000 against Fartygoskonstruktioner (part of the Mattson Group), the four fines of £100,000 against Pembroke Cracking Co. Ltd. and the £100,000 fine against Firth Vickers Centrispinning Ltd. The average fine without these convictions would be £3,324.
[11] Includes the fine of £100,000 against Cheetham Hill Construction Ltd. The average fine without this conviction would be £3,068.
[12] Includes the fine of £200,000 against Port Ramsgate Ltd. The average fine without this conviction would be £4,558.
[13] Includes the fines of £500,000 against Lloyds Register of Shipping, the fine of £750,000 against Fartygsentreprenader AB (part of the Mattson Group), the fine of £250,000 against Fartygskonstruktioner (part of the Mattson Group), the four fines of £100,000 against Pembroke Cracking Co. Ltd. the £100,000 fine against Firth Vickers Centrispinning Ltd. the fine of £100,000 against Cheetham Hill Construction Ltd. and the fine of £200,000 against Port Ramsgate Ltd. The average fine without these convictions would be £3,266.

Radioactive Materials

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the United Nations International Maritime Organisation's conclusion on the safety of ro-ro vessels for the transport of radioactive materials; and if he will make a statement. [18849]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The statement attributed to the IMO in a recent press article that ro-ro vessels are

"exceptionally vulnerable to human error"

is taken from a 33 page IMO background information paper entitled "IMO and ro-ro safety" The paper deals with ro-ro safety in general and makes no reference to the transport of radioactive materials in particular. However, in 1993 the IMO Assembly adopted, and has recently amended, the *Code for the Safe Carriage of Irradiated Nuclear Fuel, Plutonium and High-Level Radioactive Waste in Flasks on board Ships* (INF Code). UK companies involved in the transport of materials covered by the INF Code use ships complying with the Code.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures are being taken to ensure than shipments of radioactive material comply with safety and security regulations; and if he will make a statement. [18850]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Officials of my Department's Radioactive Materials Transport Division are responsible for the safety assessment of package designs for the safe transport of radioactive material, requiring competent authority approval, by all modes. Their compliance assurance branch monitors the design, manufacture and operation of all packages and is responsible for enforcement of the radioactive material road transport regulations. Enforcement during carriage by rail, air and sea, is carried out respectively by HM Railways Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Department's Marine Safety Agency.

Matters of physical security are for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the public safety implications and *(b)* the security issues involved in the use of roll-on roll-off ferries to transport plutonium around the United Kingdom; and what action he is taking to monitor this activity. [18848]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Public safety is ensured by enforcing the Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1990 monitored by the Department's Marine Safety Agency. These regulations require such material to be carried in packages which are

resistant to severe accident conditions and which have been approved by my Department. UK companies involved in the transport of plutonium by sea use ships meeting the International Maritime Organisation's "Code for the Safe Carriage of Irradiated Nuclear Fuel, Plutonium and High-Level Radioactive Wastes in Flasks on board Ships" (INF Code).

The UK applies the requirements of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. Matters of physical security are for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Household Projections

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates of the levels of cohabitation were included in the latest household projections; and to what extent these differ from previous projections. [18604]

Mr. Raynsford: The most recent, 1992-based household projections were the first to use co-habiting couples as a separate household category for estimation purposes. This followed the inclusion of "living together as a couple" for the first time as a recognised relationship in the 1991 Census. It is not possible, therefore, to make comparisons with previous projections about assumed levels of cohabitation.

The levels of co-habitation assumed for the latest households projections were the 1992-based projections of marital status made by the Government Actuary's Department. A detailed description of the methodology and statistical assumptions underlying the latest household projections is set out in the annexes of "Projections in Households in England to 2016", published by the Stationery Office in March 1995. The treatment of the marital status projections and cohabitation is provided in Annexes D and G of this publication, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many homes were built in each English county between 1991 and 1996; and what change in the number of households was previously projected over those years. [18598]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is provided below. The total number of new dwellings built, by county, covers the period from July 1991 to June 1996. The figures for successive sets of household projections are the differences between the published projected figures for mid-year 1996 and mid-year 1991. These are subject to rounding error as the published figures are only readily available to the nearest thousand.

It is not appropriate to make a direct comparison between the number of dwellings built between 1991 and 1996 and the projected number of households forming over that period, for two reasons. First, the household projections are not an estimate of the number of additional houses which have to be built in any period. Rather, they represent one of the factors to be taken into account by local planning authorities when arriving at figures for housing provision to be included in regional guidance and development plans. Secondly, the housebuilding figures do not include other sources of new dwellings such as conversions. Furthermore, the 1992-based household projections were not published until March 1995 and most county structure plans prepared since 1991 have used earlier household projections as the basis for planning housing provision.

Thousands

	Housebuilding	*Household projections—increase in households 1991–96*				
	1991–96	*1981-based*	*1983-based*	*1985-based*	*1989-based*	*1992-based*
Cleveland	8.1	2	4	2	3	7
Durham	7.8	3	2	3	4	8
Northumberland	4.7	2	3	4	4	5
Tyne and Wear	13.0	–2	–4	0	6	17
Cheshire	15.7	14	15	17	22	20
Cumbria	7.4	3	3	6	10	8
Greater Manchester	36.0	2	6	11	25	35
Lancashire	20.3	11	10	12	23	22
Merseyside	20.0	–4	–2	–4	0	14
Humberside	16.0	7	6	6	15	17
North Yorkshire	14.2	9	10	14	21	16
South Yorkshire	14.4	9	6	5	15	18
West Yorkshire	27.0	11	11	15	28	38
Derbyshire	17.0	8	11	12	18	19
Leicestershire	15.4	14	13	15	22	23
Lincolnshire	16.3	5	12	15	17	17
Northamptonshire	14.3	14	13	16	20	14
Nottinghamshire	14.9	11	12	17	22	21
Hereford and Worcester	15.6	15	14	15	18	18
Shropshire	9.9	8	8	11	12	10
Staffordshire	17.3	14	13	15	21	18
Warwickshire	8.8	8	8	9	9	10
West Midlands	26.0	11	6	13	22	29
Bedford	11.2	10	10	12	13	14
Cambridgeshire	15.1	14	15	23	28	25
Essex	29.4	27	25	30	34	34
Hertfordshire	17.8	20	19	22	18	22
Norfolk	19.7	11	11	16	19	19
Suffolk	13.6	11	13	16	14	12
Greater London	75.5	12	37	80	74	144

Thousands

	Housebuilding 1991–96	*Household projections—increase in households 1991–96*				
		1981-based	*1983-based*	*1985-based*	*1989-based*	*1992-based*
Berkshire	11.5	23	20	19	25	24
Buckinghamshire	18.8	21	21	24	27	23
East Sussex	10.9	13	5	14	17	13
Hampshire	26.4	27	40	45	41	36
Isle of Wight	1.9	2	1	2	2	1
Kent	20.2	23	22	27	32	27
Oxfordshire	12.9	15	11	15	21	16
Surrey	14.4	17	17	21	12	17
West Sussex	12.9	18	14	17	17	14
Avon	13.9	16	10	17	19	22
Cornwall	6.4	9	9	11	11	11
Devon	16.7	15	17	22	27	23
Dorset	13.0	16	13	16	19	16
Gloucestershire	10.8	9	8	10	13	13
Somerset	6.8	10	9	10	12	12
Wiltshire	13.8	10	15	17	19	18
England	753.5	522	544	714	874	962

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which county councils have been written to by Ministers in respect of the housing numbers being proposed in structure plans. [18607]

Mr. Raynsford: Since the responsibility for adopting structure plans passed to local authorities, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has written to the following county councils in respect of proposed housing numbers in their plans:

Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Cheshire
Devon
Dorset
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
Kent
Oxfordshire
Somerset
West Sussex
Wiltshire.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which county structure plans have been adopted with housing requirements lower than those set out in regional planning guidance. [18606]

Mr. Raynsford: Of the counties that have adopted their structure plans after the publication of the Regional Planning Guidance for the region concerned, two have adopted housing figures lower than those in the RPG. In both cases the differences were marginal. The counties concerned were Buckinghamshire (64,000 compared to an RPG figure of 65,340) and Surrey (35,600 compared to an RPG figure of 36,000).

Local Government Finance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the effect on local authority costs of inflation at 2.75 per cent. per annum during the period 1997–98 to 1999–2000. [18803]

Mr. Raynsford: The impact of inflation on local authority costs would depend on the rate of increase in prices for the particular services and goods purchased by authorities.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for 1998–99 the annual *(a)* SSA and *(b)* capping limit for Harrogate Borough Council for each year between 1990–91 and 1998–99. [19474]

Mr. Raynsford: The Standard Spending Assessment and capping limit for Harrogate Borough Council for each year between 1990–91 and 1998–99 is as follows:

£ million

	SSA	*Capping limit*
1990–91[1]	8.679	—
1991–92[2]	11.119	15.000
1992–93	11.663	15.000
1993–94	11.718	15.234
1994–95	12.841	15234
1995–96	12.594	15.234
1996–97	11.867	14.936
1997–98	11.853	14.942
1998–99[3]	12.925	14.942

[1] Harrogate Borough Council was not given a capping limit.
[2] Harrogate Borough Council had a budget less than £15 million and under the capping regime of 1991–92 the cap limit was effectively £15 million.
[3] The 1998–99 SSA and capping limit are provisional.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for 1998–99 the proposed *(a)* revenue support grants and *(b)* standard spending assessments for (i) district councils and (ii) shire councils as a sum per head of their populations ranked and numbered in descending order. [19526]

Mr. Raynsford: As the tables showing the figures for shire districts and shire countries are lengthy, I have placed them in the Library.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the percentage changes in *(a)* standard spending assessments and *(b)* revenue support grants for (i) shire

counties and (ii) district councils between the settlement for 1997–98 and the proposals for 1998–99, ranked and numbered in descending order. [19525]

Mr. Raynsford: The figures for shire counties and shire districts are shown in tables which I have placed in the Library. The 1997–98 figures for Revenue Support Grant and Standard Spending Assessments are not comparable with the provisional figures for 1998–99 because of changes in local authority functions (e.g. in relation to under-fives) and local government reorganisation (for 1998–99 this affects the county areas of Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Devon, Essex, Hereford and Worcester/Worcestershire, Kent Lancashire, Nottinghamshire and Shropshire).

Empty Council Properties

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many council properties in each of the London boroughs are empty; and how many have been empty for *(a)* up to six months, (b) up to one year and *(c)* over one year. [18581]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities in England report the numbers of their vacant dwellings at 1 April each year, together with the length of time they have been vacant, in their annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP1) returns. The latest available figures for the London boroughs relate to the position on 1 April 1996 and are given in the 1996 "HIP 1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Air-Sea Rescue Service

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for changes in the operation of, and what assessment he has made of future employment levels at, the air-sea rescue service from HMS Daedalus. [18881]

Ms Glenda Jackson: HMS Daedalus was a former naval base and is where the Coastguard Agency leases accommodation for Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter facilities from the Ministry of Defence. Following the announcement of HM Coastguard's five-year strategy, there will be no change to the Coastguard helicopter provision at Portland and Lee-on-Solent. New five-year contracts have been let recently to Bristows Helicopters Ltd. for the provision of Coastguard (SAR) helicopters at both locations thus ensuring their continuing presence until at least 2002. There are no plans to relocate these major SAR resources. The crewing of these helicopters is a matter for the contractor.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will *(a)* obtain from BAA plc and *(b)* publish details of those flights which landed at or departed from Heathrow Airport between midnight and 7 am on Christmas morning 1996, indicating airline, aircraft, origin or destination and schedules and actual times of arrival and departure. [18995]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information from Heathrow Airport Ltd. is as follows:

Arrivals

Airline	*Aircraft*	*Origin*	*Actual time of arrival*	*Due*
British Airways	B747	Hong Kong	0417	0425
Virgin Atlantic	A340	Hong Kong	0421	0445
British Airways	B747	Hong Kong	0432	0430
British Airways	B777	Jeddah	0503	0520
British Airways	B777	Boston	0509	0520
British Airways	B747	Kuala Lumpur	0512	0520
Singapore Airlines	B747	Singapore	0516	0530
Lufthansa	B737	Bonn	0520	0520
British Airways	B747	Singapore	0526	0535
British Airways	B747	Delhi	0533	0510
Cathay Pacific	B747	Hong Kong	0536	0515
Qantas	B747	Singapore	0538	0530
British Airways	B747	Bangkok	0541	0540
British Airways	B747	Johannesburg	0556	0525
British Airways	B767	Kuwait	0603	0620
Malaysian Airlines	B747	Kuala Lumpur	0606	0555
American Airlines	B767	New York	0608	0625
United Airlines	B777	Newark	0610	0640
United Airlines	B777	Washington DC	0613	0630
American Airlines	MD11	Chicago	0615	0630
Qantas	B747	Bangkok	0617	0625
Royal Brunei Airlines	B767	Dubai	0620	0630
Thai Airways	B747	Bangkok	0621	0620
British Airways	B747	Buenos Aires	0622	0625
Japan Airlines	B747	Anchorage	0624	0605
Virgin Atlantic	A340	Washington DC	0626	0645
British Airways	B747	Singapore	0627	0620
British Airways	B747	New York	0629	0655
British Airways	B767	Bahrain	0631	0640
Canadian	B767	Toronto	0633	0625
United Airlines	B767	New York	0635	0655
Air Canada	B767	Montreal	0637	0645
British Airways	B747	Bombay	0639	0650
United Airlines	B767	Delhi	0642	0650
American Airlines	B767	New York	0643	0650
United Airlines	B767	Chicago	0645	0710
Virgin Atlantic	B747	New York	0648	0710
Pakistan International Airlines	B747	Lahore	0650	0625
Air Canada	B747	Toronto	0656	0650
Kenya Airways	A310	Rome	0700	0640

Of these landings, all those between midnight and 0600 counted against the movements limit and against the noise quota, in accordance with the night flying restrictions. There were no departures between midnight and 7 am.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he will take to ensure that the Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority has sufficient funds to meet *(a)* its statutory duties and *(b)* its minimum recommended standard of service in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [18989]

Mr. Raynsford: Statutory responsibility rests with the Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority to set a budget which will allow it to meet its statutory duties and maintain the national standards of fire cover. As part of the provisional local government finance settlement, announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on 2 December,

the Authority will be able to increase its budget requirement for 1998–99 by up to £1.736 million (4.5 per cent.)

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects work on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link *(a)* to begin and *(b)* to be completed; and if he will make a statement on negotiations concerning the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. [19236]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the Development Agreement with the Government, London and Continental Railways (LCR) are contracted to complete the Channel Tunnel Rail Link within five and a half years of raising finance for the project. LCR say that this is planned for around mid-1998, that they are currently discussing related proposals with a number of parties and that main construction should begin next April.

Railtrack

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met the Chief Executive of Railtrack; and how often he *(a)* has met the Chief Executive and *(b)* officials in his Department have met officials of Railtrack. [19223]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has met the Chief Executive of Railtrack once, on 30 October. Officials from the Department meet Railtrack officials frequently to discuss various railways issues.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to prohibit the use of mobile phones by drivers in charge of their vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [19465]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The police can and do prosecute motorists using mobile phones for failing to have proper control of a vehicle, careless and inconsiderate driving or other more serious offences where appropriate. The Association of Chief Police Officers considers that existing road traffic legislation is sufficient to deal with cases arising from the use of a mobile phone while driving.

Our aim is to persuade motorists not to use phones while driving. One of the principal changes proposed in the recent consultation on the new edition of the Highway Code was a strengthening of the advice on this issue. We are drawing up good practice guidelines for drivers and for employers; and are considering what other measures may be necessary to reinforce the advice in the Highway Code.

Discharges to Water

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many discharges to water in excess of permitted limits were identified by the Environment Agency in 1996; how many prosecutions resulted; how many were successful; and what penalties were applied. [18683]

Angela Eagle [*holding answer 4 December 1997*]: The number of discharges which exceeded their consented limits in 1996 was 3,448. Inevitably, this headline figure disguises a considerable range of cases from marginal exceedances to substantial failures. The Agency brought 18 prosecutions under section 85(6) of the Water Resources Act 1991 for breaches of consent in 1996. All were successful and the fines imposed ranged from £450 to £10,000. However, the majority of prosecutions brought by the Agency are for the general offence of causing water pollution under section 85(1) of the 1991 Act. Some of these cases may also be attributable to a consented discharge. One of the reasons for the low number of prosecutions in relation to breaches of consent is that, on being notified of a failed sample, most dischargers take prompt action to remedy matters. In other cases, the Environment Agency may issue a formal caution.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19366]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department provides the following car parking spaces:

	London	*United Kingdom*
(a) Ministers	9	0
(b) Employees	405	5,406
(c) Visitors	204	1,242

Slurry Lagoons

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy on the requirement for a site investigation covering the hydraulic properties of soil, subsoil and bedrock as a prerequisite to the granting of permission for slurry lagoons in areas of high groundwater vulnerability. [19120]

Angela Eagle: Any person having custody or control of slurry must store it in accordance with the requirements of the Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) Regulations 1991. Slurry storage systems covered by the regulations include lagoons. The regulations require the base and walls of any effluent tank, channels and reception pit and the walls of any pipes to be impermeable. The regulations do not require a site investigation to be undertaken. However, no part of the storage tank, any effluent tank, channels, pipes or reception pit is to be situated within 10 metres of any inland freshwater which slurry could enter if it were to escape unless this has been agreed by the Environment Agency on the basis of suitable precautions to avoid any significant risk of pollution of controlled waters. The Department has issued general guidance to farmers on the regulations. The Code of Good Agricultural Practice for

the protection of water issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food also contains advice to farmers in respect of slurry storage.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government's target for a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010 is contingent upon the carbon dioxide emission targets of other countries; and if he will make a statement. [19264]

Angela Eagle: Our domestic aim is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. After Kyoto we will be launching a national debate on how we might move over time towards this level of reduction. However, this is not an offer to take on a legally binding target of 20 per cent. regardless of the commitments other countries are prepared to make. In Kyoto we are supporting the EU proposal that all developed countries should reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases to 15 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons the Government is awaiting the outcome of the Kyoto environment conference before setting out the measures which will be taken to achieve its 20 per cent. carbon dioxide reduction target; and if he will make a statement. [19263]

Angela Eagle: As a first stage, we will consult next year on a programme of measures which will largely focus on delivering our legally binding commitment from Kyoto. We will also launch a national debate on how we might move over time towards our 20 per cent. aim. Our programme must take account of decisions reached at Kyoto, including those on targets, policies and measures, and the scope for using instruments such as emissions trading and joint implementation. It must also reflect the outcome of a number of policy reviews in progress, such as on renewable energy and development of an integrated transport policy.

Bicycles

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the depreciation associated with the average use of an average bicycle. [18791]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

Tax relief for depreciation on the cost of a bicycle used for the purposes of a business or employment is available through capital allowances at 25 per cent. per year. The allowance is adjusted for any private use.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Expenditure

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total public expenditure in each district council area in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [18933]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is not available. Public expenditure allocations are generally not recorded by District Council area.

Planning Application (Portadown)

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with regard to the application for planning permission for land to the south of No. 68 Mahon Road, Portadown, made on 28 July 1996 (N/96/0564), what were the original observations of the Roads Service when consulted by the Planning Service; what previous applications were made in respect of that land; what was the outcome of such applications; and what were the reasons for refusal. [18958]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. S. McKay to Mr. David Trimble, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked Mr. T. W. Stewart, Chief Executive of the Planning Service, to reply to your recent Question about a planning application for land to the south of No. 68 Mahon Road, Portadown (N/96/0564). I am responding on Mr. Stewart's absence on annual leave.

The Roads Service was formally consulted about this planning application on 9 September 1996 and in its consultation response to the Planning Service of 10 February 1997 commented as follows:-

"Safety and Convenience of Traffic

Roads Service has no objection to this application. The access must be located close to the southern end of the site to provide adequate forward visibility on Mahon Road. The existing footway along the site frontage must be widened to 1.8m"

On foot of Roads Service advice a condition and informative relating to sight distances and access were included in the decision notice.

The Planning Service has no record of any previous applications having been made in respect of this land.

I do hope this clarifies the position.

Departmental Pay

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the lowest hourly rate paid by her Department to *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* persons employed under personal contract and *(d)* persons employed by firms undertaking contracted-out services for central government offices, defining the job title in each case. [18106]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* For the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, the information is as follows:

	Hourly rate (£)	*Job title*
(a)	3.27	Administrative Assistant
(b)	3.27	Part-time Administrative Assistant
(c)	3.42	Typist
(d)	—	-

[1] Information is not readily available.

Republic of Ireland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 25 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *773*, on the Irish Government's territorial claim to Northern Ireland, what steps her Department has taken subsequently to establish confidence-building measures in respect of the Irish constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. [18934]

Marjorie Mowlam: Constitutional issues have been discussed by the two Governments in meetings as part of the talks process. The Government have always made clear their view that there is a need for amendments to relevant constitutional legislation, reflecting the widespread support which exists for the consent principle in all its aspects.

The Government remain of the view, expressed by the Prime Minister in his speech in Northern Ireland on 16 May, that changes to the Irish constitution to reflect the principle of consent would be a helpful confidence-building step in advance of any settlement.

Miss Mildred McIlveen

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make it her policy to permit Miss Mildred McIlveen to purchase her Housing Executive flat at 24c Ardgeehan Gardens, Bangor; and if she will make a statement on long term residency and purchase rules. [18935]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The House Sales Scheme operated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive broadly mirrors the Right to Buy scheme operated by housing authorities in England and Wales. Its operation is a matter for the Executive's Chief Executive and it would be improper for me to intervene. The Chief Executive informs me that the period of residency in Executive or other social housing determines the percentage discount that a tenant may qualify for, against the valuation price of the house. The basic rules for purchase are that, with certain exceptions, tenants may purchase the dwelling they are living in. The exceptions are sheltered dwellings and those dwellings considered suitable for the elderly, the rationale being that there is constant demand for these properties and it is likely to increase. In the case of dwellings considered suitable for the elderly, such dwellings are single storey properties and ground floor accommodation with no more than two bedrooms and which have been let to, or are for, someone over age 60. Where a dwelling was let to someone over 60 at the time when the tenancy began, the successor in title may not buy the dwelling. If, in very exceptional circumstances, a dwelling considered suitable for the elderly is let to someone less than age 60, the house is not exempted from the House Sales Scheme.

The Chief Executive of the Housing Executive has advised me that there are no plans to change the House Sales Scheme as it applies to exempted properties.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if she will list the telecommunications masts which have been erected without the benefit of planning permission due to permitted development rights; [18129]

(2) on how many occasions the Department of the Environment Planning Service has withdrawn permitted development rights in respect of the erection of telecommunications masts; and what were the locations of these masts; [18130]

(3) how many applications for planning permission for telecommunications masts have been made to each of the divisional planning offices since 1 April; what applications were approved; what are the locations of these masts; and how many have been erected. [18196]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Planning Service under its Chief Executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. S. McKay to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked Mr. T. W. Stewart, Chief Executive of the Planning Service, to reply to your recent Questions about the erection of telecommunications masts throughout Northern Ireland. I am responding on Mr. Stewart's absence on annual leave.

The Planning Service does not hold records of the number of telecommunications masts actually erected. However, I can say that since 1994 there have been 236 requests for determinations as to whether telecommunications equipment of various types could be erected under the permitted development, of which 203 requests were confirmed 7 were not permitted development, and the remainder are currently outstanding. Once confirmed that a proposal is permitted development, there is no time-scale laid down within which it has to be erected. To date, the Department has withdrawn the permitted development rights in respect of one telecommunications mast in the Downpatrick area.

As regards the number of planning applications submitted and approved for telecommunications masts since 1 April 1997, the information is not readily available in the precise form requested. The available information is as follows:

Company name	*Divisional Planning Office*					
	Belfast	*Craigavon*	*Ballymena*	*Downpatrick*	*Omagh*	*Londonderry*
Cabletel	1(0)	0	0	0	0	0
Vodafone	0	1(1)	0	0	1(1)	0
Orange PCS	0	4(0)	11(7)	7(0)	9(4)	12(5)
Millennium Communications	0	1(1)	1(1)	0	2	0
Telecom Securior Radio	0	0	0	0	2(1)	0
Castle Transmission	0	0	0	0	2(1)	3(2)
Teleport (NI) Ltd.	0	0	2(1)	0	0	0
Others	5(2)	1(1)	2(2)	3(3)	1(1)	1(1)
Total	6(2)	7(3)	16(11)	10(3)	17(8)	16(8)

Figures refer to planning applications for all types of telecommunications equipment.
( ) Refer to numbers approved.

I do hope this is helpful.

Departmental Accounting Systems (Payment)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which her Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12555]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Departments of Agriculture, of Economic Development, of Environment and Health and of Social Services use accounts systems based on Oracle Financials software. All these Departments use ICL CFM as sub-contractors and have a basic overall maintenance contract costing around £830,000. The Department of Health and Social Services in addition employed Deloitte Touche and the Helm Corporation in the implementation of the system.

The Department of Education use McDonnell Douglas "Reality" system operating CAFIS software with an annual maintenance cost of £14,000.

The Department of Finance and Personnel use IFMIS Financial System maintained by McDonnell Douglas at a cost of £11,000.

The Northern Ireland Office use the Integra Accounting Package, Sage Sovereign Accruals Package from Microcare (NI) Ltd, a Selima Purchase Ledger from Sanderson and a package where payments are made via payable order, BACS or occasionally a tele-banking facility.

TREASURY

Teachers (Tax Relief)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what relief from taxation was allowed to teachers in 1995–96 in respect of claims for *(a)* books and *(b)* computer software. [18558]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 1 December 1997*]: Teachers may claim a deduction for income tax purposes for books and computer software if these expenses are incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment. Although Tax Offices establish what deductions are valid in relation to the individual's employment, information on the numbers and amounts claimed for particular types of employment is not routinely collected. The amount of deductions claimed for particular items by teachers is not, therefore, available.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of tax relief was claimed by teachers in 1995–96 for professional association fees. [18557]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 1 December 1997*]: Teachers may claim a deduction for income tax purposes for annual subscriptions paid to certain approved professional bodies or learned societies, where the body's activities are relevant to the duties of their employment. Although the Tax Offices establish that any deductions are valid in relation to the individual's employment, information on the numbers and amounts claimed for particular types of employment is not routinely collected. The amount of deductions claimed by teachers is, therefore, not available.

VAT (Health Service)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the annual cost to *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* social services of the Value Added Tax (Drugs, Medicines and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997. [18641]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 3 December 1997*]: The NHS and Local Authorities are funded to take account of VAT. The Order seeks to close tax avoidance arrangements.

Charity Shops

Mr. Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he is planning to the VAT status and business rate status of charity shops; and if he will make a statement. [18996]

Dawn Primarolo: A Review of Charities' Taxation was announced in the July Budget. Since then charities have been giving their views and proposals to Customs and Excise, who are now analysing them. We expect to publish a consultation document in Spring 1998.

The Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions is also considering the issue of business rates reliefs for charity shops as part of their Review of Local Authority Finance. A consultation document is due to be published shortly.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reform insurance premium tax; and if he will make a statement. [18997]

Dawn Primarolo: As with all taxes, insurance premium tax is kept under review and changes will be made if and when appropriate.

Smuggling

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to eliminate the smuggling into the United Kingdom of goods which are subject to substantially lower rates of duty and taxation in other parts of the European Union; and what representations he has received from proprietors of convenience stores on those measures. [19204]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of front-line Customs staff to deal with Single Market Excise smuggling has been significantly increased in the last 15 months. An extra 70 have been allocated throughout the country under the Spend to Save initiative. In addition, a further 30, backed up by specialist investigation officers, are currently being deployed at Dover to intensify the drive against illegal trade. Customs announced new measures on 26 September 1997 to crack down on hired vehicles used for smuggling.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget a review of the effects on the Exchequer and the industry of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. The review, which is being

conducted in partnership with all the trade sectors concerned and with key Government Departments, will be completed by the end of the year.

I have received a number of representations on this subject from businesses and members of the public; the records do not separately distinguish those from proprietors of convenience stores.

Family Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the proposed working family tax credit will *(a)* be available only to families with dependent children and *(b)* only benefit those who currently have zero tax liabilities. [19031]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The Government are considering all options.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the proposed working family tax credit will be withdrawn as income rises. [19032]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The working families tax credit could provide a highly effective way of targeting help at low-income families. The Government are considering all the options for its potential design and delivery.

Child carers

Audrey Wise: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much time the young people who are to be trained as child carers under his proposals will spend on that training in hours per week and over what period of time; and to what level they will be trained. [18824]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply. Under the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds, young people undertaking training as child carers through the Full Time Education and Training option will spend up to 12 months in full-time study towards approved qualifications at NVQ Level 2 or, exceptionally, NVQ Level 3. Those undertaking training through the Employment or Voluntary Sector options will study for a minimum of the equivalent of one day per week, for up to 6 months, towards approved qualifications at NVQ Level 2 or, if appropriate, Level 3.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher Education

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to encourage young people to enter higher education and to complete their courses. [18798]

Mr. Byers: The Government's approach to raising school standards, exemplified by our School Standards and Framework Bill, is designed to raise educational achievement. While there are other factors influencing the participation of young people in higher education, achievement of the required entry qualifications is by far the most significant.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the estimated cost of preparing, printing and publishing his Department's communications which have been sent to educational institutions explaining the Government's policies on higher education. [19506]

Dr. Howells: The cost, since 1 May 1997, of preparing, printing and publishing communications explaining the Government's policies on higher education is £64,500.

UK universities and colleges have traditionally achieved high retention rates and we see no reason for this changing. Research evidence suggests there are several reasons why students drop out of higher education and it is primarily for universities and colleges, through appropriate support, counselling and advice both before and after admission, to address these.

We expect our plans to introduce a fairer system of financial support for students will help encourage young people to participate, and subsequently complete their courses, in higher education.

Summer Literacy Schools

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment his Department has made of the effect of this year's summer literacy schools on the reading standards of the pupils who participated. [19505]

Mr. Byers: The Department published its assessment of the effect of this year's Summer Literacy Schools scheme in a summary report published on 20 November. A copy is in the Library.

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students attending further education colleges as part of the New Deal programme will continue to receive social security benefits. [19524]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Participants on the Full-Time Education and Training Option of the New Deal for young people aged 18 to 24 will receive an allowance equivalent to their usual Jobseeker's Allowance payments, and will retain entitlement to any passported benefits.

Young people in the other three New Deal options may attend a further education college part-time, under the education and training element of those options. Participants in the Employment option will be paid a wage. Those in the Environment Task Force and Voluntary Sector Options will receive either a wage or an allowance equivalent to their usual benefits plus a grant amounting to £15.38 per week, plus any passported benefits to which they are entitled.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19367]

Dr. Howells: Car park spaces used by the Department for Education and Employment are detailed in the table.

	Ministers	*Employees*	*Visitors*	*Total*
DfEE London HQ	6	40	7	53
DfEE HQ Outside London	Nil	703	109	812
Employment Service (ES)	Nil	7,200		7,200
Total	6	743	116	8,065

ES figure includes 200 spaces in central London.

Compulsory Retirement

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his Department's policy on compulsory retirement ages for its employees. [19507]

Dr. Howells: The normal retirement age for all staff in this Department is 60. Some staff may be retained past age 60, but only if they are fit and efficient and there is a need for their service.

Class Sizes

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his decision to compel St. Andrew's GM Church of England Primary School, Weeley, Essex, to take an extra pupil into their year 1 class; and what is his policy in circumstances when such enrolments result in class sizes of over 30. [19490]

Mr. Byers: The Government have pledged to reduce class sizes for all five, six or seven-year-olds to 30 or below. We will achieve this by the end of the Parliament. The School Standards and Framework Bill will impose a duty on LEAs and schools to comply with class size limits prescribed by the Secretary of State. Until such limits come into force, there may continue to be circumstances in which infant class sizes exceed 30. This may, very occasionally, follow a direction under section 431 of the Education Act 1996. In the case of St. Andrew's School in Weeley, the Secretary of State decided that the LEA's direction should stand.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what target date he has set for every child aged between five and seven years to be taught in a class of 30 pupils or fewer. [19182]

Mr. Byers: We shall honour our pledge to reduce class sizes to 30 or below for every five, six and seven year-old by the end of this Parliament.

New Deal

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people aged between 18 and 24 years, unemployed for over six months, will benefit from the new deal in the first year of operation. [19134]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is not possible to provide precise estimates of the total numbers of young people who will require help from the New Deal. In its first year, we will offer to help everyone who becomes eligible for the New Deal, and sufficient places will be available to meet this commitment.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the new deal resources for education and training he expects to be allocated to the further education sector. [19192]

Mr. Andrew Smith: FE Colleges will have the opportunity to bid for well over £100 million-worth of New Deal resources next year.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he will take to ensure that unemployed adults participating in the new deal will be able to continue their training beyond NVQ Level 2 or equivalent. [18992]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Full-Time Education and Training Option in the New Deal for unemployed people aged 18 to 24 is primarily aimed at helping young people who do not hold qualifications at or above N/SVQ2 or equivalent. In circumstances where it will clearly enhance their employability, young people who already hold Level 2 qualifications will be able to work towards a higher level qualification. Under the education and training element of the other three options, participants will pursue an approved qualification, which might be at NVQ Level 3, or equivalent, if appropriate.

The education and training element of the New Deal for adults will allow the long-term unemployed to study on full-time employment related courses for qualifications broadly up to NVQ3 level for up to a year while receiving Jobseeker's Allowance.

School Classroom Technicians

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are currently employed as school classroom technicians. [18128]

Mr. Byers: The available information is shown in the table.

Full-time equivalent numbers of education support staff in schools in England: January 1997

	Technicians[1]
Nursery	n/a
Primary	n/a
Middle	173
Secondary	12,420
Special[2]	256
Pupil Referral unit	n/a
City Technology Colleges	143
Independent	n/a

n/a = not available.

[1] Includes laboratory assistants/technicians, design technology assistants/technicians (including home economics assistants, craft technicians), IT technicians.

[2] Includes maintained and non-maintained special schools.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration Service

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many telephone lines are in service at Lunar House; and how many telephone operators are on duty during daytime working hours. [18397]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* There are 162 telephone lines connecting either to an operator, or to a recorded message or directly to a member of staff. Of these, 28 are to the Telephone Inquiry Bureau which is staffed by an average of 20 staff on weekdays from 9am (10am Thursday) to 4.45pm (4.30pm Friday). The precise number of operators depends upon the demands of the Public Inquiry Office, with which staffing is shared.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies he has carried out into improving the Immigration Service by decentralising immigration control functions to offices outside London. [18398]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* Fewer than half the staff of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate work at the Croydon headquarters. The rest are at locations around the United Kingdom including sea and airports, enforcement offices, detention centres, presenting officer units and the Nationality office in Liverpool. The use of accommodation is kept under review but in present circumstances significant shifts of work away from Croydon are unlikely to be cost effective.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been received regarding accessibility of the Immigration Service at Lunar House by telephone in the last 12 months. [18395]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* This information is not collated centrally. The Telephone Inquiry Bureau received 13 complaints.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency measures he has established against failures in millennium compliance in each emergency service. [19197]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* It is the responsibility of each police force and fire brigade to ensure that its information technology and communications systems are Year 2000 compliant.

The Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) is co-ordinating the police response to the millennium problem. PITO has issued a guide to the police which provides a blueprint for action and has also held two conferences this year to disseminate best practice. A national electronic police bulletin-board is regularly updated to provide on-going advice and guidance to forces. Forces are engaging their information technology (IT) suppliers to ensure their local systems will be complaint and are also writing to other organisations in their area, whose millennium compliance may be crucial to police operations, to seek assurance that those systems will be ready. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary is monitoring the progress of forces during its regular inspections. The Police National Computer, which is operated by PITO, will be compliant by early 1999.

In the case of the fire service, discussions have been held with the relevant fire service committees and central guidance, in the form of a Home Office Circular, will be issued to brigades later this month. Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate will also be monitoring progress within brigades.

If, during its audit of IT systems, a force or brigade establishes that there is a problem which cannot be, or is unlikely to be resolved before the millennium, it will be expected to establish contingency plans to ensure the continued integrity of its emergency service.

I have placed a copy of the guidance issued by PITO in the Library. A copy of the Home Office circular to chief fire officers will also be placed in the Library as soon as it is published.

The contingency arrangements made by the Coastguard Agency and the ambulance service are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and for Health respectively.

MI5

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances MI5 is permitted to determine that a file is not suitable for Ministerial eyes. [18685]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* By virtue of section 2(2)(a) of the Security Service Act 1989, the Director General of the Security Service is under a duty to ensure that there are arrangements in place for securing that no information is disclosed by the Service except so far as is necessary for the proper discharge of its functions, for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime or for the purpose of any criminal proceedings. The Director General must have regard to these provisions in deciding what information in the possession of the Service should be disclosed to persons or organisations outside the Service.

Group 4

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *647*, if he will list those former Home Office officials and Prison Service staff who have taken paid employment with Group 4 Prison and Court Services Ltd. after leaving his Department; and if he will list all their former responsibilities within his Department. [17770]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* We now understand from Group 4 Prison and Court Services Ltd. that they have employed a total of 40 former Prison Service employees. This includes 14 former governor grades, not 20 as previously stated in my answer to a Question from the right hon. Member on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *647*, and two Psychologists. The remainder were either prison officers of differing grades and specialisms, or prison auxiliaries.

It is not general policy to mention officials or former officials by name.

Details of posts held by former officials are not kept centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Service (Health Care)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to enable health care staff in prisons to develop the skills of practice as community nurses; and if he will make a statement. [19294]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 November 1997]:* The Prison Service supports the training and development of nurses through a variety of health-related training programmes including England National Boards courses, National Vocational Qualifications, diplomas and university degrees in health care. Prison health care centres have developed and continue to develop close links with community nursing teams in local National Health Service Trusts and General Practitioner practices, contributing to the development of community nursing skills of prison health care staff, along the more formal training courses.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases involving suicides in prison establishments in the last 10 years the families of victims have sought compensation from the Prison Service; and in which cases compensation has been paid. [18842]

Ms Quin: Centrally available records do not provide information in the form required. This could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Algerians have sought asylum in the United Kingdom in 1997 to date; and how many have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused asylum. [18964]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table.

Decisions on applications[1,2] for asylum in the United Kingdom from Algerian nationals, excluding dependants, in 1997 to date (January to October)

	Number of principal applicants
Asylum applications	545
Total decisions[3]	710
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	80
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4]	*
Total refusals	630

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with "*" = 1 or 2.
[2] Provisional figures.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the period.
[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made with the review of asylum seekers procedures. [18929]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The review team has made substantial progress and will shortly start drafting its report. Proposals will be submitted to Ministers in the new year.

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were being held on rule 43 in prisons in England and Wales on 1 November. [18961]

Ms Quin: The available provisional information is for 31 October 1997. On that date, the number of inmates held on Prison Rule 43 or Young Offender Institution Rule 46 were:

	Good order and discipline	*Own protection*
Males	468	1,297
Females	8	28
Total	476	1,325

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the age profile of prison inmates in England and Wales. [18960]

Ms Quin: The information requested is as follows:

Population in prisons in England and Wales on 31 October 1997: by age[1]

Age	*Number*
15–17	2,451
18–20	7,659
21–24	11,808
25–29	13,753
30–39	17,184
40–49	6,528
50–59	2,880
60 and over	963
Total	63,226

[1] Provisional figures.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality are under consideration by his Department. [18962]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As at 30 November 1997, there were 75,015 applications for British citizenship awaiting determination, of which 35,518 were at various stages of consideration.

Stonnall Road Bail Hostel

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the legal costs incurred by the West Midlands Probation Committee in its unsuccessful challenge, in the High Court and the Court of Appeal, to the decision of the Planning Inspector not to grant permission to extend the Stonnall Road Bail Hostel. [18877]

Ms Quin: The legal costs incurred by the West Midlands Probation Committee in the High Court were £21,000. Provisional estimates are that the costs incurred in the Court of Appeal will be in the region of £13,000, to which any legal costs incurred by the Crown in the appeal would be added.

Gloucester Prison

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons funding has been withdrawn from the job focus courses at HMP Gloucester; and what alternative provision will be made available for inmates who are about to be released. [18928]

Ms Quin: Job focus courses run at Gloucester prison and other prisons in England and Wales are funded by the Employment Service of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). A decision was made a year ago to cease funding for these courses and concentrate resources on people already in the labour market.

The current contract for the provision of the job focus course at Gloucester prison, involving a prison officer and a tutor from Gloucester College of Art and Technology, will cease on 31 March 1998. The governor of Gloucester prison will maintain the job focus club by continuing the involvement of the prison officer but does not have the resources available to replace the funding from DfEE for the tutor.

Help for ex-offenders from Employment Services will be available nationally through a number of measures including:

- specialist advice and guidance from Employment Service staff to ex-offenders about their jobsearch;
- allowing time spent in custody to count towards eligibility for Employment Service programmes;
- maintaining Employment Service contact with prison authorities at local level to provide advice on programmes and services as part of a pre-release programme;
- allowing prison staff to attend Jobclub leader training courses (where places are available) without charge;
- continuing the availability of Jobclubs in prisons where all parties consider them to be useful.

National Hunt Racing

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the problems facing National Hunt racing; and if he will make a statement. [17991]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government have not carried out their own assessment. We have seen the British Horseracing Board's assessment of the impact a hunting ban would have on National Hunt racing. There will be an opportunity to discuss this during the Committee Stage of the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19372]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office Central London Estate, which comprises six buildings, has a total of 155 car park spaces. Ministerial vehicles are parked in the outside courtyard of the Home Office. No other spaces are normally provided for Ministers. Eighteen are reserved for staff with medical or child care needs. The remainder are used for staff, visitors and contractors as appropriate to their needs. Figures for the rest of the Home Office estate could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by nationality the *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were being held in custody in England and Wales under immigration laws on 1 November. [18963]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information on persons held in detention in England and Wales under immigration powers as at 31 October 1997, but nationality and gender, is given in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Males recorded as being in detention[1,2] under Immigration Act powers in England and Wales, by nationality as at 31 October 1997[3]

Nationality	*Total detainees*
Afghanistan	4
Albania	6
Algeria	57
Angola	13
Bangladesh	21
Bulgaria	10
Burundi	2
Chile	2
China	25
Colombia	9
Cyprus	12
Czech Republic[4]	26
Democratic Republic of Congo[5]	8
Ecuador	8
Egypt	2
France	2
Gambia	12
Ghana	34
Greece	3
Guyana	2
India	123
Iran	10
Iraq	3
Israel	2
Ivory Coast	7
Jamaica	29
Kenya	16
Lebanon	7
Liberia	6
Libya	4
Morocco	6
Nepal	2
Netherlands	3
Nigeria	88
Pakistan	73
Palestine	2
Poland	2
Romania	18
Sierra Leone	4
Slovakia	22
Somalia	3
South Africa	4
Spain	2
Sri Lanka	14
St. Lucia	3
Sudan	5
Tanzania	3
Tunisia	3

Table 1: Males recorded as being in detention[1,2] under Immigration Act powers in England and Wales, by nationality as at 31 October 1997[3]

Nationality	Total detainees
Turkey	34
Uganda	3
USA	3
Venezuela	2
Former USSR	18
Former Yugoslavia	17
Stateless[5] and Nationality Doubtful	7
Other	25
Total	831

[1] Persons detained in prisons or immigration detention centres.
[2] Excluding persons detained in police cells.
[3] The data are provisional.
[4] Figures for the Czech Republic may include persons holding Czechoslovakian passports.
[5] Formerly Zaire.
[6] Excluding Palestine and Hong Kong stateless persons.

Table 2: Females recorded as being in detention[1,2] under Immigration Act powers in England and Wales, by nationality, as at 31 October 1997[3]

Nationality	Total detainees
Angola	5
Colombia	2
Czech Republic[4]	2
Ghana	6
Jamaica	11
Kenya	4
Nigeria	18
USA	2
Other[5]	20
Total	70

[1] Persons detained in prisons or immigration detention centres.
[2] Excluding persons detained in police cells.
[3] The data are provisional.
[4] Figures for the Czech Republic may include persons holding Czechoslovakian passports.
[5] The category "Other" includes persons whose nationality is doubtful or for whom no nationality is recorded.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Know How Fund

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the total budget of the Know How Fund. [19555]

Clare Short: We plan to spend £89 million on Know How Fund programmes in 1997–99.

Strategic Defence Review

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's contribution to the Strategic Defence Review. [17745]

Clare Short: I had a very interesting and constructive meeting with the Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Charles Guthrie, which covered a number of subjects of mutual interest, and plan to meet the Secretary of State for Defence later this month.

We have been consulted on the Strategic Defence Review and continue to participate in the discussions and seminars. DFID has participated as a member of the Defence Review Steering Group chaired by the Cabinet Office, and in more detailed discussions of particular issues. These include consideration of the Government's wider international responsibilities, particularly in relation to the maintenance of peace, international order and stability, humanitarian principles and democratic rights. Particular issues of interest to us include:

Disaster preparedness;

international conflict prevention and peacekeeping;

humanitarian relief and reconstruction—DFID and MOD have collaborated on peacebuilding in Bosnia;

controlling arms exports;

anti-personnel landmines—co-ordination of resources to focus better military expertise in demining sector, including adaptation of existing technologies to the specific needs of humanitarian demining and the provision of training facilities;

military training and promoting civilian control of the armed forces in developing countries—Work in this field can make a significant contribution to our efforts to promote good governance and the rule of law and in curbing excessive military expenditure in poor countries;

the respective roles and responsibilities of individual countries and international organisations in emergency situations and areas of conflict; and how we can work together;

sharing relevant experience and expertise;

developing regional and local capacity in peace building and conflict management.

DEFENCE

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19365]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally and could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Service Personnel (Compensation)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the arrangements for compensating service personnel for death or injury due to service. [20025]

Dr. Reid: The Government share a number of concerns about the anomalous and complex nature of the current arrangements for paying compensation to Service personnel who are killed, injured or suffer serious illness as a result of their service. Experience from the Gulf conflict and operations in Bosnia underline the need for arrangements which properly reflect the special nature of the commitment which Service men and women make to the defence of our country.

We have therefore decided there should be a comprehensive review of the arrangements for compensating Service personnel (or their dependants) and for the payment of death and invaliding pension benefits. Our aim is to devise a modern, fair and simplified scheme which could apply to all Service personnel injured or

killed on peacetime duties—in training or on operations—where death or injury was attributable to military service, to replace the current complex arrangements.

The main aim of the review will be to recommend new arrangements for the future, but it will also examine the extent to which personnel currently serving may be able to benefit from a simpler and more comprehensive approach. The War Pensions Scheme will continue to be available to existing ex-Service personnel.

The review will be conducted jointly with the Department of Social Security, the Department responsible for the War Pensions Scheme. We intend to publish the results of the review in a consultation document.

A review of compensation for Service personnel was recommended in the House of Commons Defence Committee Sixth Report on Gulf War illness, published earlier this year. I hope that the whole House will support the initiative we are now taking.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Cox: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reported incidents involving drug misuse in the armed forces there have been in each of the last three years. [18586]

Dr. Reid: It is not yet possible to provide confirmed figures for 1996 and 1997. However, figures for 1993–1995 are as follows:

Drug offences dealt with by Court Martial, Summary Trial or Summary Proceedings, or civilian courts

	RN/RM	*Army*[1]	*RAF*	*Total*
1993	286	627	79	992
1994	236	355	48	639
1995	111	174	7	292

[1] The Army figures may be subject to slight revision.

Those dismissed for drug related offences following a sentence of dismissal from Service at Court Martial, Summary Trial or Summary Proceedings, or a sentence of imprisonment from a Service or civilian courts:

	RN/RM	*Army*	*RAF*	*Total*
1993	51	81	20	152
1994	45	68	8	121
1995	31	37	1	69

(Latest figures available).

In addition to the above figures, the numbers of those administratively discharged for drug related incidents are:

	RN/RM	*Army*	*RAF*	*Total*
1993	2	204	10	216
1994	0	136	22	158
1995	0	253	14	267

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98 full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15269]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Details of central MOD expenditure on publicity and advertising are contained in the annual MOD Departmental Reports. For 1993–94, the information is shown on page 39 of Cm 2801; for 1994–95, the information is shown on page 43 of Cm 3055; for 1995–96, the information is shown on page 32 of Cm 3448; and for 1996–97, the information is shown on page 49 of Cm 3781. Copies of these Reports are available in the House.

Estimated expenditure for 1997–98 is £40.97 million. We do not publish detailed future plans as approval to commit expenditure is subject to formal endorsement through Ministers and the Parliamentary supply system.

Expenditure by non-departmental public bodies for the years in question is set out below.

	£
1993–94	629,262
1994–95	487,663
1995–96	456,644
1996–97	408,826
1997–98 to date	291,816
1997–98 full year	421,995
1998–99	—

[1] Detailed figures not yet agreed.

Publicity expenditure for Departmental Agencies is not held centrally. I have asked Chief Executives, where appropriate, to write direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about how much was spent by Defence Agencies on publicity and advertising, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO).

I attach a table with the appropriate breakdown of costs for 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 year to date and the 1997–98 full year estimate. The substantial increase in 1997–98 is due to our involvement, as part of the Army's presence, in the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition in September 1997.

Total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising for the Army Base Repair Organisation

	£
1993–94 (Actual)	5,036
1994–95 (Actual)	7,618
1995–96 (Actual)	30,026
1996–97 (Actual)	37,721
1997–98 (Forecast)	176,868
Total	257,269
1997–98 (To date)	77,943

Letter from M. J. Heritage-Owen to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency who is away on duty, as this matter falls within his area of responsibility.

The information requested, broken down by financial year, is as follows:

Financial year	*Total (£)*
1995–96	54,460
1996–97	359,741
1997–98 (To end of October)	135,668
1997–98 (Estimated full year)	405,531
1998–99	[1]—

[1] Detailed figures not yet available. Information for FY 1993/94 and FY 1994/95 is not available in the format requested and is, therefore, not provided. Expenditure includes advertising and promotional costs. The increase since 1995/96 is due primarily to increased civilian recruiting costs resulting from the drawdown of Service manpower.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from David G. Wadsworth to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about recruitment and advertising expenditure, as this matter falls within my areas of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Service Children's Education Agency.

The SCE Agency recruits teaching and specialist staff in UK and overseas. Details of the past, current and future recruitment advertising budget is attached at Annex A.

In addition to this, each of the 56 SCE Schools around the world is required to produce a school brochure in line with the practice followed by LEA maintained schools in the UK. These brochures are used largely as information for parents. However, in a few cases they may be used to advertise the benefits of attending an SCE school, where more than one is available in a given location or where irreducible spare capacity can be offered to fee paying parents.

Information on school brochure expenditure is not collected as a matter of course, as most are produced locally at very little cost. Based upon information available so far in this financial year, I would not expect the total sum to exceed £15K.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Annex A: Expenditure on all forms of recruitment advertising

	£000
1993–94	[1]—
1994–95	32
1995–96	52
1996–97	66
1997–98 (year to date)	18
1997–98 (full year estimate)	51
1998–99 (planned expenditure)	[2]—

[1] No information available.
[2] Not yet finally agreed.

Letter from Peter Ewins to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about expenditure on publicity and advertising. For the Meteorological Office, this matter falls to me as Chief Executive.

Expenditure by the Meteorological Office on publicity and advertising (in thousands of pounds) is estimated to be as follows:

Period	*Expenditure £000*
1993–94	777
1994–95	758
1995–96	735
1996–97	666
1997–98 (to date)	288
1997–98 (full year estimate)	765
1998–99 (planned expenditure)	955

This should be set against income from our commercial activities as a Trading Fund, currently running at over £22 million per annum.

Letter from D. L. Burden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question (PQ 1029i) to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by the MOD, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, in so far as it applies to the Army Personnel Centre (APC).

I should explain that the only expenditure incurred separately by my Agency which falls into these categories is related to civilian staff recruitment advertising costs during FY 1996/1997. These, inclusive of VAT, were as follows:

	£
First advertisement, April 1996	3,578
Second advertisement, April 1996	1,037
Total	4,615

There is no planned expenditure of this nature for the remainder of this FY or during FY 1998/1999.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from D. J. Stevens to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about expenditure on publicity and advertising in respect of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency.

This agency was launched in December 1996 and is formed from a number of management areas within the MOD. The information which you requested is not available therefore for the years prior to 1996/97. The figures requested for 1996/97 and 1997/98 are given below and cover mainly recruitment advertising and external publicity, including attendance at exhibitions, advertising our irreducible spare capacity from which we earn income. I am unable to give a figure for 1998/99 as detailed budgets have yet to be agreed.

	£
1996–97	19,464
1997–98 (to date)	37,035
1997–98 (full year estimate)	48,035

Letter from T. McG. Brown to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding expenditure on publicity and advertising. As Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency (DPCSA) I am responsible for expenditure within my Agency and I am therefore providing the details you have requested.

All publicity costs are for the production of our Annual Report and Accounts. In accordance with our Accounts Direction (issued by HM Treasury) and our Framework Document the Agency is obliged to present an annual report to Parliament. Some of the publicity costs shown below were incurred on my Agency's behalf by other areas of the MOD. All advertising costs are for staff recruitment.

£000

Year	Publicity	Advertising	Total
1993–94	10.9	0.0	[1,2]10.9
1994–95	16.9	0.0	[2]16.9
1995–96	18.6	7.6	26.2
1996–97	23.2	6.6	29.8
1997–98 (to date)	0.7	4.2	[3]4.9
1997–98 (year end estimate)	20.0	10.0	[3]30.0

Detailed figures for 1998–99 are not available at present.
[1] Production costs for the first Annual Report, a smaller document containing unaudited accounts, were significantly lower than for subsequent larger Annual Reports with complete audited accounts.
[2] During 1993–94 and 1994–95 there were no advertising costs as staff recruitment for the Agency was the responsibility of central MOD organisations at that time.
[3] Final costs for the latest Annual Report have not been finalised.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Malcolm Bruce dated 8 December 1997:

Thank you for your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about estimates of expenditure on publicity and advertising. I am replying on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

The following figures for graduate recruitment advertising represent the majority of expenditure in this area:

	£
i. 1993–94	[1]—
ii. 1994–95	888,000
iii. 1995–96	1,366,000
iv. 1996–97	1,392,000
v. 1997–98 (to date)	1,033,000
vi. 1997–98 (full year estimate)	1,570,000
vii. 1998–99 (planned expenditure)	1,685,000

[1] Information not available.

Other advertising and publicity costs are in the region of £200,000 per annum. This figure includes the cost of the DERA Press Office and the Annual Results Press Conference.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from M. J. A. Smallwood to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about publicity and advertising, on behalf of the Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency, as this falls into this area of responsibility. The Chief Constable/ Chief Executive is away from the office at present.

I have identified the following expenditure in respect of publicity and advertising: 1993–94 £6,572; 1994–95 £6,985; 1995–96 £36,659; 1996–97 £28,164; 1997–98 £13,775 up to 28 November 1997. I expect the final outturn for the current Financial Year to be £20,000. Spending plans for 1998–99 have not yet been finalised.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I have been asked to respond to your Question regarding all forms of publicity and advertising and give our response below.

The amount spent on advertising is as follows:

1993–94: £4,116

1994–95: £2,100

1995–96: £3,451

1996–97: £6,929

1997–98: £5,297 to date

1997–98: £5,750 full year estimate

1998–99: Details not yet agreed.

Letter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

In November you asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question relating to expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising. As this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO), I have been asked to reply to your direct.

The information you requested is as follows:

UKHO—Total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising

Financial year	Amount (£)
1993–94	228,741.97
1994–95	226,396.90
1995–96	340,446.88
1996–97	323,672.13
1997–98 (to date)	239,776.25
1997–98 (full year estimate)	[1]494,887.15
1998–99 (planned expenditure)	687,000.00

[1] Includes to date figure.

As the UKHO operates in an international commercial market, the attainment of Trading Fund status has provided the UKHO with additional flexibility to respond to commercial activities. In the first year of operating as a Trading Fund the UKHO achieved a net profit of £3.7M which clearly demonstrates that costs are more than fully recovered by sales activities.

I hope the above has been of assistance. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch with my Office.

Letter from J.D. Coles to Mr. Malcolm Bruce dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces about the estimate of total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising, as it relates to the Ships Support Agency, for which I am responsible.

The Agency was established on 11 December 1996 and the estimate of expenditure since that date is as follows:

	£
(b)(iv) 1996–97	30,000
(b)(v) 1997–98, year to date	15,000
(b)(vi) 1997–98, full year estimate	15,000

Detailed budgets for 1998–99 have not yet been agreed.

The figures relate to actual and planned expenditure associated with: Agency launch; the printing of the Agency's Framework Document, Corporate Plan, and Annual Report and Accounts; and the Agency's input to the International Maritime Defence Exhibition 1997 at the Royal Naval College Greenwich.

Letter from P. D. Foxton to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to the recent question you tabled to the Secretary of State for Defence for those matters that fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA). You asked about the expenditure by ABSDA on all forms of publicity and advertising for Financial Years 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97 and the year 1997–98 to date, and the 1997–98 full year estimate.

For clarity I have incorporated the answer in the form of a table

Financial Year	Cost (£)	Estimate (£)
1994–95	3,788	n/a
1995–96	10,379	n/a
1996–97	5,824	n/a

Financial Year	Cost (£)	Estimate (£)
1997–98	3,649	8,248
1998–99		n/a

The Agency was not formed until 1995 and therefore no expenditure is recorded for the Financial year 1993–94.

I trust I have answered your questions satisfactorily.

Letter from S. R. Hill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the expenditure on publicity and spending by Defence agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO).

2. Attached is a summary of the figures for this Agency.

Parliamentary Question—Expenditure on Publicity and Advertising by Defence Agencies

Financial year	Recruitment costs (civilian) £	PR/Marketing and business support £
1993–94	934	988
1994–95	1,205	3,153
1995–96	1,478	0
1996–97	4,154	45,416
1997–98 (to date)	5,604	2,606
1997–98 (forecast)	11,083	15,000

The recruitment costs are for advertising.

Letter from K. A. Bradshaw to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence/Her Majesty's Government about Advertising and Publicity Costs as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Codification Agency.

The Defence Codification Agency has expenditure for the years quoted as follows:

	£
1996–97	38,438
1997–98 (to date)	14,525
1997–98 (forecast)	21,000
1998–99 (yet to be finalised)	—

For background information, the Defence Codification Agency was launched in June 1996. At that time funds were disaggregated from the Defence Information Division (DINFOD) for our Marketing function.

Letter from I. G. McIntyre to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about expenditure on publicity and advertising as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency.

During 1996/97 my Agency spent £13,738. This figure includes the cost of the national advertising for the national advertisement for the post of Chief Executive. The spend to date in 1997/98, the current financial year, is £1,020 with the full year estimate being £2,000. Details of budgets for future years have not yet been finalised.

Letter from R. J. Mealing to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

In response to your Question, and in the unavoidable absence of the Chief Executive on business, I am writing to inform you of expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising in so far as it effects the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency.

Most of the expenditure incurred on publicity and advertising by my Agency is attributable to job advertising in newspapers. The following table shows the information you have requested.

Financial year	Expenditure (£)
1993–94	[1]—
1994–95	Nil
1995–96	5,901
1996–97	24,261
1997–98 (so far)	24,650
1997–98 (estimate)	27,053
1998–99	[2]—

[1] DCTA not formed as an Agency.
[2] Detailed budget not yet agreed.

Letter from Malcolm Westgate to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about advertising and publicity costs. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

During 1995/96 my Agency spent £6,844.37 on advertising the post of Chief Executive. All other publicity and advertising expenditure has been included in the reply given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

Letter from P. R. Wildman to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about expenditure on publicity and advertising as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive.

Military Survey's expenditure on publicity and advertising since 1993 is as follows:

1993–94: NIL

1994–95: NIL

1995–96: £16,737 incl VAT

1996–97: NIL

1997–98: £18,893.07 incl VAT (to-date; none further planned)

1998–99: NIL planned.

The expenditures were on recruitment advertising for civilian posts with the Agency.

Letter from M. I. Laurie to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about expenditure on publicity and advertising as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Intelligence and Security Agency. The Agency was formed on 1 October 1996 and the figures below represent expenditure after that date:

	£
(a) 1996–97 (October 96–March 97	2,686
(b) 1997–98 (to date)	5,370
(c) 1997–98 (full year estimate)	6,694
(d) 1998–99 (estimated)	Nil

On its formation the Agency began a collocation programme, moving from five previous sites to one. The expenditure detailed above relates to newspaper advertising of job vacancies at the new site.

Letter from G. Jones to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising, by his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, in each of the last four financial years, the current financial year to date with a full-year estimate, and that planned

for 1998–99, for which figures are available, as these matters fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency.

Advertising by the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency has, to date, been confined to that required for the recruitment of civilian staff. We have no record of any expenditure prior to 1996–97 because most recruitment was conducted centrally. In September 1996 the Agency was delegated additional responsibility for recruitment and, as a result, the expenditure on recruitment advertising in 1996–97 was £61,685. In 1997–98 the expenditure to date has been £43,435, with a forecast for the complete year of £120,000. Expenditure for 1998–99 is expected to be similar to that for the current year, but the funding is still the subject of the 1998 Long Term Costing process.

Letter from D. D. Allan to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about estimates of expenditure on publicity and advertising as this matter falls within my area of responsibility. I am replying in the absence of the Chief Executive of the Logistics Support Services Agency who is away on business.

2. Our expenditure on publicity and advertising, both actual and estimate, is detailed in the table below and the figures are exclusive of VAT.

	Total
1993–94	0
1994–95	0
1995–96	0
1996–97	6,990
1997–98 (spend)	5,360.08
1997–98 (estimated)	8,100
1998–99	[1]—

[1] Planned figures not yet accepted.

WALES

Inward Investment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with *(a)* the President of the Board of Trade and *(b)* the Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning inward investment; and if he will make a statement. [19532]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend has had discussions about inward investment with both the President of the Board of Trade and the Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency. We all recognise the importance of continued inward investment success to our aims of economic and industrial strength and stability.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the advantages of establishing the National Assembly for Wales at the Flintshire County Council Offices at Ewloe, Deeside, Flintshire; and if he will make a statement. [19528]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Council Offices at Ewloe, and a wide range of other options, are being assessed against the criteria described in my consultation paper, "The National Assembly for Wales; Accommodation Options". I now wait to hear the views of the people of Wales before deciding where the Assembly will be located.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the range of estimates of the cost of the proposed locations for the National Assembly for Wales. [19599]

Mr. Ron Davies: My consultation paper sets out the range of options across Wales which we have considered in most detail. It also gives indicative costs for the different approaches to housing the Assembly, within the cost ceiling the Government have established.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce the location of the National Assembly for Wales. [19529]

Mr. Ron Davies: I shall announce the location of the Welsh Assembly within the next few months, following my consultation with the people of Wales which ends on 30 January 1998.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the location of the National Assembly for Wales. [19530]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have already received a number of representations about the location of the Welsh Assembly, and expect to receive more during the period of my consultation with the people of Wales.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the reconfiguration of NHS trusts in North Wales; when he will announce his decision; and if he will make a statement. [19531]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have received representations from a number of hon. Members, NHS Trusts, Community Health Councils, General Practitioners, Local Authorities, NHS staff groups and the general public. Public consultation on our proposals for a new configuration of NHS Trusts in Wales, in line with statutory requirements, will take place next summer. Following this, I expect a decision to be announced in October 1998.

Public Transport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase the use of public transport in rural and urban areas; and if he will make a statement. [19533]

Mr. Hain: The Government are currently embarked on a review with the aim of producing a White Paper next year setting out proposals for a new Integrated Transport Policy. Reducing dependence on car travel and the promotion of public transport will be among the key objectives of that policy. The Welsh Office is participating fully in the review and will be producing its own Welsh Transport Policy statement at around the same time as the White Paper is published.

Job Creation (Alyn and Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss job creation in Alyn and Deeside. [19534]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss a range of issues. The creation and safeguarding of jobs in Wales continues to be a priority for the Agency and I know that the Chairman has recently visited Alyn and Deeside constituency and met my hon. Friend and representatives of the workforce and management of the British Aerospace plant to discuss their expansion plan.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the reasons for the delays in paying sheep annual premium payments to Welsh farmers; and if he will make a statement. [19099]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The timetable of payments has been delayed by the need to comply with additional information requirements to support European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) payments made after the start of the new EAGGF financial year on 16 October 1997. Without the new supporting information any payments made will be subject to disallowance by the European Commission. The Welsh Office has been working to address these new requirements and this has involved substantial computer reprogramming. The position on Sheep Annual Premium is that some 85 per cent. of first advances in Wales had been paid by early October, and the payment of the second advance is now well under way.

Charities and Voluntary Groups

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the charities and voluntary groups which received grants and other assistance from his Department in the financial year 1996–97 together with the amounts given. [19096]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have asked for the information to be collated. I will write to my right hon. Friend as soon as the exercise has been completed and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on welfare reform for disability benefits. [19527]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

We are committed to modernising the Social Security system so that it helps people to work as far as they are able; provides appropriate support to those who cannot work; and makes the most effective use of the resources available.

As a first step we are undertaking a comprehensive review of the Department's expenditure. The review is wide-ranging and includes consideration of the complex range of benefits paid to people who are disabled or have health problems. We want to end the exclusion of disabled people; to empower them to play a full part in society, and to develop an approach which focuses on people's abilities and their capacities, rather than only their disabilities and incapacity.

As part of this process, up to £195 million has been made available from the Windfall Tax to test a range of options to help people with long-term health problems or disabilities to move into, or remain in, work.

We will, in due course, consider how many proposals for change should be taken forward.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

38. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to increase the availability of documents in the Public Record Office. [18017]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are committed to ensuring that public access to public records is improved. There is a vigorous review of all files to ensure that as many as possible are released. In July we announced that over 77,500 records that had previously been withheld, had been released in the Public Record Office, after the Departments had reconsidered them. Further updated figures should be available soon.

Lord Chancellor (Accommodation)

39. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the Lord Chancellor's accommodation. [18019]

Mr. Hoon: I presume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Lord Chancellor's Official Residence in the Palace of Westminster. This is the fifth question I have answered on this topic from hon. members, and I have received eight letters from members of the public.

40. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the redecoration of the Lord Chancellor's official residence will be completed. [18020]

Mr. Hoon: It is expected that the redecoration will be substantially completed by February, 1998.

Magistrates Courts

41. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what responses he has received following his statement on the changes to the magistrates courts procedures; and if he will make a statement. [18023]

Mr. Hoon: A range of responses have been received to the statement we made on 29 October concerning the future structure of the magistrates courts service. Responses have been received from 10 magistrates courts committees, 3 Members of Parliament, the Magistrates Association, the Justices Chief Executives Group and West Sussex County Council.

Criminal Justice (Keighley)

42. **Mrs Ann Cryer:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for improvements in the administration of criminal justice in Keighley. [18024]

Mr. Hoon: My statement of 29 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 901–05 set out the Government's view of the future structure of the magistrates courts service. I believe there should be fewer and larger MCC areas, more closely aligned to the areas served by other justice agencies. My first priority is to consider the position of metropolitan areas. I have recently written to the Chairman of the West Riding MCC on this subject and have indicated that, in the absence of any proposals from the committees themselves concerning the organisation of MCCs in West Yorkshire, it is likely that I will wish to consider, in the autumn of 1998, whether amalgamation is appropriate in the area.

Court Officials (Training)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the guidance and training available to judges, magistrates and other court officials in dealing with witnesses with learning or communication difficulties. [18986]

Mr. Hoon: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), which is a non-departmental governmental body. The JSB has held a number of sessions in both induction and continuation training on equal treatment, including dealing with people with learning or communication difficulties, and is considering how training in this area might be developed.

Lay Magistrate training is organised and delivered by Magistrates Courts Committees based on syllabuses, advice and guidance from the JSB. Lay magistrates already address the issue of equality of treatment for all in the light of their judicial oath and the JSB has recently begun a project to develop and pilot training materials to ensure equality of treatment issues are incorporated into all aspects of magistrates training.

Staff in the Court Service receive training on customer service skills as part of an induction programme. This programme includes training on communication skills and dealing with customers including those with special needs. Further training in this area is also available to all staff whose work brings them into contact with members of the public. The Court Service makes no distinction in the training of court officials dealing with witnesses—all customers should be treated appropriately and with courtesy.

A review of the induction programme for court staff is planned as part of the work towards achieving recognition as an "Investor in People" in 1999.

HEALTH

Community Health Councils

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the operation of community health councils; if he will list the areas which are under review; what representations he has received about their *(a)* role, *(b)* independence and *(c)* duties; and if he will make a statement. [17210]

Mr. Milburn: No immediate changes to Community Health Councils are planned. We have received a small number of letters mainly about the role of CHCs in relation to primary care and membership matters. In addition the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales has sent to Ministers a copy of its report "Making a Difference".

Pathology Services (Kent)

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine refused training recognition to the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust Pathology Service; and what progress has been made by the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust to address the concerns of the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine expressed at the time they refused the Pathology Service training recognition. [17789]

Mr. Milburn: The Boards of the Council are the statutory bodies responsible for training recognition. The Medical Laboratory Technicians (MLT) Board withheld training recognition for the Histopathology/Cytology Department on 15 September 1992. This decision did not affect the clinical chemistry, haematology and hospital transfusion science or microbiology, which all received approval.

Subsequent inspection has shown that some improvements have been made; however, the MLT Board decided on 14 January 1997 to withhold approval for training in cellular pathology (histopathology) until the Board's requirements have been met.

Older People's Services Report

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the recent Audit Commission report. "The Coming of Age: Improving Services For Older People". [18137]

Mr. Boateng: We welcome the publication of the Audit Commission's report "The Coming of Age: Improving Care Services for Older People". The Department has already looked in detail at the recommendations made in the report and these will contribute to work we already have in hand, which is actively addressing issues of particular concern to elderly people. This area includes the Long-Term Care Charter and the Royal Commission on long-term care for the elderly, announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 4 December. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already issued instructions to health authorities, the National Health Service and local authorities on services for the elderly setting out priority areas to meet their medium and long-term needs.

Prescription Drugs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what audit procedures exist to deal with the disposal of returned prescription drugs by health authorities; [18815]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the National Health Service of items prescribed but returned to community pharmacists or GPs unused; [18814]

(3) what audit procedures exist to deal with the return of prescription drugs to community pharmacists. [18816]

Mr. Milburn: We encourage the public to take unused medicines to a community pharmacy for safe destruction. This reduces the risk of accidental ingestion, especially by children, and allows the medicines to be destroyed in line with environmental law. Prescription-only medicines have to be disposed of as clinical waste. Funding has been made available to the National Health Service since 1993 to run schemes through community pharmacies for the safe disposal of waste medicines. As at 31 March 1997 schemes were running in every health authority area in England and Wales, and 98 per cent. of community pharmacies in these areas were taking part in these schemes. No national estimate has been made of the value of returned medicines.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for further regulation of the dental profession. [18861]

Mr. Milburn: The General Dental Council has made proposals for changes in the Dentists Act 1984, which would give it more appropriate powers for professional regulation and protection of the public. We intend to address these issues when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

NHS Bureaucracy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *427*, on savings in NHS bureaucracy, if he will list by health trust the trust management costs for the last two years. [18624]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service trust management costs are available for 1994–95 and 1995–96 listed by trust in Trust Management Costs 1994–95 (published December 1995) and Health Authority Costs and Management Costs in NHS Trusts Financial Year 1995–96 and planned costs for 1996–97 (published March 1997). Copies are available in the Library. Figures for 1996–97 together with 1997–98 plans will be published shortly.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *427*, on savings in NHS bureaucracy, if he will list by health authority the quarterly management costs for the last six quarters. [18623]

Mr. Milburn: Health authority costs are published annually. 1995–96 figures are listed by health authority in *Health Authority Costs and Management Costs in NHS Trusts Financial Year 1995–96 and Planned costs for 1996–97* (published March 1997). Copies are available in the Library. Figures for 1996–97 together with 1997–98 plans will be published shortly.

The quarterly monitoring of health authority costs, referred to in my reply to the hon. Member on 24 November at column *427*, provides regional offices of the National Health Service Executive with information on the likely year-end position of health authorities to assist with in-year performance management.

Health Service Funding (North Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make available additional resources to the NHS Hospital in Northallerton through the North Yorkshire Health Authority to compensate for the scaling down of the military hospital in Catterick. [18802]

Mr. Milburn: We understand the Defence Secondary Care Agency is currently considering various options for the future of the Duchess of Kent Military Hospital at Catterick and is assisting with a consultation exercise led by North Yorkshire Health Authority.

North Yorkshire Health Authority has recently been allocated £1.7 million for winter pressures. It will also receive a £14.3 million increase in its allocation for next year, of which £5.8 million is growth funding. Any additional pressures due to changes at the Duchess of Kent Military Hospital would be expected to be met by this extra funding.

Alcohol and Drugs

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made in the current year to provide assistance to those with alcohol and drug problems. [19108]

Ms Jowell: Health and local authorities are responsible for assessing the level of need for alcohol and drug services locally, and making arrangements to meet that need in accordance with local priorities and the resources available.

The Drug Misuse Special Allocation is a significant element in the resources available to health authorities to address the needs of drug misusers. In 1996–97 the special allocation stands at £37.191 million. This will rise to £41.296 million in 1998–99, an increase of 8 per cent. in real terms.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with the mobile phone industry as to whether a health and safety warning is needed on all handsets; [19127]

(2) what discussions he has had with the National Radiological Protection Board about potential health risks from use of mobile phones. [19130]

Ms Jowell: The Department regularly discusses advice on the health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including mobile phone frequencies, with the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). NRPB's view is that mobile phones currently used in the United Kingdom comply with the recommended exposure limit. The Department has had no discussions concerning health and safety warnings with the mobile phone industry.

Health Promotion

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made in the current year by his Department to promote healthy living through general practitioner practices and primary healthcare services. [19109]

Mr. Milburn: Advice on healthy living and disease prevention is integral to the activity of general practitioners and primary health care teams. Most consultations in primary care will include an element of opportunistic health promotion. A patient is entitled to a health check on registering with a doctor or after three years without a consultation and patients over 75 years are entitled to an annual health check. The health of children is promoted through the immunisation and child health surveillance programmes. Most practices engage in chronic disease management programmes in asthma and diabetes, in the national cervical cytology screening programme and in structured health promotion activity under arrangements introduced in October 1996.

The initial cash-limited and non-cash limited total general medical services allocation for 1997–98 is £2,980 million. This figure will however be reviewed shortly at spring supply and will be subject to change.

Meningitis

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to combat recent outbreaks of meningitis. [19012]

Ms Jowell: The Department takes meningococcal disease very seriously.

Guidance on the control of meningococcal infection is issued by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). The most recent guidelines were issued on 8 December 1995 and guidance on the management of clusters of meningococcal disease was issued in January 1997. Copies of this guidance are sent to all Directors of Public Health and local Consultants in Communicable Disease Control and it is published. The guidance is constantly under review and careful thought is given to whether any lessons can be learnt from any incident and to whether any revision of the guidance might be required. The guidance was last reviewed on 21 November 1997 drawing on recent experiences in Southampton and it was agreed that no change to the guidance was necessary.

PHLS experts are routinely involved in dealing with serious outbreaks of disease. Advice on the diagnosis of meningitis is contained in the Department's memorandum "Immunisation against infectious disease" which is provided free to all doctors. Additionally, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) writes annually to all doctors alerting them to the expected winter rise in cases of meningococcal infection and reminding them of the value of early antibiotic treatment and urgent referral to hospital. The Department contributes to the many information articles in newspapers and the medical press, and television and radio programmes that appear during the winter increase in cases.

The CMO also holds an annual press briefing for journalists to raise public, professional and media awareness of meningococcal disease. This year's briefing was held on 3 November and CMO was supported by representatives of the National Meningitis Trust and the Meningitis Research Foundation. The vital message at the briefing was that, in the absence of an effective meningococcal Group C vaccine suitable for routine use, and with no Group B vaccine at all, it remained essential that parents and, in places of further education, students, are aware of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia and remain alert to seek urgent treatment if illness is suspected. Information materials continue to stress this message as well. This year, the Department's information leaflet "Knowing about meningitis and septicaemia" has been rewritten; it is available to the public from general practitioners' surgeries. The Health Education Authority (HEA), funded by the Department, has also relaunched its leaflet, "Look out for your mate", which is targeted at students. This year about 1.2 million "Look out for your mate" fliers and posters were distributed to over 750 colleges in England and Wales; 4,000 leaflets and 40 posters were sent to Southampton University before the recent outbreaks there. Information on recognising the signs and symptoms of meningitis is provided to new parents in the HEA's booklet "A Guide to Childhood immunisations". The Department also provides funding under Section 64 of the Health and Personal Social Services Act to support the work of the two meningitis charities in raising awareness among health care professionals.

Studies to evaluate meningococcal and pneumococcal vaccines in United Kingdom children, funded by the Department at a total cost of over £1 million, are being carried out by the PHLS in collaboration with the National Institute for Biological Standards and Controls, the Centre of Applied Microbiology and Research and the Institute for Child Health. These studies have shown very encouraging results already for Group C vaccines and early indicators for Group B are encouraging. There are reasonable prospects that these vaccines will eventually be able to induce long-term immunity although more research is needed before their suitability for widespread use can be considered.

Hospital Complaints Procedures

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the effectiveness of hospital complaints procedures in order to establish a code of best practice. [19453]

Mr. Boateng: We will be commissioning an independent evaluation of the National Health Service complaints procedures during 1998. It is intended that one of the areas on which the evaluation focuses should be the identification of good practice.

Health Council

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Health Council on 4 December. [20003]

Ms Jowell: Following discussion, the Council reached a common position on a proposed Directive on tobacco advertising. The Council also reached political agreement on the Commission's proposal for a programme of Community action on rare diseases. The Council discussed the public health aspects of food safety. The Council agreed the text of a resolution following up the Commission's report on the state of women's health in the European Community. The Council also agreed conclusions of the European Union-United States Task Force on communicable disease, emphasising the importance of co-ordination between the activities of the Task Force and other appropriate bodies working on disease surveillance. The Council also took note of developments since its last discussion of Transmissible

Spongiform Encephalopathies and agreed to keep the subject under review. There was a brief discussion of the Commission's proposals for programmes of Community action on injury prevention and pollution-related diseases. Finally, the Council took note of a Commission proposal for a Recommendation on the suitability of blood and plasma donors and the screening of donated blood.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19369]

Ms Jowell: The Department has 288 car parking spaces associated with its London buildings, of which 14 are specifically allocated to visitors and six are shared between Department of Health and Department of Social Security Ministers. The remainder are allocated to staff but available to visitors when not in use.

In the rest of the United Kingdom there are a further 1,504 car parking spaces associated with Department of Health buildings, of which 66 are specifically allocated to visitors, 476 to staff and the remainder are available for both staff and visitors.

Incontinence Products

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is provided in this year's allocations for NHS for the cost of VAT on incontinence products. [19717]

Mr. Milburn: Resources are not allocated to fund particular services or costs. It is for health authorities and general practitioners to use these resources to plan and arrange services for their residents, following an assessment of their needs, and to make decisions about the level of resources required for any particular service. However, the National Health Service has always been liable to Value Added Tax and NHS funding allocations take account of this.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how health authorities and trusts are notified of the amounts in their allocations which are provided to fund them to meet the costs of VAT on incontinence products. [19715]

Mr. Milburn: There is no separate allocation of funds to health authorities in respect of Value Added Tax liability.

National Health Service trusts receive most of their income through contracts with commissioners of health care services, i.e. health authorities and general practitioner fundholders. Contract prices are intended to recover all relevant costs including liability to VAT.

Drugs, Medicines and Aids (VAT)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date his Department was notified of the Treasury's intention to table the Value Added Tax (Drugs, Medicine and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997. [19718]

Mr. Milburn: The Department was notified of the intention to legislate on 13 August 1997.

Medical and Dental Students

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will fund the cost of the special support covering the proposed tuition fees beyond year four for English and Welsh medical and dental students studying at Scottish universities; and what estimate he has made of the costs. [19589]

Mr. Milburn: It is the Government's intention that all eligible United Kingdom medical and dental students should benefit from the special provisions announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 September. Clarification of the arrangements and costs will be the subject of discussions between the departments concerned.

SCOTLAND

Language Teaching

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many secondary schools offer the opportunity to study two languages at each level indicating the number offering *(a)* French, *(b)* German, *(c)* Spanish and *(d)* any other modern languages; and what were the figures *(a)* two years ago and *(b)* 10 years ago. [18132]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested. The table shows the number of education authority secondary schools with pupils presented in more than one modern language subject at SCE Ordinary or Standard Grade and at SCE Higher Grade by the time they had left school.

	SCE Ordinary/Standard Grade			*SCE Higher Grade*		
	1986–87	*1994–95*	*[1]1996–97*	*1986–87*	*1994–95*	*[1]1996–97*
Total number of schools	440	405	401	440	405	401
Number of schools with leavers presented in more than one modern language	379	323	336	343	247	271
of which making presentations in:						
French	379	323	336	343	246	271
German	336	296	301	279	212	239
Spanish	127	113	134	78	66	100
Other languages	118	79	95	74	48	70

[1] Based on pupils in school at the end of session.

Student Tuition Fees

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the CBI regarding the effect on the labour market of the introduction of tuition fees for students. [18349]

Mr. Wilson: I wrote to Mr. Lain McMillan, Director, CBI Scotland on 23 July, inviting the CBI Scotland to comment inter alia on the Government's preferred approach to future funding arrangements for higher education, which were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in Parliament on that day, *Official Report*, columns 949–51. I received the CBI Scotland response on 26 September.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he had with Sir Ron Dearing prior to his announcement of tuition fees for students. [18350]

Mr. Wilson: I have not met with Sir Ron Dearing. However, I met Sir Ron Garrick, Chairman of the Scottish Standing Committee of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, on two occasions prior to the Government's announcement on 23 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 949–51, of its plans to reform higher education funding, and also when I addressed the COSHEP Annual Forum on 27 October.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the principals of higher education institutions in Scotland regarding the introduction of tuition fees. [18358]

Mr. Wilson: In addition to various informal discussions with individuals and representative bodies, I received a paper from the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals responding to various aspects of the Dearing and Garrick Reports including the introduction of tuition fees. I am placing copies of the paper in the Libraries of both Houses.

School Transport

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will issue guidance to Scottish local authorities to require them to provide free school transport for all children whose families are in receipt of means-tested benefits. [17206]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 December 1997]:* No. It is entirely a matter for each authority to decide whether or not to provide free school transport, taking account of individual circumstances.

Council House Sales

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to reinstate the cost floor arrangement for council house sales; and if he will make a statement. [18649]

Mr. Chisholm: The current cost floor rules relating to sales of council houses in Scotland have been in place since 1989. My right hon. Friend is considering possible changes to these rules. Any changes proposed would be subject to consultation.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of council houses sold for less than the outstanding debt in each of the past five years and the amount of remaining debt involved *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each council area. [18608]

Mr. Chisholm: Information on the selling prices and outstanding debt of individual council houses is not held centrally.

Schools

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for repeal of the legislation which allows schools to opt out of education authority control; and if he will make a statement. [18906]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* My right hon. Friend will bring forward legislation to repeal these provisions at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many schools have opted out of education authority control; where they are located; and if he will make a statement. [18905]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* Two—St. Mary's Episcopal Primary School, Dunblane and Dornoch Academy. Fort William Primary School's proposal for self-governing status was accepted last December but it has not been implemented.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Guinness Affair

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will place in the Library the text of the legal advice taken by her Department on which she based her decision not to institute proceedings under the Companies Act 1985 against any of the individuals referred to in her Department's report on Guinness PLC. [19459]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: No. The decision by the President of the Board of Trade not to institute proceedings under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 against any of the individuals referred to in the inspectors' report into Guinness PLC was based on, and in accordance with, the legal advice she had received. That legal advice included advice from independent Counsel.

Technology Foresight Programme

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress is being made with the technology foresight programme; and if she will make a statement. [19289]

Mr. Battle: The Government are committed to driving forward the Foresight programme. They have brought Foresight into the heart of Government policy on business competitiveness. Soon after the election, the President of the Board of Trade commissioned an audit to assess the level of departmental activity in support of Foresight and identify areas where more emphasis is required. The findings and recommendations were published in October. Following the audit, the Government have set up a Ministerial Foresight Group, to provide top-level co-ordination of the programme across Whitehall. Progress is also being made in increasing business

participation in Foresight, the top priority for the current phase of the Programme and a key objective for the next round of Foresight which will start in 1999. Planning for this exercise is already under way. A consultative document seeking views from interested parties will be published in the Spring of next year.

As a practical demonstration of its commitment to Foresight, the Government has launched the Foresight LINK awards, which bring together business and the science base to work together on projects addressing Foresight priorities. We have also launched several new LINK programmes in response to Foresight, notably the Foresight Vehicle programme, which will develop the technologies for cleaner, leaner and safer vehicles of the future.

Coal Industry

Mr. Prior: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the future of the Coal Research and Development Programme. [19330]

Mr. Battle: My Department has undertaken a detailed review of the UK's future clean coal technology requirements in consultation with industry and universities. This review has just been completed and examined what further support the Government should provide to clean coal technology research, development and demonstration. An announcement will be made about the outcome of the review in the New Year.

India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Indian-based British firms she visited and how many contracts were signed during her trip to India; and if she will make a statement. [18820]

Mrs. Beckett: I attended a breakfast meeting involving some 30 members of the British Business Group in Delhi and spoke at a lunch hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry for the local business community. I visited Rolls-Royce's premises. I was able to announce the creation of 10 Golden Jubilee Fellowships under the Indo-British Partnership and witnessed the signing of a joint venture agreement between Libra Weighing Machines Ltd., Sheffield, and Giri Brothers P Ltd. based in Chennai. The visit followed on from the successful Towards 2000 exhibition in October and re-emphasised the Government's strong commitment to the Indo-British Partnership.

Energy Consumption

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers she has to require the energy utilities to provide annual figures for energy consumption by postcode area. [18993]

Mr. Battle: Under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947, the President of the Board of Trade has powers to ask for information from any undertakings on questions about matters in the schedule to the Act. This includes consumption by locations. The use of these powers to collect information must be balanced against a clear need for the data and the compliance burden placed on the companies in question.

Arms Export Licences (Indonesia)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which companies were awarded a licence to export machine guns to Indonesia in 1995. [14827]

Mrs. Roche: As I stated in my answer to my hon. Friend of 21 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *451*, one such licence was granted during 1995.

Inquiries are being made as regards the release of the identity of the licensee concerned under the non-statutory Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and, since this is confidential information, the consent of the licensee is being sought for its disclosure. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library.

Genetic Testing

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if NHS trusts will have to negotiate their own licences to test with or for a patented gene; and if she will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of ensuring that genetic testing is equally available throughout the United Kingdom. [16372]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 17 November 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

It is for a patent owner to give permission for someone else to use his invention by granting a licence. The terms of this licence is a matter for the patent owner and the potential licensee. As separate legal entities, trusts, individually or as members of consortia are in a position to negotiate their own patent licences. Genetic testing is usually provided through clinical genetic services purchased by health authorities for their local population.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Eastern Arts Council

9. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the funding available to the Eastern Arts Council. [17984]

Mr. Fisher: Grant-in-aid, distributed through the Arts Council of England to the Eastern Arts Board during the financial year 1997–98 totalled £4,985,614.

Additional funding from the British Film Institute and the Crafts Council gives an overall total of £5,425,060.

Sports Sponsorship

10. **Mr. Prior:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations he has received from sports bodies on business sponsorship; and if he will make a statement. [17985]

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and I recently met governing bodies of sports in receipt of tobacco sponsorship. We discussed how to end tobacco advertising and sponsorship while minimising any damage to the sports concerned. Agreement has now been reached on the EU Directive and as a result, all sports have five years in which to find alternative sponsors. I am also setting up a task force of sports and business interests to help them do just that.

24. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on sources of sponsorship available to United Kingdom sporting events. [18002]

Mr. Banks: The sports sponsorship market has grown to over £300 million a year. We estimate that it increased by 6 per cent. last year alone. It is flourishing. I congratulated 700 delegates at a sportsmatch sponsorship award ceremony some three weeks ago.

Public Libraries (Information Services)

11. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to develop information services in public libraries. [17986]

Mr. Fisher: New Technology presents public libraries with the opportunity to enhance their traditional services and provide information to users in new and exciting ways. We are currently considering a report from the Library and Information Commission which recommends the development of IT in public libraries. We will be responding to the report's recommendations early in the New Year.

Cricket

12. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he last met the President of the MCC; and what subjects were discussed. [17987]

Mr. Banks: Neither my right hon. Friend I nor have had the opportunity to date to meet the President of the MCC

Film Industry

13. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary for State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the future of the British film industry. [17988]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The British film industry is booming. However, we cannot be complacent about its continuing success, which is why I am co-chairing with Stewart Till of PolyGram Filmed Entertainment a comprehensive Film Policy Review. The Review Group will report early next year with an agenda for action by the industry and Government.

Tourism

15. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to encourage financial institutions to invest in tourism projects. [17990]

Mr. Tom Clarke: A Tourism Forum working group led by Charles Allen of Granada is working on ways of helping investors to reassess the industry. In addition, the need to raise the profile for tourism opportunities in the financial sector was highlighted in the report, "Visitors Welcome", produced by the CBI's Tourism Action Group, on which my Department is represented.

16. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the work opportunities which the tourism industry can provide for the welfare-to-work programme. [17992]

Mr. Tom Clarke: At the New Deal Conference which I hosted on 24 November, I was greatly encouraged by the very positive response to the New Deal from almost 160 key industry leaders present. Further, a survey recently conducted by the British Hospitality Association suggests that 86 per cent. of the BHA membership is willing to offer placements under the programme.

22. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to boost the United Kingdom's income from tourism. [18000]

Mr. Tom Clarke: At a meeting of the new revitalised Tourism Forum on 26 November, I announced that I would be developing a strategy for tourism, for publication next summer, which will specifically address the issue of enabling further growth in tourism.

Football

17. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his Department's assistance for the bid for the soccer World Cup in 2006. [17993]

Mr. Banks: The Government are committed to attracting major sporting events to the UK, and are giving the fullest possible promotional and diplomatic support to the Football Association's bid to host the 2006 World Cup. I have written to hon. Members asking them to back the bid whenever an opportunity arises.

20. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to encourage families to support their national soccer team at the 1998 World Cup finals. [17997]

Mr. Banks: I hope that next year's World Cup Finals will be enjoyed by all football supporters both at home, and those fortunate enough to travel to France. The Government are offering the French authorities every assistance so that those genuine supporters from this country attending this celebration of world football can have a safe and memorable time.

Media Ownership

18. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received concerning media ownership. [17994]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have received representations about the public interest test applying to mergers between local newspapers and local radio stations and about a possible EC Directive on Media Ownership in the Internal Market.

Inner-city Theatres

19. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the Department's strategy in promoting inner-city theatres. [17995]

Mr. Fisher: The arts have an important part to play in the regeneration and building of local communities; this can have particular importance in inner city areas. Strategic funding decisions for theatres are made by the Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards in conjunction with local authorities and other funding

partners. I know that none of them underestimate the wider benefits which the arts can bring to their audiences and communities.

Development Through Play

21. **Mr. Pollard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to encourage children's development through play. [17998]

Mr. Chris Smith: The National Playing Fields Association is currently carrying out work for the Department in the areas of information dissemination, playwork education and training and play safety. I also made it clear in the White Paper "The People's Lottery" that we are particularly committed to the development of children's play. I am currently discussing with Lottery distributors how we can best ensure that Lottery funding for it is more easily accessible.

Jazz

23. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his policy on the role of the Arts Council of England in developing audiences for jazz. [18001]

Mr. Fisher: All the Arts Council's funding for jazz is designed to develop and build new audiences: the Government agree that the development of audiences in all art forms is a high priority.

Athletics Training

25. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to help improve the quality of training for British athletes.[18003]

Mr. Banks: We are committed to improving the quality of training for our athletes. In particular, the United Kingdom Sports Institute will provide our athletes with the best training facilities possible and the English Sports Council's World Class Performance Programme provides Lottery support to our best athletes.

National Lottery

26. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions he has had with the lottery distribution fund boards. [18004]

Mr. Chris Smith: I hold regular meetings with the Lottery distributors. I last met the Chairmen and the Chief Executives of the London-based Lottery distributors on 26 November. This was the fourth in a regular series of such meetings. The main topic of discussion was the Lottery Bill.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate his Department has made of the effect on the share of funding which will be received by humanitarian charities from the national lottery as a result of the introduction of a sixth good cause. [17975]

Mr. Chris Smith: The National Lottery Charities Board can expect to receive £1.8 billion over the period of the current licence. This matches its original expectation when the Lottery was launched. In addition, charities can expect to benefit from projects funded under the new good cause, covering health, education and the environment.

Subtitling and Sign Language

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will take steps to ensure that the agreed levels of subtitling and sign language inserts that will apply to terrestrial television over the next 10 years will apply equally to United Kingdom providers of satellite and cable television service. [18788]

Mr. Chris Smith: Channel 3 and 5 licensees are required to meet targets set out in the Broadcasting Act 1990 for the provision of subtitling. The BBC, Channel 4 and S4C, in pursuit of their public service commitments, aim to provide a similar amount of subtitling. Digital terrestrial television programme service licensees will be required to meet the subtitling and signing targets set under the Broadcasting Act 1996.

There are no statutory subtitling or signing targets for cable and satellite broadcasters. I am nevertheless keen that cable and satellite channels should provide more subtitling and sign language services. I am therefore asking them what plans they have to make their services more accessible in the future.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of television football coverage is supplemented with live subtitling on *(a)* terrestrial and *(b)* satellite television stations. [18789]

Mr. Chris Smith: From 1 January–2 November 1997, the BBC provided live subtitling for 63.25 per cent. of its network football coverage. I understand from the Independent Television Commission that during the same period, the ITV Network subtitled all its live coverage of football matches. Neither Channel 4, Channel 5 nor, as far as the Commission are aware, any satellite television services provided any live subtitling of football coverage.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to extend to satellite television channels the obligations regarding subtitling set out in the Broadcasting Acts. [19563]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have no plans (and no current powers) to extend the statutory subtitling targets for subtitling to satellite broadcasters, but I am, nevertheless, keen that satellite channels should provide more subtitling services. I am therefore asking them what plans they have to make their services more accessible in the future to viewers with hearing difficulties.

British Library

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if the British Library *(a)* Board and *(b)* Management Committee are required to publish details of their remuneration in the annual report; [19054]

(2) what information the British Library is required to provide in its annual report in respect of income from the disposal of *(a)* freehold and *(b)* leasehold properties. [19055]

Mr. Fisher: Under arrangements agreed with the Treasury, the British Library and other Non-departmental Public Bodies may produce summary financial information in their Annual Reports, indicating that the detail is available in the Annual Accounts. The Library's Accounts, which are published after the Annual Report, disclose remuneration of members of the British Library Board, the pay bands of senior employees earning more than £40,000 and the remuneration of the Chief Executive. The Accounts also show the income from the sale of freehold and leasehold properties.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what revenue was generated by readers in the British Library in respect of *(a)* London and *(b)* Boston spa reading room, in the last five years for which figures are available. [19045]

Mr. Fisher: Reading room revenue for the last five years was as follows:

£000

	London reading rooms	*Boston Spa reading rooms*	*Total*
1992–93	510	14	[1]—
1993–94	537	19	[1]—
1994–95	835	25	[1]—
1995–96	1,019	31	1,050
1996–97	729	34	1,007

[1] Prior to 1993–94, no distinction was made in revenue from readers and remote users.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the number of reader places for science and medical readers in the new British Library; and what previous estimates of these numbers have been presented to Parliament. [19046]

Mr. Fisher: The total number of reader desks in the Science reading rooms is 273, with a further 41 dedicated for special functions such as CD-ROMS. These are available on a general basis and not specifically designated as "science" or "medical". Previous estimates of this provision were presented to Parliament on the following occasions:

8 December 1988 (OR, WA, col 255) 238 reader seats for science and technology in the first phase of the new building.

NAO Report, October 1990: New Building for the British Library: Revised reader seat provision for Science Reference Information Services: 242.

National Heritage Committee Report, July 1994, The British Library: Reading rooms for science, technology and business: 209 desks in Phase 1A; 61 desks in Completion Phase.

NAO Report, May 1996: Progress in Completing the New British Library: Capacity of the science and oriental reading rooms . . . 351 seats [i.e. 273 science and 78 oriental desks].

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what are his proposals for 29 Exhibition Road, South Kensington, when the National Sound Archive vacates the building; [19052]

(2) what are his plans for 25 Southampton Buildings, Holborn, when the present tenants vacate these buildings. [19051]

Mr. Fisher: Subject to approval by the relevant authorities, the Library will sell the freehold of the property at 29 Exhibition Road in 1998–99. The freehold of the property at 25 Southampton Buildings will be sold after their present tenants have vacated the buildings in 1999.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the floor area of the office accommodation in the British Library St. Pancras building; and how many offices it contains. [19053]

Mr. Fisher: The total floor area of office accommodation in the St. Pancras building is 11,500 sq m. Under current plans, the number of individual offices is expected to be 40, as well as some 22 large open plan areas.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if 17 deg. C. and 50 per cent. relative humidity has been achieved in all the vault areas in the British Library. [19044]

Mr. Fisher: Tests in the vault areas have confirmed that the plant has achieved and maintained environmental conditions of 17 deg. C. (plus or minus one degree) and 50 per cent. relative humidity (plus or minus 5 per cent.) in accordance with the technical specifications laid down for the areas.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the cost of the *(a)* new and *(b)* proposed British Library buildings at Boston Spa. [19047]

Mr. Fisher: In 1995 the Library completed construction of a storage building at Boston Spa to accommodate reference material at a cost of £2.25 million. The Library is considering leasing additional office space to accommodate staff for functions relocated from London.

Ballet and Opera

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what initiatives he proposes to increase access for young people and those on low pay to ballet and opera. [17982]

Mr. Chris Smith: Access is a central theme of my Department's policies for the arts. The public has a right to expect a return for the substantial public funding which the arts receive. The Government are considering proposals for a number of initiatives to enhance access, such as an artscard scheme for young people and open theatre nights. More recently, we have asked Sir Richard Eyre to look at the future of the Royal Opera House companies and English National Opera, to see how the future of all the companies can best be secured, and how the work of each company can become more accessible to all of us—whether through more touring activity, through education work or broadcast opportunities.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Upratings

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what would have been the extra cost to the National Insurance Fund that would have arisen from uprating contributory invalidity benefit or incapacity benefit by the higher of average earnings or prices in each year since 1980–81; [15452]

(2) what the basic rate of invalidity benefit or incapacity benefit would have been in each year since 1980–81 if it had been uprated by the higher of average earnings or prices; and what was the actual rate for each of these years. [15453]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table.

Year	*Actual rate of basic invalidity benefit (incapacity benefit from April 1995) (£s per week)*	*Rate if uprated by the higher of earnings of prices*	*Estimated additional annual costs £s million*
1980–81	26.00	26.45	5
1981–82	28.35	29.60	40
1982–83	31.45	32.10	60
1983–84	32.60	34.90	75
1984–85	34.25	36.70	160
1985–86	38.30	41.60	190
1986–87	38.70	43.45	325
1987–88	39.50	45.90	490
1988–89	41.15	49.50	650
1989–90	43.60	53.90	795
1990–91	46.90	59.15	925
1991–92	52.00	65.60	1,065
1992–93	54.15	70.80	1,335
1993–94	56.10	74.25	1,530
1994–95	57.60	76.40	1,645
1995–96	58.85	79.45	1,620
1996–97	61.15	82.55	1,575
1997–98	62.45	86.00	1,560

Notes:

1. In April 1995 invalidity benefit was replaced by incapacity benefit. The amounts shown are those for the long term rate of incapacity benefit.
2. Uprating indices used are the Retail Prices Index (all items) and the Average Earnings Index (whole economy) as supplied by the Office of National Statistics.
3. The uprated figures have been rounded to the nearest five pence.
4. Estimates of additional costs are:
   (i) rounded to the nearest £5 million,
   (ii) cover invalidity pension-basic incapacity benefit and adult dependency additions and invalidity allowance only (IVA was replaced by age additions in April 1995),
   (iii) converted to 1997–98 prices using the GDP deflator and take account of offsetting costs in the income related benefits using family expenditure survey data.

Source:
Analytical Services Division.

Website for Women

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the new Website for Women and how many visits have been made since the site went on-line. [17272]

Ms Ruddock: The new website of the Ministers for Women was set up at a total cost of £2,450 (£2,200 staff time, plus £250 for registration of the domain and IP address http://www.womens-unit.gov.uk).

The number of unique hosts accessing the site in the weeks since the site has been on-line are as follows:

Weeks-ending	*Number*
8 November	508
15 November	332
22 November	175

Child Support

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents without care and control have been assessed by the CSA as having arrears in excess of £15,000. [16917]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We expect the Child Support Agency to provide an efficient and effective service to all its clients throughout the child support assessment process. We are looking for substantial and sustained operational improvements from the Agency, in particular on getting more maintenance paid, reducing the backlog and improving customer service.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 5 December 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of parents without care (normally known as absent parents) that have maintenance outstanding in excess of £15,000.

The number of maintenance assessments completed and recorded on the Child Support Computer System currently stands at approximately 679,000; at 19 November 1997, the total number of cases with more than £15,000 of maintenance arrears outstanding was 18,890.

In 90% of these cases (16,912), the arrears recorded as outstanding are the result of a Category A interim maintenance assessment. This measure, which sets maintenance at a punitive rate for absent parents who fail to co-operate, is imposed until the Agency is provided with the information needed to complete a full maintenance assessment. The Agency issued many interim maintenance assessments in its first two years—73,303 in 93/94. The emphasis now is to encourage absent parents to co-operate early and therefore avoid building up excessive maintenance arrears; the number of interim maintenance assessments has now greatly reduced to 11,718 in 1996/97.

From April 1995 regulations were changed, so that the liability under an interim maintenance assessment reverts to the level of the full maintenance assessment once the absent parent co-operates; once sufficient information is provided to complete a full maintenance assessment in the interim maintenance cases the amount of arrears actually owed will be considerably reduced.

I hope this is helpful.

Weather Stations

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security pursuant to her answer of 17 November 1997, *Official Report,* column *79,* if she will indicate the location of the two new weather stations; and if she will make a statement. [17528]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report,* columns *855–56.*

The Government are determined that pensioners will stay warm in their homes this winter. In his pre-budget report on 25 November, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced additional help for pensioners, to help with winter fuel bills for this winter and next.

A payment of £50 will be made to pensioners receiving Income Support and £20 to other pensioners. This is in addition to any Cold Weather Payments they may also receive.

Housing Benefit (Young People)

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she expects the review of the operation of the changes in eligibility for housing benefit for under-25s to be completed. [17315]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We want to build up a national picture of the effects of this change. In order to enable us to do that, we are gathering evidence from a variety of sources and, in addition, we have commissioned research jointly with Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ascertain the effects of this change on Housing Benefit and the private rented sector. We will consider fully all the available evidence which will be coming on stream over the next few months. We will then decide on the way forward.

Lone Parents

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents in the London, south-east and eastern regions, receive the lone parent element of *(a)* income support *(b)* child benefit. [19359]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of Income Support and Child Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 5 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many parents in the London, south-east and eastern regions, receive the lone parent element of (a) Income Support (IS) and (b) Child Benefit (CHB).

The information is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency (BA) collates statistics by BA District Offices. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or specific geographical areas.

From April this year, the lone parent premium was replaced by a higher rate of family premium for lone parents. Information relating to parents in receipt of the lone parent rate of family premium is shown in the attached Annex.

Information relating to parents in receipt of the lone parent element of CHB could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex: Income support customers in receipt of the lone parent rate of family premium as at 31 August 1997

	Number of lone parent rate of family premium recipients
Benefits Agency Area Directorates	
AD1—East London and Anglia[1]	108,666
AD2—Chilterns[2]	104,289
SD3—London South[3]	147,945
London[4]	193,948

The BA collates statistics by Distric Offices. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or this specific geographical area. The 125 Districts are grouped together into 13 Area Directorates.

[1] Includes the BA Districts of Barking and Havering, Cambridgeshire, City East, Essex South East, Essex South West, Hackney and Islington, Lea Roding, Leaside, Newham, North Essex, Norwich and Suffolk.

[2] Includes the BA Districts of Barnet, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Ealing, Euston, Harrow and Hillingdon, Neasden, North and East Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Thames Valley and West Hertfordshire.

[3] Includes the BA Districts of Bankside, East Kent, East Sussex, Hampshire North, London Central, North and West Kent, Palace, Solent and New Forest, South Circular, Central Sussex, South East Hampshire and Isle of Wight, South West Thames, Surrey Unit, Thameside and West Sussex.

[4] Includes the BA Districts of City East, Hackney and Islington, Lea Roding, Leaside, Newham, Barnet, Ealing, Euston, Neasden, Harrow and Hillingdon, Bankside, London Central, Surrey Unit, Palace, South Circular, South West Thames, Thameside and North and West Kent.

The information has been provided by the BA's Central Data Unit, it is provisional and maybe subject to change. The figures provided relate to the number of income support customers in receipt of the lone parent rate of family premium as at 31 August 1997. It does not include those lone parents customers who are pensioners nor those registered sick who would qualify for a higher rate premium such as a pensioner or disability premium.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19370]

Mr. Field: The breakdown of car park spaces provided for Ministers, employees and visitors is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Department of Social Security Ministers are accommodated in Richmond House. Facilities in this building, including car parking, are provided by the Department of Health as the major civil service occupier.

The numbers of car park spaces provided within the Department of Social Security for all users are as follows:

	Number
In London	293
In the United Kingdom	10,945

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the costs and media of advertising campaigns designed *(a)* to combat benefit fraud and *(b)* to encourage benefit take-up for the year 1996–97. [19237]

Mr. Field: The costs of advertising combat benefit fraud and to encourage benefit take-up for the year 1996–97 were £3.776 million and £3.991 million respectively.

Media used for advertising are as follows:

Media	*Fraud*	*Take-up*
National press	Yes	No
Local and regional press	Yes	Yes
Direct mail	Yes	Yes
Specialist press	No	Yes
Radio	Yes	Yes
Posters	Yes	Yes
Promotional events	No	Yes
Leaflets and alternative formats	Yes	Yes

Unclaimed Benefits

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the value of unclaimed benefits for the year 1996–97 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland. [19234]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Estimates for 1996–97 are not yet available. The total amount of unclaimed income-related benefits in Great Britain in 1995–96 is estimated as between £2.3 billion and £3.5 billion. The total amount of unclaimed benefit in Scotland in 1995–96 is estimated as between £200 million and £300 million.

Estimates relating to Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Source:

Family Resources Survey.

Notes:

1. Estimates relate to the four main income related benefits: Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Family Credit only. All take-up estimates exclude the self-employed as their entitlement to income-related benefits cannot readily be established from survey data.

2. Estimates for 1996–97 are not yet available.

3. The estimate for Scotland should be regarded as indicative only, as it is based on modest sample sizes.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

28. **Mr. Prior:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what estimate he has made of the entrance fee for the millennium experience. [18006]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company is actively considering a range of entrance fees and ticketing arrangements, with a view to ensuring that as many people as possible have the opportunity to visit the Experience at Greenwich.

29. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what steps are being taken to promote the Millennium Experience to visitors from overseas. [18007]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company is in detailed discussions with the domestic and overseas travel trade and journals. Initial promotion began at the World Travel Market in London last month. Detailed promotion will begin in Spring 1998, including a feature stand at the British Travel Trade fair in March.

The Millennium Experience will be featured in all relevant travel guides and programmes as a focal event in 2000. The NMEC will participate with British Incoming Tour Operators Association and other appropriate trade groups. The Millennium Experience will feature prominently in the British Tourist Authority's and the London Tourist Board's promotional and liaison programmes. The NMEC's ticketing strategy will recognise the importance of the travel trade to the Millennium Experience.

31. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what is his policy on encouraging private sector contributions to the cost of the Millennium Experience. [18009]

Mr. Mandelson: My policy is, with the New Millennium Experience Company, to give every possible encouragement to the private sector to contribute to the cost of the Millennium Experience.

30. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio when he proposes to publish the names of the successful contractors, and their plans, for the exhibitions within the millennium dome. [18008]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) announced on 2 December that they had concluded contracts with the first 10 designers for the large-scale exhibition structures within the Millennium-Experience. They are Bentheim, Eva Jiricna Architects, HP:ICM LTD., Jasper Jacob Associates, Land Design Studio Ltd., Media Projects International, MUF Architects, Park Avenue, Spectrum, and Work. In association with the NMEC, sponsors and specialist advisers, these designers are now developing further the concepts for the Experience attractions. I have placed a copy of the NMEC'S press release in the Library of the House. Since that announcement the company has concluded a contract with Zaha M. Hadid.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what will be the contents of the Millennium Dome. [18984]

Mr. Mandelson: *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) announced on 2 December that it had concluded contracts with the first 10 designers for the large-scale exhibition structures within the Millennium Experience. They are Bentheim, Eva Jiricna Architects, HP:ICM Ltd., Jasper Jacob Associates, Land Design Studio Ltd., Media Projects International, MUF Architects, Park Avenue, Spectrum, and Work. In association with the NMEC,

sponsors and specialist advisers, these designers are now developing further the concepts for the Experience attractions. I have placed a copy of the NMEC's press release in the Libraries of the House. Plans for a spectacular central experience that will be shared by all who visit the Dome are also well under way.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on official hospitality for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997, [15226]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Expenditure on hospitality by Ministers and officials is shown in the table.

	MAFF
1980–81	n/a
1987–88	30,291
1990–91	54,420
1991–92	64,852
1992–93	72,986
1993–94	79,758
1994–95	64,092
1995–96	59,646
1996–97	70,104
1997–98 (May–September)	39,143

n/a = not available.

These figures do not include the expenditure by the Department's Agencies nor its non-departmental public bodies. Agencies will respond independently. The Department does not hold information about its NDPBs, and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Michael Finnigan to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on official hospitality within the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA).

FRCA is a new agency which came into being on 1 April 1997, and cannot, therefore show expenditure for financial years prior to 1997/98.

For the period 1 May 1997 to 30 September 1997 expenditure on official hospitality was £5,805. This figure includes costs of refreshments for meetings, which are not separately identifiable from hospitality.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning the level of expenditure on official hospitality for various periods has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.

The MHS was established as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April 1995. It therefore does not have any information on expenditure on official hospitality prior to 1995.

I can advise you that the MHS spent the following sums, on an accruals basis on hospitality during the respective financial years:

Year	*Expenditure (£)*
1995–96	5,750
1996–97	13,011
1 April 1997–30 September 1997	4,697

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on official hospitality by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1st May to 30th September 1997, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991/92. Since that date expenditure on official hospitality is as follows:

	£
1991–92	1,239
1993–94	1,035
1994–95	1,817
1995–96	123
1996–97	186
1 May 1997–30 September 1997	Nil

The figures shown for the years up to 1994–95 included the cost of lunches for industry liaison meetings and advisory groups which is now accounted for separately.

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

In response to your Parliamentary Question on official hospitality, I have been asked to provide you with the relevant figures covering the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). These are as follows:

	£
1980–81	n/a
1987–88	n/a
1990–91	1,000
1991–92	645
1992–93	213
1993–94	1,645
1994–95	1,491
1995–96	1,292
1996–97	1,614
1997–98 April–September	1,026

n/a = not available.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning expenditure incurred by PSD on official hospitality.

The Directorate was launched as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to this date are not available. Expenditure from this date is set out below:

Year	*£*
1993–94	380
1994–95	422
1995–96	1,269
1996–97	1,609
1997–98 (May to September)	964

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning expenditure on official hospitality

Expenditure prior to 1992, when CSL was first launched as an Agency, is included in Departmental Figures. The Agency was significantly enlarged and relaunched in 1994 and collocated to a new side between 1996 and the summer of 1997.

Expenditure on hospitality within CSL is shown below:

Year	*£000*
1992–93	4.2
1993–94	4.7
1994–95	12.5
1995–96	23.6
1996–97	9.4
1997–98 (May –September)	4.0

Expenditure on hospitality in 1995–96 includes the cost for the Visiting Group to CSL's Agriculture and Environment Directorate. The purpose of Visiting Group was to assess the quality and management of the science delivered by Directorate.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) on official hospitality.

The VLA was launched as an Agency on 1 October 1995 as a result of the merger between the Central Veterinary Laboratory, already an Agency since April 1990, and the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was formerly part of the State Veterinary Service.

Figures for expenditure on hospitality are as follows:

	£
1993–94	16,720
1994–95	12,076
1995–96	18,900
1996–97	27,152
May–September 1997	14,392

Figures prior to 1993–94 are included in MAFF figures.
Figures from 1996–97 include the Veterinary Investigation Service following the merge in 1995.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team since 2 May, specifying in each case *(a)* the participating Minister or Ministers, *(b)* the destination of the trip, *(c)* the purpose of the trip and *(d)* the cost of the trip; and if he will make a statement. [15228]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* The costs of each overseas trip undertaken by myself or by members of my Ministerial team, including the costs of accompanying officials, since 2 May are as follows:

Date	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Costs £*
20 May 1997 to 21 May 1997	Brussels	Agriculture Council (Dr. Cunningham)	1,840.72
20 May 1997	Brussels	Bilateral with Fisheries Commissioner (Mr. Morley and Dr. Cunningham— see above)	807.00
25 May 1997 to 27 May 1997	Netherlands	May Informal Council (Dr. Cunningham)	2,288.00
15 June 1997 to 16 June 1997	Stockholm	Bilateral with Swedish Agriculture Minister (Dr. Cunningham)	2,051.60
23 June 1997 to 24 June 1997	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council (Dr. Cunningham)	2,566.62
15 July 1997 to 16 July 1997	Strasbourg and Bonn	To meet the Temporary Committee European Parliament and then to Bonn for a bilateral (Dr. Cunningham)	3,340.00
21 July 1997 to 22 July 1997	Brussels	Agriculture Council (Dr. Cunningham)	3,150.24
06 October 1997 to 7 October 1997	Poland	Meeting with Ministers on CAP Reform and EU Enlargement (Lord Donoughue)	1,900.00
16 September 1997	Spain	Meeting of Fisheries Ministers (Mr. Morley)	2,300.40
22 September 1997 to 23 September 1997	Brussels	Agriculture Council (Dr. Cunningham)	2,625.20
9 September 1997 to 12 September 1997	Czech Republic and Hungary	Meeting with Ministers on CAP Reform and EU Enlargement (Lord Donoughue)	3,050.00
10 October 1997 to 12 October 1997	Rome	Bilateral with Italian Agriculture Minister (Dr. Cunningham)	1,593.00
13 October 1997	Cologne	ANUGA Food Fair (Dr. Cunningham)	547.80
16 October 1997	Indonesia	Trade Promotion (Lord Donoughue)	26,500.00
20 October 1997 to 21 October 1997	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council (Dr. Cunningham)	2,726.40
18 October 1997 to 26 October 1997	Monaco	Meeting of International Whaling Commission (Mr. Morley)	1,298.00
30 October 1997	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council (Mr. Morley)	2,849.40
7 November 1997 to 12 November 1997	South Africa	Trade Bilaterials (Dr. Cunningham)	13,415.60
17 November 1997 to 19 November 1997	Brussels	Agriculture Council (Dr. Cunningham)	3,266.00

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on overseas travel for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997; and if he will provide a breakdown to show (1) air fares and (2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. [15227]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Expenditure on overseas travel by Ministers and officials is shown in the table:

	MAFF
1980–81	n/a
1987–88	953,392
1990–91	1,444,905
1991–92	1,954,412
1992–93	2,159,191
1993–94	2,127,316
1994–95	1,910,202
1995–96	1,641,245
1996–97	1,834,381
1997–98 (May–September)	558,788

n/a = not available.

These figures do not include the expenditure by the Department's Agencies nor its non-departmental public bodies. Agencies will respond independently. The Department does not hold this information about its NDPBs, and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on overseas travel by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1st May to 30th September 1997, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991–92. Details of expenditure on overseas travel and subsistence since that date are shown below. Expenditure for airfares is not separately identifiable.

	£
1991–92	95,848
1992–93	112,386
1993–94	118,009
1994–95	126,864
1995–96	112,501
1996–97	98,676
1 May to 30 September 1997	24,289

The main element of overseas travel was in respect of inspections of manufacturing premises in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and Europe.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning expenditure on overseas travel.

Expenditure prior to 1992, when CSL was first launched as an Agency, is included in Departmental figures. The Agency was significantly enlarged and relaunched in 1994.

Expenditure on overseas travel within CSL is shown below:

Year	*All £000*
1992–93	98.7
1993–94	57.4
1994–95	155.8
1995–96	175.2
1996–97	198.3
1997–98 (April–October	105.4

Expenditure for air fares is not separately identifiable.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning expenditure on overseas travel.

The Directorate was launched as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to this date are not available. Expenditure by PSD on all forms of overseas travel since this date are set out below:

	Actual expenditure
	£
1993–94	97,668
1994–95	74,980
1995–96	107,914
1996–97	80,819
1997–98 (May to September)	34,128

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

In response to your Parliamentary Question on overseas travel, I have been asked to provide you with the relevant figures covering the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). These are as follows.

	£
1980–81	n/a
1987–88	n/a
1990–91	98,173
1991–92	122,525
1992–93	126,244
1993–94	98,554
1994–95	130,259
1995–96	154,883
1996–97	162,125
1997–98 April–September	4,672

n/a = not available.

Unfortunately it is not possible to separate the air fare costs.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning the level of expenditure on overseas travel for various periods has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.

The MHS was established as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April 1995. It therefore does not have any information on expenditure on overseas travel prior to 1995.

I can advise you that the MHS spent the following sums, on an accruals basis, on the overseas travel during the respective financial years:

Year	*Expenditure*
1995–96	Nil
1996–97	Nil
1997–98 (to date)	£878 (£245 air travel)

Letter from Michael Finnigan to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on overseas travel within the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA).

FRCA is a new agency which came into being on 1 April 1997, and cannot, therefore show expenditure for financial years prior to 1997–98.

For the period 1 May 1997 to 30 September 1997 expenditure on overseas travel was £485.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) on overseas travel.

The VLA was launched as an Agency on 1 October 1995 as a result of the merger between the Central Veterinary Laboratory, already an Agency since April 1990, and the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was formerly part of the State Veterinary Service.

Figures for expenditure on overseas travel are as follows:

	£
1993–94	61,700
1994–95	66,200
1995–96	63,900
1996–97	111,900
May–September 1997	74,300

Figures prior to 1993–94 are included in MAFF figures. Figures from 1996–97 include the Veterinary Investigation Service following the merger in 1995. It is not possible to break down expenditure into air fares and expenditure relating to overseas travel.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15229]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Expenditure on publicity and advertising by Ministers and officials is shown in the table:

	MAFF
1980–81	—
1987–88	—
1990–91	—
1991–92	—
1992–93	—
1993–94	4,649,589
1994–95	4,961,303
1995–96	5,324,791
1996–97	5,138,192
1997–98 (year to date)	1,948,160

These figures do not include the expenditure by the Department's Agencies nor its non departmental public bodies. Agencies will respond independently. The Department does not hold this information about its NDPBs, and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) on publicity and advertising.

The VLA was launched as an Agency on 1 October 1995 as a result of the merger between the Central Veterinary Laboratory, already an Agency since April 1990, and the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was formerly part of the State Veterinary Service.

Figures for expenditure on publicity and advertising are as follows:

	Publicity[1] £	*Advertising*[2] £
1993–94	68,500	7,656
1994–95	47,000	13,429
1995–96	42,000	15,787
1996–97	52,800	42,000
April—October 1997	47,400	52,653
1997–98 estimate	61,200	70,000
1998–99 planned	62,000	40,000

[1] This includes annual reviews, marketing brochures, customer newsletters and leaflets.
[2] The majority of advertising is for staff recruitment in newspapers and specialist journals.

The figures from 1996–97 include the Veterinary Investigation Service following the merger.

Letter from Michael Finnigan to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on publicity and advertising within the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA).

FRCA is a new agency which came into being on 1 April 1997, and cannot, therefore show expenditure for financial years prior to 1997–98.

For the period 1 May 1997 to 30 September 1997 expenditure on publicity and advertising was £19,291, which includes £10,842 spent on advertising staff vacancies.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning the level of expenditure on publicity and advertising for various periods has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.

The MHS was established as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April 1995. It therefore does not have any information on expenditure on this item prior to 1995.

The MHS spent the following sums, on an accruals basis, on the requested items during the respective financial years:

Year	*Expenditure (£)*
1995–96	1,000
1996–97	34,000
1997–98 (forecast)	49,000
1998–99 (estimate)	49,000

The expenditure on publicity and advertising predominantly covers expenditure on the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts. It excludes recruitment advertising.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (v) the 1997–98 year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

Expenditure on publicity and advertising is as follows:

	£
1993–94	80,106
1994–95	52,129
1995–96	48,723
1996–97	63,917
1 April to 31 October 1997	43,614
1997–98 forecast	65,000
1998–99 forecast	65,000

The above figures cover the announcement of the grant and expiry of marketing authorisations in the official gazettes, direct recruitment advertising, the VMD's Annual Report and Accounts, publicity relating to the safe use of organophosphorus sheep dips and expenditure on the VMD's quarterly newsletter MAVIS. This newsletter is circulated to the veterinary profession, the veterinary medicinal products industry, representative bodies and opinion formers.

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

In response to your Parliamentary Question on publicity and advertising, I have been asked to provide you with the relevant figures covering the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). For clarity, the figures are shown in separate categories: staff advertising/recruit-ment, and publicity/marketing.

	Staff advertising/ recruitment £	*Publicity/ marketing* £
1980–81	n/a	n/a
1987–88	n/a	n/a
1990–91	7,000	n/a
1991–92	3,191	n/a
1992–93	7,128	n/a
1993–94	50,686	n/a
1994–95	12,817	n/a
1995–96	35,292	38,880
1996–97	36,106	[1]45,665
1997–98 April–September	29,646	17,500
1997–98 full year estimate	57,000	76,000
1998–99 planned expenditure	budgets not yet agreed	

[1] Includes Agency launch expenditure.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question regarding expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising.

The Directorate was launched as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to this date are not available. Direct expenditure by PSD on all forms of publicity and advertising from this date is set out below. PSD makes use of MAFF advertising and publicity where appropriate and the costs are borne directly by MAFF on PSD's behalf.

Year	£
1993–94	15,471
1994–95	4,400
1995–96	0
1996–97	0
1997–98 (April to October)	0
1997–98 (estimate)	0
1998–99 (estimate)	0

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 December 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising.

CSL was first launched as an Agency in 1992. The Agency was significantly enlarged and relaunched in 1994.

Expenditure on publicity and advertising within CSL is shown below:

Year	*£000*
1993–94	16.4
1994–95	41.1
1995–96	26.5
1996–97	32.4
1997–98 (April—October)	12.6

Agenda 2000

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the impact in the United Kingdom of Agenda 2000 on each of the agricultural sectors where proposals have been made. [19549]

Dr. John Cunningham: Formal legislative proposals to implement the ideas outlines in Agenda 2000 are not expected to be published by the European Commission until the first part of 1998.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to the Sixth Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation's considerations of Agenda 2000 (HC 155-vi), if he will list the environmental and rural development measures referred to in paragraph 2.5; which Commission rural policy and targeted agri-environmental measures referred to in paragraph 2.6 he supports and for what reasons; if he will set out the basis for his calculation of the savings to consumers in paragraph 2.7; and which member states had the difficulties with the proposed level of the cuts in support prices for cereals and milk referred to in paragraph 2.8; and for what reasons. [19594]

Dr. John Cunningham: No. I will formulate my detailed response to the Commission's legislative proposals giving effect to Agenda 2000 when they are tabled next year.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of its EU budget he estimates would be spent on agriculture if the current Agenda 2000 proposals were adopted in full. [19545]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Commission estimate that the agricultural guideline would stand at 50 billion ecu in 2006 (at 1997 prices), out of total budgetary commitments of 114.5 billion ecu. The Commission envisages that actual spending on agriculture would be less than the guidelines, at 46 billion ecu (at 1997 prices). This estimate includes expenditure in new Member States and on pre-accession aid for countries which have yet to join the EU.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the United Kingdom will press the Council to review the level of its agriculture guidelines as part of the Agenda 2000 negotiations. [19541]

Dr. John Cunningham: Decisions on the level of the agricultural guideline are for ECOFIN, not the Agriculture Council. The Commission has proposed keeping the method of calculating the guideline unchanged and reviewing this in about 2005. The UK will be pressing for agricultural spending to be set well below the guideline, which should be a ceiling, not a target, as I made clear at the November Agriculture Council.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the way in which Agenda 2000 will affect the prospects for the production of bio-mass for energy usage. [19544]

Dr. John Cunningham: It is not yet clear what effect Agenda 2000 will have on the prospects for the production of biomass for energy usage. While the Commission's paper recognises that renewable energy crops represent a new opportunity for agriculture, forestry and rural job creation, it also proposes to suspend obligatory set-aside and reduce the aid for voluntary set-aside, measures which currently support these crops.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which proposals in Agenda 2000 will help *(a)* improve the environment, *(b)* encourage reduced usage of agro-chemicals, *(c)* protect wildlife, *(d)* increase organic production, *(e)* prepare the community for enlargement, *(f)* assist the community to negotiate successfully in the next World Trade Organisation round, *(g)* enable the Community's expenditure on agriculture to stay within its guidelines, *(h)* allow efficient British farmers to prosper, *(i)* require environmental objectives to be achieved before CAP payments are made or received, *(j)* set environmental objectives for the CAP, *(k)* encourage the production of non-food crops, *(l)* affect forestry, *(m)* help the beef sector and *(n)* affect hill farmers. [19546]

Dr. John Cunningham: In the Government's view, the Agenda 2000 proposals are a step in the right direction towards a market-oriented CAP with less production-related support and more emphasis on agri-environmental and rural development objectives. A CAP which is radically reformed along these lines, as favoured by the Government, should be beneficial in most of the areas identified by the right hon. Member.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the required increase in productivity in each sector affected by the Agenda 2000 proposals to trigger a reduction in levels of direct payments; and what recommendations the United Kingdom Government will make on this matter to the Council. [19539]

Dr. John Cunningham: None. In the Government's view, direct payments should be time-limited and degressive, giving producers time to adjust their businesses to a market-oriented system which does not rely on production-related subsidies.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Agenda 2000 is to be fully implemented before further Community enlargement takes place. [19540]

Dr. John Cunningham: Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is essential to enable the EU to meet its future challenges, including early successful enlargement. I will use our Presidency to launch negotiations in the Agriculture Council as soon as the Commission's legislative reform proposals appear.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons peas and beans will receive supplementary aid under the Commission's proposals for Agenda 2000. [19550]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Commission has explained the purpose of its proposal as being to maintain the competitiveness of protein crops with cereals and to encourage their production.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the environmental impact studies of Agenda 2000 carried out by his Ministry or any of its specialised advisory groups. [19542]

Dr. John Cunningham: My Department is in the process of commissioning one project from the Centre for Agricultural Strategy at Reading to assess the implications of Agenda 2000 for land use in England and Wales, using the Land Use Allocation Model, and another desk top study to identify the likely consequences for the environment if the Agenda 2000 reforms are implemented. It is normal practice to allow researchers to publish the results of their work.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of Agenda 2000 on the countryside stewardship scheme; and if he will make a statement. [19538]

Dr. John Cunningham: In the absence of detailed legislative proposals, the impact of Agenda 2000 on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme cannot be assessed.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the removal of crop specific payments for oilseeds proposed under Agenda 2000 will end the requirements for a maximum area for these crops; [19547]

(2) what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the Agenda 2000 proposals for non-specific payments in respect of oilseed crops with existing World Trade Organisation rules. [19548]

Dr. John Cunningham: The compatibility with WTO rules of any trade arrangement can only be definitively determined under WTO dispute settlement procedures. The Commission's preliminary view, which we share, is that the introduction of a non-crop specific aid for oilseeds would relieve the EU from the restrictions on the maximum area of oilseeds laid down in the 1992 Blair House Agreement between the EU and the USA.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the financial effects which Agenda 2000 will have on the United Kingdom beef sector; and if he will make a statement. [19543]

Dr. John Cunningham: The effects of the Commission's proposals for the reform of the beef regime will depend upon the extent to which the proposed cut in support prices is reflected in market prices.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what rate and over what time scale under the terms of Agenda 2000 the Government propose that direct payments should be decoupled from production and reduced. [19537]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Commission has not yet tabled legislative proposals to implement the ideas set out in the Agenda 2000 series of papers. The Government will respond appropriately to those proposals when we receive them.

Food Safety

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer of 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *640*, on food safety, what factors in respect of the management of risk his research programme is examining; what are the programme's findings to date on the public perceptions of food safety risk; which other relevant opinion surveys he has assessed; and what were their results. [19595]

Dr. John Cunningham: My Department's risk management research programme, which has been running for five years, covers all aspects of risk management including perceptions of risk, the way that risk messages are received by the public, risk communication and methods by which consumer views on food safety might be best taken into account in decision making. Other relevant opinion surveys are published by others, such as, for example, the Consumers Association, as a result of research into a variety of food-related issues.

Scientific Research (Corporation Tax)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the Board of Trade's proposed changes to the guidelines on granting exemptions from corporation tax to scientific research associations. [19551]

Dr. John Cunningham: The proposed changes to the guidelines would have a significant impact on a number of bodies under my Department's sponsorship and, following representations from several of these, both my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and I, have raised the matter with colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Support Schemes

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which Community funded agricultural support schemes he estimates will underspend their budgeted amounts in 1997–98; and by how much. [19552]

Dr. John Cunningham: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him on 21 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *356*.

Hill Farming

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those elements of his hill farming policy which are compatible with Article 33 of the treaty establishing the European Community. [19536]

Dr. John Cunningham: Hill farmers receive specific financial help via the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances scheme. This has been approved under the terms of the EC farm structures Regulation 950//97, and is therefore compatible with Article 33 (ex 39) of the Treaty.

Unpasteurised Milk

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he decided to consult publicly on the banning of unpasteurised milk following his receipt of the scientific advice from the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food. [19585]

Dr. John Cunningham: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *357*.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 December 1997

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Travel Expenses

Mr. Gill: To ask the President of the Council if she will estimate the cost of travel incurred by hon. Members returning to Westminster for one day. [19226]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: It is not possible to provide a realistic estimate of the travel cost of one day's travel to and from Westminster.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Education and Conduct Report

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct intends to publish its sixth annual report. [20115]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct has today published its sixth annual report, and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Information Services

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the President of the Council what was the aggregate amount spent by her Department and its agencies during 1996–97 on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* public relations, *(c)* promotions, *(d)* public information campaigns, *(e)* press and information services and *(f)* market research and opinion polls. [19163]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: In 1996–97, a total of £49,919 was spent by my Department on press and information services.

SCOTLAND

NHS White Paper

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish his White Paper on the future of the NHS in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [20239]

Mr. Dewar: Our White Paper on the future of the NHS in Scotland, "Designed to Care", is published today. Copies have been laid before the House. Copies are available in the Library of the House and the Vote Office.

Our objective is a modernised patient-centred health service designed to ensure that wherever patients make use of the services of the NHS they receive the highest quality care. We will create a seamless service which gives patients continuity of care from GP through hospital to rehabilitation. And we will harness new technologies to improve reliability and effectiveness of patient care.

The White Paper sets out clearly the system which will replace the internal market in health care. The cost of the internal market has been fragmentation, bureaucracy and the beginning of a two-tier service. Our proposals will save £100 million over the lifetime of this Parliament, money which will be reinvested in patient care. "Designed to Care" honours our commitment to retain the central role for primary care whilst removing the disadvantages of GP fundholding. We will do this by giving strong organisational support to primary care through the creation of Primary Care Trusts, which will allow professionals to take the lead in combining locally to organise health services for the benefit of all patients in their area. We have retained distinct roles for those responsible for strategy and those responsible for service delivery to promote devolved decision-making.

"Designed to Care" re-focuses NHS Trusts on improving services to patients and gives clinicians and those who use their services a bigger say in their management. We are committed to fewer NHS Trusts, and the White Paper sets out the criteria to guide this process to a speedy conclusion.

"Designed to Care" sets out our vision for the future of the NHS in Scotland, with solutions suited to Scottish needs. It lays the foundation for the work of the Scottish Parliament in continuing to improve the health of the people of Scotland.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Mixed Oxide Fuel

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions have taken place in the European Environment Council on the environmental implications of the transportation of mixed oxide fuel from the European Union to Japan; and if he will ensure that a full report is prepared on this subject during the period of the United Kingdom presidency. [18493]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are unaware of any such discussions. However, the fourth report of the Standing Working Group on the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material of DG XVII has recently been submitted to the Commission and will be submitted to the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. We have no plans to issue any further report on this matter.

Nuclear Materials (Transport)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contingency plans are in place to deal with accidents involving

(a) aircraft and *(b)* ships whilst transporting mixed oxide fuel from the United Kingdom to (i) mainland Europe and (ii) Japan. [18476]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Transporters of radioactive material within the United Kingdom are required, by statutory safety regulation, to have contingency plans in place to respond to accidents. The UK transporters of mixed oxide fuel have such plans in place for air and sea modes.

Rail Operators

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money has been awarded in bonuses for *(a)* meeting and *(b)* exceeding service standards to rail operators in the last 12 months. [19340]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director operates financial incentive regimes under franchise agreements which supplement the pressure of market forces where necessary; intercity train operating companies are not covered by such regimes. The regimes reward or penalise operators according to performance compared with historical benchmarks. Details of these appear in the Franchising Director's quarterly bulletins and in his Annual Report which are in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the district, county and unitary councils that have not been permitted to spend above their 1990–91 capping level for each of the years from 1990–91 to 1998–99. [19476]

Mr. Raynsford: Capping levels were only set for 21 authorities in 1990–91. Of these, the following have had provisional caps at or below the level of their 1990–91 cap in the years shown:

Barnsley, 1992–93;

Basildon, 1991–92 to 1998–99;

Bristol, 1991–92 to 1995–96;

Derbyshire, 1991–92, 1993–94[1], 1997–98[2].

[1] The cap limit was lower in 1993–94 as a result of the adjustment for the transfer of Further Education out of the local authority sector.

[2] The cap limit was lower in 1997–98 as a result of the transfer of functions to the new unitary authority of Derby City Council.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what have been the total community charge and council tax receipts in each year since 1991–92. [19929]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Community charge	6,590	7,300	584	278	167	103
Council tax	n/a	n/a	6,807	7,549	8,149	8,717

These figures are the amounts received in each financial year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the level of spending by English local authorities in each year since 1991–92; and if he will indicate the annual percentage change in real terms. [19821]

Mr. Raynsford: The information is given below. There has been a number of changes in local authority responsibilities in the period covered. In particular;

in April 1993 responsibility for further education was transferred to the Further Education Funding Council;

from 1994–95 onwards, Care in the Community responsibilities were transferred to local authorities;

in 1997–98 budgeted expenditure decreased by some £500 million as the result of the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme.

For these reasons it is not always valid to make comparisons between years.

Net revenue expenditure—English authorities

Year	*Cash*[1] *(£ million)*	*Percentage change (Real terms)*[2]
1991–92	38,454	3.8
1992–93	40,801	1.8
1993–94	39,742	–5.3
1994–95	41,677	3.3
1995–96	43,087	0.6
1996–97[3]	45,828	3.5
1997–98[4]	46,486	–1.2

[1] Net revenue expenditure is net of all specific grants except, for years since 1995–96, police specific grants. Hence, for consistency, the figures for the years prior to 1995–96 have been adjusted to include the principal police specific grant.

[2] The percentage change in expenditure in real terms has been calculated by using the GDP deflator.

[3] Provisional Outturn.

[4] Budget.

Road Users (Disabled People)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his Answer of 26 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *554*, if he will ensure that orange badges for disabled motorbike riders are produced in a form which will fit into their normal vehicle tax disc holder. [19452]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Orange Badges should be displayed by motorcyclists only when they are in use in connection with parking. Any secure holder may be used to display the badge as long as the details on the front of the badge are visible.

British Airways

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations *(a)* his Department and *(b)* authorities responsible for air traffic control and safety have received about problems in identifying in the air British Airways aircraft following the new decorations on their tailplanes. [19916]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None.

Aviation Fuel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has undertaken into the environmental damage arising from burning of aviation fuel *(a)* at ground level and *(b)* in the upper atmosphere. [19742]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We continue to support research on the nature and effects of local and global emissions from aircraft engines. Many of these projects are major international collaborative efforts. The Department has a leading role in the International Civil Aviation Organisation's environmental committee, which includes an emissions group. It also supports participation by UK experts in major science and technology assessments, for example the European inventory of aircraft NOx emissions and the current assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of aviation and the environment.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what will be the future role and responsibilities of the Rural Development Commission and if he will make a statement. [19749]

Mr. Caborn: We are considering this as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. We expect to reach conclusions in the New Year.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he last met the Chairman of the Rural Development Commission to discuss the future of the Rural Development Commission; [19782]

(2) pursuant to his oral statement of 3 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns 357-59, when he received a request from the Chairman of the Rural Development Commission for a meeting to discuss the future of the Commission. [19819]

Mr. Caborn: Ministers in the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions had several meetings with Lord Shuttleworth at which the future of the Rural Development Commission was discussed, including on 21 July, 23 July, 16 September and 2 December 1997.

Lord Shuttleworth's letter requesting a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister to discuss the future of the Commission was dated 27 October 1997.

Alexandra Palace and Park

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the correspondence between his Department and the London Borough of Haringey regarding Alexandra Palace and Park which is of a non-commercial nature. [19734]

Ms Armstrong: Identifying this information from the considerable volume of correspondence with Haringey over Alexandra Palace and Park would be time consuming and could not be undertaken except at disproportionate cost.

In November 1996 the Department gave the London Borough of Haringey directions, allowing an increase in their aggregate credit limit totalling £55 million, in connection with the Council's proposals for establishing the future of Alexandra Palace and Park. The directions are technical measures and do not convey additional financial support. I am arranging for a copy of the directions to be placed in the library.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what proposals his Department has received from *(a)* the London Borough of Haringey and *(b)* other interested parties for the closure of Alexandra Palace and Park; and if he will make a statement; [19731]

(2) what financial guarantees his Department has given since 1990 to the London Borough of Haringey with regard to Alexandra Palace and Park. [19732]

Ms Armstrong: None.

Local Self-government

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which clauses of the European Charter of local self-government the Government plan to sign up to. [19680]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on Thursday 31 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *546*.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions whether the boundaries of regional development agencies and regional chambers will be co-terminous. [19679]

Mr. Caborn: Regional chambers are being established under voluntary arrangements by local authorities and others. However, we wish to encourage a single chamber covering each region to provide a coherent voice for the region, in particular to offer views to the Regional Development Agency.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Indian Sub-continent (Visa Applications)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many *(a)* visit, *(b)* settlement and *(c)* other visa applications made at the British High Commission in (i) Islamabad, (ii) Karachi, (iii) New Delhi, (iv) Mumbai, (v) Calcutta, (vi) Madras, (vii) Dhaka and (viii) Colombo were (1) made, (2) refused initially, (3) granted initially and (4) deferred in each year since 1992; [19013]

(2) how many *(a)* visit, *(b)* settlement and *(c)* other visa applications made at the British high commissions in (i) Islamabad, (ii) Karachi, (iii) New Delhi, (iv) Mumbai, (v) Calcutta, (vi) Madras, (vii) Dhaka and (viii) Colombo were (1) made, (2) refused initially, (3) granted initially and (4) deferred in each month since January 1996 to the latest convenient date. [19023]

Mr. Fatchett: In view of the amount of detail needed to answer this question, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visit visa applications from people aged over 65 years were *(a)* made, *(b)* granted initially, *(c)* refused initially and *(d)* deferred at the British High Commission (i) Islamabad and (ii) New Delhi in each year since 1992. [19100]

Mr. Fatchett: The details are as follows:

Islamabad

10,864 applications were made between 1992 and November 1997 as follows:

1992: 504

1993: 1,086

1994: 1,091

1995: 2,846

1996: 3,645

1997 (to November): 1,692

A breakdown into issues, refusals and deferrals cannot be given without a physical search of all applications which would entail disproportionate cost to public funds.

New Delhi

New Delhi only maintains non-settlement records for 2 years after a visa is issued. The figures for 1996 and to the end of November 1997 are as follows: Deferred figures are not available.

Year	*Applications made*	*Granted*	*Refused*
1996	4,801	2,647	991
1997	4,084	3,394	439

Ottawa Convention

Mr. Martin Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) of 24 November 1997, Official Report, columns *398–99*, on the Ottawa Convention, when he plans to introduce the legislation necessary for the ratification of the Convention. [19323]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We attach great importance to the Ottawa Convention, signed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development on 3 December. We intend to ratify it as soon as possible. The timing of the legislation necessary for ratification will depend on our legislative programme. We intend to introduce the legislation as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows.

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the maximum number of Greek military personnel allowed in Cyprus in accordance with its role as a guarantor power; how many Greek Army personnel are presently in Cyprus; how many military aircraft are in Cyprus; which authority monitors the level of Greek military presence in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [19512]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Under the 1960 treaties, Greece is allowed to station a force of up to 950 military personnel in Cyprus. We estimate that there are about 2,000 Greek military personnel in Cyprus at present. There are no fixed-wing military aircraft permanently based in Cyprus. No international authority monitors the level of Greek military presence in Cyprus.

European Commission Directorates

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British nationals currently work for each directorate of the European Commission. [19559]

Mr. Doug Henderson: According to July 1997 figures, the numbers of British nationals working at A Grade in each Directorate-General of the European Commission are as follows:

I: 38

IA: 58

IB: 30

II: 11

III: 36

IV: 17

V: 27

VI: 32

VII: 20

VIII: 44

IX: 9

X: 14

XI: 26

XII: 48

XIII: 43

XIV: 5

XV: 23

XVI: 21

XVII: 22

XIX: 8

XX: 8

XXI: 17

XXII: 15

XXIII: 10

XXIV: 8.

In addition, there are the following numbers of British nationals working at B, C and D Grade for the European Commission:

B Grade: 237

C Grade: 308

D Grade: 7.

These figures include staff paid from the Central and Research Budgets, and permanent and temporary staff.

Western Sahara

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to contribute financial resources and personnel to

MINURSO, to ensure that the United Nations supervised referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara is free and fair. [19708]

Mr. Fatchett: The UK contributes 6.568 per cent. in UN assessed contributions to the total costs of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Accordingly, we will pay 6.568 per cent. of the estimated costs (£129 million) of the expansion of MINURSO as set out in the Secretary-General's report of 13 November and its addendum of 19 November 1997. We have no plans to contribute personnel.

We fully support the expansion of MINURSO to facilitate the full implementation of the settlement plan.

Brazil

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Brazilian Government concerning the eucalyptus plantation established by Aracruz Cellulose on land previously occupied by Tupirikim Guarani Indians. [19710]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: After meeting representatives of the Tupinikim and Guarani Indians, I wrote to the Brazilian Ambassador on 1 July about their claim to land occupied by Aracruz Cellulose. I also raised it with the Head of the National Foundation for Assistance to Indians (FUNAI), when I visited Brazil in September 1997. Our Embassy in Brasilia continues to monitor this particular case. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised other indigenous issues with the Brazilian Foreign Minister during their talks on 3 December.

Gibraltar

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the policy on voting rights of Gibraltarian citizens in European Parliament elections. [19272]

Mr. Doug Henderson: To include Gibraltarian citizens in European Parliament elections would require an amendment to annexe II to the EC's 1976 Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament. This would require the unanimous agreement of all Member States, and ratification by each Member State in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. We keep policy under review in the light of those facts.

Sudan

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards aiding the development of democratic government in the Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [19273]

Mr. Fatchett: We have made clear both to the Government of Sudan and to the opposition National Democratic Alliance our wish to see progress towards a pluralist democratic system of government and respect for human rights in Sudan. Development of bilateral relations is dependent on progress in this and other fields.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the new Government in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [19274]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: There is no new Government in Sierra Leone. We condemned the military coup which took place there on 25 May 1997 and have consistently called for the restoration of the legitimate Government of President Kabbah. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) reached agreement with the military junta on 23 October in Conakry on a framework for the restoration of that Government. We have played a leading role within the international community in promoting discussion of the implementation of that agreement. With our encouragement, the United Nations is currently considering how best it can support ECOWAS activities in this regard.

Raicha Jivan Parmar

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the British High Commission in Bombay is taking in respect of the case of Raicha Jivan Parmar of Maidston Road, Leicester, currently in India. [19949]

Mr. Fatchett: We have asked the High Commission in Bombay to provide a detailed account of the position. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons will write to my hon. Friend within one week of receiving that account.

Hamir, Lakhu and Devshi Vega

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the refusal of Bombay to issue a visa to Hamir, Lakhu and Devshi Vega (ref. R/973542), whose parents reside at Avonside Drive, Leicester. [19950]

Mr. Fatchett: We have asked the High Commission in Bombay to provide a detailed account of the position. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons will write to my hon. Friend within one week of receiving that account.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Biodiversity

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's Biodiversity Strategy. [19672]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) is committed to providing continued assistance to help poor people in developing countries benefit from safeguarding biodiversity, both through the bilateral programme and the UK contribution to the Global Enviornment Facility (which is the financial mechanism for assisting developing countries implement the Convention on Biological Diversity). During negotiations with multilateral organisations, DFID will also pay particular attention to the impact of intellectual property rights on the interests of indigenous and local

communities who depend on local biodiversity for their livelihoods. To assist in the identification and provision of assistance in situations with opportunities for both alleviating poverty and safeguarding biodiversity, DFID is reviewing its bilateral biodiversity strategy in co-operation with interested parties, including NGOs.

Environment and Development

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the Government will initiate a joint Environment and Development Council during its presidency of the European Union. [19785]

Clare Short: We do not propose to hold a joint Environment and Development Council but will contribute fully to the Environment Council's preparations for the Commission on Sustainable Development next year and continue to work closely with our environment colleagues on other issues of mutual interest.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures the Government will take to improve the effectiveness of EU overseas aid devoted to environment protection and enhancement schemes. [19784]

Clare Short: We will discuss any recommendations arising from the Commission's independent evaluation of the environmental performance of EC-funded programmes which is due to be completed in the new year, and continue to encourage the EC to integrate fully environmental considerations into the design of its projects. We will continue to participate in the Commission's Scientific Environmental Monitoring Group and the forestry and water expert groups, and have agreed to provide a project leader to prepare an EC/Member States strategy for biodiversity conservation. We have also seconded a forestry specialist to work for the Commission on the management of tropical forestry programmes.

Sustainability

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proposals he has to promote the integration of sustainability through the Development Council. [19787]

Clare Short: We will continue to promote the integration of sustainability into the Community's aid programmes by seeking to ensure that due weight and consideration are given to it in the Community's legislation and policies. This will be one of our top priorities in the discussions on the future of Lomé during the UK Presidency.

India (Port Development)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received regarding the proposed port development by P & O at Vadhavan in Dahanu Taluka, India. [19918]

Clare Short: The Department of Trade and Industry takes the lead on this question. The Department for International Development and other Government Departments have received a number of letters on this subject.

DEFENCE

Cadet Forces

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sum his Department has spent on supporting combined cadet forces in schools in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97, broken down between (i) private schools and (ii) state schools. [19737]

Mr. Reid: The Ministry of Defence has allocated the following sums to schools in support of the Combined Cadet Forces. The figures are in £million at current prices.

1994–95: 6.6

1995–96: 6.2

1996–97: 5.8.

I regret that my Department keeps no separate records detailing the overall costs attributable to individual schools, whatever their category. This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

HMS Caroline

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Royal Navy has for the future use of HMS Caroline; and if he will assess the advantages of converting it to a museum. [19560]

Mr. Spellar: HMS Caroline will continue in use as the RN Reserve Training Centre (RTC) for the Belfast area for the foreseeable future. Consideration would be given to moving the Centre to a shore-based site if suitable accommodation could be identified, and if the requisite funding could be made available. The Ministry of Defence has no plans to assess the advantages of converting Caroline into a Museum.

Resource-based Accounting

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the impact on his Department's budget of the introduction of resource-based accounting; and if he will make a statement. [19839]

Dr. Reid: When fully implemented, resource accounting will provide visibility of the full costs of all resources consumed. This will enable better informed management and decision taking throughout the department.

PRIME MINISTER

Hospitality

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister what sums he has spent on hospitality for representatives of business at No. 10 Downing Street since 1 May. [19101]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 5 December, *Official Report*, columns *376–77*.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the mechanism by which the security services are able to make representations to him about his proposed ministerial appointments. [18919]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* No representations are made to me by the Security Services about proposed Ministerial appointments. Advice is available to me when relevant.

BSE

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of an inquiry into BSE. [19909]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will make a statement shortly.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Transsexuals

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the current arrangements for the *(a)* police, *(b)* courts and *(c)* prison service in respect of transsexuals; what plans he has to review these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [19730]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: *(a)* The Association of Chief Police Officers suggested to forces in 1995 that a transsexual prisoner be asked to state a preference for the gender of the searching officer and to sign the custody record in confirmation. In the event of a lack of co-operation, the custody officer would treat the prisoner as being of the sex under which they were documented and living their lives. Best practice guidance for dealing with transsexuals is being drawn up and will be issued to forces.

(b) The Court Service has no special arrangements in respect of transsexuals. Where appropriate, the police and prison service escort service address any special accommodation requirements of which they may be notified. There are no plans to review this arrangement.

(c) The Prison Service decides where to locate and how best to care for transsexual prisoners on a case by case basis, taking account of such factors as their sex in law, their most obvious physical characteristics and their ability or otherwise to integrate with other prisoners. It is currently engaged in drawing up guidelines for issue to establishments on the care, management and treatment of prisoners with gender dysphoria.

Under-age Drinking

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to combat under-age drinking. [19842]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a Question from my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on 16 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *173*, and to the letter which I sent to all hon. Members on 17 July.

Firearms

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the differences between the Draft Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1997 Compensation Scheme laid before the House on 27 November 1997 and the ex gratia scheme under Schedule 1, Paragraph 10 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [19598]

Mr. Michael: The Government have given assurances that those who chose to surrender their small-calibre pistols voluntarily under the present ex-gratia scheme would not be disadvantaged compared to claimants under a future statutory scheme, and so the two schemes are identical as regards the range and values of firearms and ancillary equipment covered. There are some minor textual changes to the claims handling procedures described in the new draft scheme to reflect practice in the Firearms Compensation Section, and three items have been added to the list of ancillary equipment qualifying for compensation at Annex B of the scheme: speedloaders, speedloader pouches and spare parts held by registered dealers. While these items were not included explicitly under the previous published scheme, compensation has been paid for them on an exceptional basis.

Czech and Slovak Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to answer the question of the hon. Member for Hertsmere of 20 November on asylum seekers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. [19752]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I replied to the Question on 5 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *361–62*.

Prisoners (Drugs)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many random drugs tests in United Kingdom prisons proved positive; and how many prisoners found positive were subsequently charged with a criminal offence as a result of the test in the most recent year for which figures are available. [18991]

Mr. George Howarth: The number of random drug tests on prisoners which proved positive in England and Wales in 1996–97 was 13,797.

The use of illicit drugs is not a criminal offence as such. Consequently, there is no central record kept of prisoners who may have been charged with a criminal offence following a drug test.

A prisoner whose drug test is positive will generally be charged with a disciplinary offence under Prison Rules. Data held centrally do not separate charges concerning random mandatory drug tests from charges following positive results from the other aspects of the mandatory drug testing programme. In 1996–97, there were 21,588 mandatory drug tests in total which were positive. Disciplinary proceedings under Prison Rule 47 or Young Offender Institution Rule 50, "administering a controlled drug or failing to prevent its administration", followed in 16,757 cases.

Handcuffs

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued in relation to the use of rigid handcuffs; and under what circumstances they permit police officers to use such handcuffs. [18990]

Mr. Michael: A Home Office circular to chief police officers containing guidance about the use of handcuffs was withdrawn on 23 January 1997. This was replaced by guidance issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) which reflects the provision in section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 that a person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime, or in effecting or assisting in the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected offenders. I am placing a copy of the ACPO guidance in the Library.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each of the last four years the metropolitan police has invited representatives of the media to be present at the scene of *(a)* a raid and *(b)* an arrest. [19048]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The Commissioner informs me that the information requested on the number of occasions the Metropolitan Police has invited the media to be present at the scene of a raid or an arrest is not readily available and could be only obtained at disproportionate cost.

He tells me that on occasions when Metropolitan Police operations are a matter of public interest the media may be invited to accompany the police on raids. On some of these occasions, arrests may take place. The Commissioner says that if the Metropolitan Police decides to invite the media to attend, their involvement is strictly controlled and carefully planned.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Wiltshire Constabulary were asked to collaborate with the Metropolitan Police in the raid on the Rectory at Donhead St. Andrews on 21 November. [19050]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The Chief Constable of Wiltshire Constabulary informs me that Wiltshire Constabulary were requested to participate in the inquiry on 13 October 1997. The request came from Sussex Police.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the media representatives who were invited by *(a)* the Wiltshire Constabulary and *(b)* the Metropolitan Police to be present at the police raid on the Rectory at Donhead St. Andrews on 21 November. [19049]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* I am told by the Chief Constable of Wiltshire Constabulary and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police that no representatives of the media were invited to be present at the raid on the Rectory at Donhead St. Andrews on 21 November.

Police Officers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the total numbers of police officers required; and if he will make a statement. [19270]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* Ministers have no direct control over police numbers. Under legislation passed by the previous Government in 1994, it is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in their force. We are already working with the police to reduce administrative burdens and to enable chief constables to put more officers on the streets.

My right hon. Friend announced on 2 December that the spending power of the police in England and Wales next year can increase by £258 million, or 3.7 per cent. over 1997–98. The provisional settlement includes an additional £40 million of police grant in 1998–99. This sum is to ensure that police authorities have funds available which would allow them to increase spending on meeting the key objectives for the police in 1998–99. This could include the recruitment of additional police officers if the chief constable considers that this is the most beneficial way of delivering the objectives.

Speed Camera Detectors

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to prohibit the sale of speed camera detectors; and if he will make a statement. [19467]

Mr. Michael: The use of such detector devices without a licence is already an offence under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 and successful prosecutions have been taken out by the police against motorists who have used them. This Department has carried out tests which showed such devices to be largely unreliable and ineffective. We have no plans to create a new offence but we have asked the Association of Chief Police Officers Traffic Committee to keep us informed of any significant increase in the use of these devices and of any difficulties which forces experience. In addition, where an advertisement for such a device is brought to this Department's attention we lodge the papers with the Advertising Standards Authority so that the Authority can ensure that the advertising copy makes the legal position clear.

Intrusive Surveillance

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the leaflet "The Police Act 1997, Complaints About the Use of Intrusive Surveillance"; and if he will make a statement. [19284]

Mr. Michael: The leaflet will provide guidance to members of the public and their representatives regarding the mechanism for complaints about intrusive surveillance operations authorised under Part III of the Police Act 1997. It will be published when the provisions of Part III are implemented next year.

TREASURY

National Register

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to charge Departments for the value of their assets recorded on the National Register. [18194]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* Departments, and parts of Departments, which are trading funds already incur a charge for their fixed assets; this forms part of the full cost of services provided which they are obliged to recover from income. As part of the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting, all

fixed assets on all departmental balance sheets will be subject to a capital charge. This will affect departmental budgets from 2001–02 when the system is fully implemented. I shall make a further statement on the Government's plans under resource accounting and budgeting in due course.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many car park spaces are provided for his Department's *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* employees and *(c)* visitors in (i) London and (ii) the United Kingdom. [19363]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* There are six parking spaces allocated to Ministers, and 46 available to Treasury staff and visitors in London. There are no other parking facilities outside London.

Banks and Building Societies

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many bank and building society branches in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland were open in each year between 1979 and 1996; [19723]

(2) if she will list the number of open banks and building society branches in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland, together with the number and percentage rate of closed branches, broken down into the smallest available geographical areas, in each year between 1989 and 1996; [19724]

(3) how many bank and building society branches in Northern Ireland were open in each year between 1979 and 1996; [19721]

(4) if he will list the number of open bank and building society branches in Northern Ireland, together with the number and percentage rate of closed branches, broken down into the smallest available areas, in each year between 1989 and 1996. [19722]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury does not have this information.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the amount of windfall gains from the demutualisation of building societies that will be spent in the current and forthcoming financial years; and how this differs from his estimate at the time of the July budget. [19702]

Mrs. Liddell: Estimates of spending out of windfall gains are set out in the box on "Windfall Payments" in Appendix A of the November 1997 Pre-Budget Report (Cm 3804, page 75).

Insurance

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the inability of travel agents to value-shift between holiday and insurance products. [19661]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received a number of such representations but all the evidence suggests that value shifting between holiday and insurance is widespread in the travel industry, as reflected by respective profit margins applied to these products.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the tax gain resulting from the higher insurance premium tax rate; and what are the reasons for the change in his previous estimate of £70 million. [19663]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest estimate of the overall tax gain from applying the higher rate of insurance premium tax to travel insurance is £60 million. This revision from the earlier estimate of £70 million took place prior to the introduction of this measure and reflected a reassessment of the share of the UK travel insurance market enjoyed by travel agents and tour operators.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has received showing that the lower rate of insurance premium tax is being used as a marketing promotion by those insurance retailers who compete with travel agents levied at the higher rate. [19665]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received a number of examples of advertising literature on travel insurance, some of which mention the higher rate of insurance premium tax charged by travel agents.

Veterinary Fees

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was received from value added tax levied on fees charged by veterinary surgeons in the last financial year for which figures are available; and how much was received from VAT on medicines sold by veterinary surgeries; and if he will reduce the level. [18932]

Dawn Primarolo: In the year to 31 March 1997, £80 million net VAT was received from veterinary practices. Figures are not separately available for VAT on veterinary surgeons' fees and medicines sold by veterinary surgeries, as veterinary practices are not required to show these amounts separately on their VAT returns. The Government have no plans to reduce the level of VAT on such supplies. However, there is already a VAT zero rate on veterinary medicines where they are supplied to animal welfare charities that provide treatment to sick animals.

VAT (Domiciliary Care)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding VAT on domiciliary care services. [19160]

Dawn Primarolo: The policy on the VAT treatment of domiciliary care services depends upon their nature. Where those services constitute medical care or welfare they are exempt from VAT. Domestic services such as laundry, cleaning, etc. do not qualify for VAT relief under any exemption. However, many of these are provided by people below the threshold for VAT and are tax free.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what calculations he has made of the total unfunded pension liabilities of the member states of the European Community; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of that liability within EMU on interest rates to the year 2025. [18987]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury has made no independent calculations of other Member States' unfunded pension liabilities. Estimates and projections of pension expenditure by Member States are available in "Public pension expenditure prospects in the European Union; A survey of national projections" published by the European Commission in European Economy No. 3 1996. Pension liabilities are unlikely to have a major impact on interest rates, given the rigorous constraints imposed by the Stability Pact on public borrowing.

Government Assets

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he has given on the arrangements for determining which assets listed in the register of Government assets are surplus to requirements. [18651]

Mr. Darling: It is for each individual Department, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, to review its asset holdings as set out in the National Asset Register and decide whether they meet the Department's aims and objectives. If they do not, it is for Departments to decide the appropriate course of action in each case. The measures I announced on 24 November will give Departments the right incentives to do this.

Statistical Surveys

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* the Family Expenditure Survey, *(b)* the Family Resources Survey, *(c)* the British Household Panel Survey, *(d)* the New Earnings Survey, *(e)* the General Household Survey and *(f)* the Social Attitudes Survey include samples from the area north and west of a line from Fort William to Inverness; if these surveys can be disaggregated to a Scottish level; and if he will increase the sample size of these surveys so that accurate statistics be produced for Scotland. [19154]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. John Swinney, dated 9 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question on the sampling arrangements for various surveys and the disaggregation of survey analyses to a Scottish level.

As regards the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) and the General Household Survey (GHS), samples include the mainland part of Scotland north of the Caledonian Canal (i.e. line from Fort William to Inverness) but do not include the islands.

The samples are designed to be representative of Scotland, minus the islands, and some analyses from these surveys are produced for Scotland. However, the sample sizes are not large enough to produce reliably all the analyses available for Great Britain.

The New Earnings Survey (NES) is a 1% sample of employees in Great Britain who are members of pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) income tax schemes. The sample includes employees north of the Caledonian Canal. Results from the NES can be disaggregated to unitary authority level in Scotland.

The Family Resources Survey (FRS) is sponsored by the Department of Social Security. It does not include samples from the area north of the Caledonian Canal due to the disproportionate fieldwork costs in this area. Some analyses are (can be) produced for the population of Scotland south of the Caledonian Canal but the sample sizes are not large enough for all the analyses that are available for Great Britain. The information on this survey was provided by a statistician from the Government Statistical Service within the Department of Social Security.

ONS co-ordinates the user requirements for a number of nation-wide surveys—including the FES, GHS and NES—in consultation with other government departments including the Scottish Office. Departmental requests for increases in the sample sizes of these surveys in particular areas, and their source of funding, are considered along with all other requests for information from the surveys. There are no plans to increase the sample size of the FRS in Scotland.

Information regarding the British Household Panel Survey can be obtained from Nick Buck (01206 873 066) at the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change at the University of Essex.

Information regarding the Social Attitudes Survey can be obtained from Alison Park (0171 250 1866) at Social and Community Planning Research.

Devolution

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements will be made for determining changes to the budgets of the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales under devolution; and if he will make a statement. [20062]

Mr. Darling: The Government set out their position on the funding of the budgets for the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales in the White Papers published in July (Cm 3658 and Cm 3718). The key to these arrangements is block budgets which the devolved Administrations, like the Secretaries of State now, will be free to deploy between the functions under their control in response to local priorities. Changes in these block budgets will be linked to changes in equivalent English spending plans by the Barnett formula which gives Scotland and Wales a population-based share of planned changes in comparable spending in England.

In order to help inform debate about these arrangements during the passage of the Scotland and Wales Bills, the Government published yesterday a statement of the principles which govern the existing block/formula arrangements and which will continue to do so under devolution. A copy of the statement is appended. Copies were placed yesterday in the Libraries of both Houses and referred to by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales when he opened the Second Reading debate on the Government of Wales Bill.

Although the block and formula arrangements have operated for nearly 20 years, this is the first time that these principles have been spelt out in public.

PRINCIPLES TO GOVERN DETERMINATION OF THE BLOCK BUDGETS FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

1. The Government set out its position on the Block and formula arrangements in its White Papers on Scottish and Welsh devolution published in July (Cm 3658 and Cm 3718 respectively). The Scottish White Paper, *Scotland's Parliament*, said:

> "In practice these arrangements, based on the Block and formula, have produced fair settlements for Scotland in annual public expenditure rounds and have allowed the Secretary of State for Scotland to determine his spending decisions in accordance with Scottish needs and priorities. They have largely removed the need for annual negotiation between the Scottish Office and the Treasury. The Government have therefore concluded that the financial

framework for the Scottish Parliament should be based on these existing arrangements with, in future, the Scottish Parliament determining Scottish spending priorities."

The Wales White Paper, *A Voice for Wales*, said:

"The Government proposes that the financial arrangements for the Assembly will largely replicate the existing system.

Annual changes to the Welsh Block will be calculated by the population-based formula used at the moment. These arrangements based on the Block and formula have worked in practice, producing fair settlements for Wales in annual public expenditure rounds."

2. The Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales will therefore have block budgets, which they will be free to allocate in response to local priorities among the functions under their control and for which they will be accountable to local people. This note outlines the principles set out in the White Papers and describes how they will govern changes made to these block budgets under devolution.

Setting Scotland's and Wales' shares of UK public expenditure: the "Barnett" formula

Existing position

3. All UK tax revenues are pooled. Decisions about the allocation of UK public expenditure are made in the light of the Government's judgement of relative priorities and relative needs. Changes to the shares of public expenditure available to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales are determined by a formula linked to changes in provision for equivalent spending programmes in England.

4. This formula, which has operated for almost 20 years, is known as the "Barnett" formula. It provides that, in settling new plans for public expenditure, Scotland and Wales should receive a share of the planned cash changes in provision for equivalent public services in England which is proportionate to their population. In other words, Scotland's and Wales' shares of changes in relevant planned spending in England are the same proportions as their populations represent of England's population. The formula applies only to changes in spending plans, not to the underlying baselines which remain unaffected. The formula also applies only to changes in the block budgets: expenditure in Scotland and Wales, and expenditure on nationalised industries in Scotland, is outside the block budgets at present and is settled separately.

After devolution

5. These arrangements will continue under devolution, with only minor adjustments. Changes to the block budgets for which the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales will become responsible will continue to be determined by a formula linked to changes in provision for the equivalent spending programmes in England. The formula will continue to be based on relative populations. The spending for which the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales will assume responsibility is set out in the annexes to this note.

6. The Government intends that these population shares will be re-calculated annually on the basis of the latest population estimates for England, Scotland and Wales published each year by the Office of National Statistics. The population ratios will next be updated for the purpose of determining changes in the Scottish and Welsh block budgets for 1999–2000.

7. The Government intends that this population-based formula will apply to changes in almost all the expenditure under the control of the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. It will not apply to changes in agriculture programmes 100 per cent. funded by the EU. The Government will also want to consider whether this approach or another formula is appropriate in relation to provision for Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit which will both come within the Scottish Block for the first time after devolution; Housing Benefit is already within the Welsh Block, but, as in Scotland, Council Tax Benefit will come within the Block for the first time.

Adjustments to the Scottish and Welsh block budgets not determined by the Barnett formula

8. There are a number of circumstances in which the block budgets under the control of the Secretary of State for Scotland and Wales are open to adjustment other than on the basis of the Barnett formula. These exceptions will continue to apply under devolution. Adjustments may be made where:

(a) the UK Government decides to make a uniform general adjustment to public expenditure programmes;

(b) action taken by the Scottish or Welsh administrations in a devolved area has knock-on costs for the UK Government or vice versa. The block budgets may be adjusted downwards to compensate for costs incurred by the UK Government as a result of the action of the devolved administrations, or upwards to compensate the devolved administrations for costs which they incur as a result of actions by the UK Government and are not allowed for through the operation of the Barnett formula. The block budgets will not however be adjusted upwards by reason of additional costs incurred as a result of actions by the UK Government which the UK Government is expecting English departments with parallel responsibilities to absorb within existing spending plans;

(c) the devolved administrations receive capital receipts as a result of a privatisation or major change in the role of the public sectors in Scotland or Wales. In these circumstances, the block budgets may be adjusted downwards in the year in which the receipts occur to reflect the continuing interest in these receipts of UK taxpayers as a whole who financed the underlying capital assets in the past. Proceeds from the sales of other capital assets under the control of the Scottish Parliament or National Assembly for Wales will be available to be re-cycled within Scotland or Wales;

(d) the devolved administrations receive significant trading surpluses from the commercial exploitation of publicly funded assets: the Uk Government may take these surpluses into account in settling block budgets;

(e) local authority self-financed expenditure grows more rapidly than equivalent expenditure in England over a period and in such a way as to threaten targets set for public expenditure as part of the management of the UK economy. In such circumstances it will be open to the UK Government to take the excess into account in considering the level of the block budgets.

9. These principles concern the determination of changes to the block budgets under the control of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales, not the level of Westminster grant to support these budgets. The latter may also be affected by changes in the level of self-financed items of expenditure—local authority capital expenditure funded by borrowing, for example—which currently count towards the block Budgets.

In-year changes to the block budgets for Scotland and Wales

10. The arrangements outlined above apply to changes in the plans for expenditure in future years in Scotland and Wales. These paragraphs deal with changes in-year to the budgets arrived at under the arrangements outlined above and in particular with access to the UK Reserve for the devolved Scottish and Welsh administrations.

11. The general presumption, as at present, is that the Scottish and Welsh administrations will contain in-year pressures on their budgets by re-allocating priorities within their Blocks, not through access to the UK Reserve. Access to the Reserve may however be considered at the discretion of the UK Government in exceptional circumstances and specifically where:

(a) the Government is making available additional provision in-year for equivalent services in England in order to cope with exceptional circumstances affecting the UK as a whole unforeseen at the time spending plans for the year concerned were settled; and

(b) Scotland or Wales face exceptional and unforeseen domestic costs—arising, for example, from a natural disaster—which cannot be reasonably absorbed within the planned block budgets without major dislocation to existing services.

Revising these principles

12. As noted above, the formula will be updated annually to take account of population changes and from time to time to take account of other technical changes. Any more substantial revision would need to be preceded by an in-depth study of relative spending requirements and would be the subject of full consultation between the devolved administrations and the UK Government.

Spending programmes forming part of the Scottish Block

Domestic agriculture, fisheries and food (after devolution)

Forestry (after devolution)

Industry, enterprise and training

Roads and transport

Housing

Other environmental services

Law, order and protective services

Education

Arts and libraries

Health

Social Work Services

Other public services

ESF

ERDF

Nationalised Industries (after devolution)

Council Tax Benefit (after devolution)

Local authority expenditure

Spending programmes forming part of the Welsh Block

Domestic Agriculture (after devolution)

Forestry (after devolution)

Health and Personal Social Services

Transport

Industry, Trade and Employment

Training (excluding ESF)

Education

Housing

Other Environmental Services

Arts and Libraries

Local Government

Central Administration

Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales

European Regional Development Fund

Council Tax Benefit (after devolution).

ECOFIN

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union held on 1 December. [19569]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 1 December. The Financial Secretary accompanied me.

The Council agreed a package of measures for tackling harmful tax competition in the EU. This comprises a Code of Conduct on Business Taxation, and agreement that the Commission should come forward with proposals on the taxation of savings by non-residents, and on interest and royalty payments between companies in different Member States.

The Council continued its discussion of economic co-ordination in Stage 3 of EMU, in the response to the remit from the Amsterdam European Council in June this year. No agreement was reached on what ECOFIN's report to the European Council should say about proposals for informal discussions of issues relating to Economic and Monetary Union. The European Council will consider this at Luxembourg on 12 and 13 December.

Agreement was reached on a common position on the FISCALIS programme (which facilitates administrative co-operation between the indirect tax authorities).

The Council noted the important economic and fiscal issues surrounding the development of electronic commerce.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism

Mr. Healey: To ask the Security of State for Culture, Media and Sport what job opportunities the tourism industry can offer as part of the New Deal programme. [17996]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) on 8 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *465–66*.

Sport and Schools

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many sportsmark award have been awarded in the past 12 months; [19478]

(2) how many gold star awards have been awarded since April 1997; [19479]

(3) if he will list those schools which have received sportsmark awards in the past 12 months, indicating the date of award. [19481]

Mr. Banks: The first round of Sportsmark and Sportsmark Gold awards were made in June this year. Three hundred and eighty-two schools achieved a Sportsmark award and a further 30 achieved a Sportsmark Gold. A full list of successful schools has today been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what actions he is taking arising from the audit of the in-service needs of teachers and schools undertaken by the National Coaching Foundation; [19483]

(2) what plans the National Coaching Foundation has to organise further training weeks for teachers and trainees, indicating the sports involved and the number of teachers participating. [19486]

Mr. Banks: The National Coaching Foundation (NCF) delivers the coaching for teachers programme on behalf of the English Sports Council (ESC). This is a four year programme. The second year of the programme will be run in spring-summer 1998.

There will be coaching for teachers weeks in every Sports Council region. Sports included in the programme are cricket, hockey, swimming, athletics, football, netball, rugby and tennis. Following the evaluation of the needs of teachers and schools conducted by the NCF during the pilot scheme, two new sports, badminton and volleyball, are to be introduced in 1998, as well as sports for people with disabilities including boccia.

About, 8,000 teachers took part last year and a similar number are expected to attend in 1998.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many hours of sporting opportunity per week are required to achieve a sportsmark. [19480]

Mr. Banks: In order to achieve a Sportsmark award schools should provide a minimum of two hours a week of timetable PE lessons for every pupil and a minimum of four hours a week of organised sport outside timetabled lessons for all interested students.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what has been the take-up of moneys from the Challenge Fund to assist school or club links; [19492]

(2) what steps he is taking to promote links between sporting clubs and schools. [19502]

Mr. Banks: One of the criteria for the Sportsmark award is for schools to develop links with a number of local sports clubs as a way of providing students with further opportunities outside school hours.

A £1 million Challenge Fund was made available in October 1996 to promote links between local schools and clubs or governing bodies of sport. Guidance was sent to all secondary schools and over 400 schools successfully applied and received financial support for local initiatives that established or strengthened the links between local schools and clubs.

The take-up of moneys in the first year of the scheme was around half a million pounds. A similar amount is budgeted for the 1997–98 academic year.

Sport (Participation)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for further regional conferences to generate interest in sports participation. [19489]

Mr. Banks: We are planning to hold a series of regional conferences in the new year.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how he is implementing the OFSTED survey's findings on the need for improved co-ordination of information to young people to help them towards independent adult sport participation. [19488]

Mr. Banks: The English Sports Council are currently working on proposals for a Community Sports Co-ordinators Initiative. The Co-ordinator would be based in a secondary school with the task of liaising and working closely with all the agencies and providers beyond the schools to ensure the best possible provision of physical education and sport for pupils at school and when they leave.

In addition, the Top Club initiative, developed by the Youth Sport Trust, the English Sports Council and the governing bodies of sport is designed to help clubs build a better future in sport for children of all ages through the governing bodies of sport. This initiative is currently being piloted.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Child Care

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amount of funding she will be allocating for child care centres in 1998–99; how many child care centres will be proposed for Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [18224]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* We will announce shortly the level of funding in 1998–99 for a planned expansion of high-quality pre-school education in Northern Ireland. The number of centres to be funded will be determined at local level by Education and Library Boards in consultation with local pre-school Education Advisory Groups and may include settings in the private, voluntary and statutory sectors.

Additional funding for out-of-school activities will begin in April 1999, but during 1998–99 details of the arrangements will be made known and applications sought from providers.

Fair Employment Legislation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she plans to implement the recommendations contained in the SACHR Review on Fair Employment legislation. [18591]

Mr. Worthington: The Government's consideration of the recommendations contained in the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights report on employment equality is well advanced. The Secretary of State has already indicated certain recommendations on which the Government propose to take action—clarification of the law on direct recruitment of the long-term unemployed and firmer powers against persistent discriminators. The Government will give a response to the full range of SACHR's proposals in a paper to be published early in the New Year. Decisions on foot of SACHR's recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible.

WALES

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the GDP per capita of *(a)* South West Wales and *(b)* North Wales as a percentage of the (i) United Kingdom and (ii) European Union averages. [19110]

Mr. Hain: The latest available information is shown in the following table.

Gross Domestic Product per head, 1994

	PPS[1] units (thousands)	Percentage of United Kingdom average	Percentage of European Union average
Dyfed (South West Wales)	11.9	72	71
Gwynedd and Clwyd (North Wales)	13.8	84	83

Source: Eurostat.
[1] Figures are given in PPS (purchasing power standard) units to cancel out differences in price levels between countries.

Breast Implants

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision there is within the National Health Service in Wales for women who suffer from ruptured silicone breast implants, to have them removed. [19287]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The removal of a ruptured silicone breast implant is a clinical matter for individual clinicians to address with their patients.

Agri-environment Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* name of, *(b)* employer of and *(c)* organisation being represented by each of the members of the Wales Agri-environment Steering Group. [19670]

Mr. Win Griffiths: There is no Steering Group for the new agri-environment scheme; my right hon. Friend will decide the form the scheme is to take.

The members of the Working Group which is advising us on the technical detail of the management prescriptions for each feature have been chosen for their personal expertise; they do not represent any organisation. They are as follows:

Name	*Employer*
Mr. D. Archer	Snowdonia National Park
Mr. J. D. Cowie	Welsh Office
Mr. H. Davies	The Forestry Authority
Mr. C. Gillmore	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr. G. E. Jones	Farming and Rural Conservation Agency
Ms C. Keenleyside	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr. Bob Merriman	Environment Agency
Ms R. Nowell-Phillips	Farmers Union Wales
Mr. B. Pawson	Countryside Council for Wales
Dr. S. Rees	Cadw
Mr. J. Salmon	Country Landowners Association (Wales)
Mr. M. Thomas	National Farmers Union (Wales)
Mr. N. Thomas	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Mr. J. Young	Welsh Office

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the planned budget of the All Wales Agri-environment Scheme in each of the next three years. [19671]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The allocation of funds for the new scheme is yet to be decided.

Less Favoured Areas

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of Objective 5B funding in the less-favoured areas of Wales in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 1996. [19919]

Mr. Hain: There is not direct relationship between less favoured area status and objective 5B funding, and records are not kept in the form requested.

Local Authority Spending

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the level of spending by local authorities in each year since 1991–92; and if he will indicate the annual percentage change in real terms. [19824]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is given in the following table.

Local authority expenditure in Wales[1]

	Net revenue expenditure (£ million) (Cash prices)	Annual percentage change in real terms (Constant 1997–98 prices)
1991–92	2,411.2	5.0
1992–93	2,577.1	2.6
1993–94	2,554.8	–3.7
1994–95	2,684.0	3.5
1995–96	2,862.9	3.8
1996–97[2]	2,969.6	0.9
1997–98[3]	3,005.0	—1.5

[1] Excluding expenditure funded by specific grants. For consistency, the figures shown for the years prior to 1995–96 have been adjusted to include police specific grants. Includes additional resources for community care for 1993–94 onwards. The annual changes in 1992–93 and 1993–94 were effected by the transfer of higher and further education colleges from the local authority sector on 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993.
[2] Provisional outturn.
[3] Budget.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will ensure during the United Kingdom presidency that implementation of United Nations Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is subject to annual review; [19676]

(2) what arrangements exist to monitor progress towards implementing the UN Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. [19681]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* Progress towards implementing the UN Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is monitored by the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, Bendt Lindqvist, whose work the Government support.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who will be involved in the review of the threshold exempting employers with fewer than 20 employees from the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [19678]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The review of the exemption provision includes a consultation exercise to gather views and evidence from a wide range of disability organisations, particularly those representing the interests of disabled people in employment or seeking employment, and employer organisations, especially those representing the interests of small firms, as well as individual disabled people and employers. The review will include meetings with interested parties.

The Government will consider the responses to the consultation carefully before deciding whether the threshold should be lowered to extend the Act's employment rights to more disabled employees and job applicants.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the time scale of the review of the 20 employee threshold in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [19677]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Section 7 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires that a review of the effects of the small employer exemption threshold must be completed within nine months. I announced such a review on 3 December 1997 and expect that it will be completed in the late Spring of 1998. Any change to the threshold has to be made within one year of the review commencing.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment whether he will ensure that research into the impact of European economic policy on disabled people is commissioned during the UK presidency. [19682]

Mr. Alan Howarth: DfEE officials have provided the European Commission with details of research undertaken across Government into disability issues. This information will be used by the Commission in conjunction with similar reports from the other member states to identify where there is a significant need for co-ordinated research at a European level. It is not yet possible to say which subjects, if any, the Commission will identify as suitable for this kind of treatment but no areas have been ruled out.

The Department has an extensive and continuing programme of disability research which addresses current priorities. The Department routinely publishes the results of the research it commissions in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

New Deal

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance New Deal participants aged over 25 years and unemployed for more than two years will receive during the period before their six month placement begins. [19180]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We are currently considering the detailed design of the new deal for people aged 25 years or over and unemployed for two years or more. We will make an announcement as soon as possible.

School Sport

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools are currently providing sports annual reports and prospectuses. [19482]

Ms Estelle Morris: All maintained schools are required to publish in their prospectus a statement indicating the aims of the governing body with respect to sport at their school and the provision made for sport. In its annual report to parents, the governing body must indicate the extent to which its aims were met and to give details of any notable sporting achievements by the school's teams. In our White Paper "Excellence in schools" we undertook to consult on the balance between requiring schools to include specific information and leaving more to their discretion.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers coaching at *(a)* primary school level have obtained NVQ 1 and *(b)* secondary level have obtained NVQ 2. [19484]

Ms Estelle Morris: This information is not collected by the Department.

Rushey Mead School, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much aid he plans to give to Rushey Mead School, Leicester, under the New Deal for Schools. [19177]

Mr. Byers: All LEAs will be entitled to bid, on behalf of the schools they maintain, for the £1 billion-worth of resources which remains to be allocated under the New Deal for Schools, in addition to the £83 million that has already been allocated in the first round of NDS. Bids will be considered on the same basis as in the first round; namely, cost-effectiveness, urgency, and how far they will raise educational standards.

If Rushey Mead School believes that it has a project that can be supported by NDS, I suggest that it discusses with Leicester City Council the possibility of including it in a future bid for NDS resources.

National Curriculum (Music)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will ensure that music is made part of the national curriculum. [19350]

Ms Estelle Morris: Music is a foundation subject in key stages 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum.

Development Education

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is his Department's estimate of the cost of providing relevant teaching materials for the integration of development issues into the national curriculum; [18941]

(2) what arrangements will be made to ensure that the development education material proposed by the White Paper "Eliminating World Poverty" will be presented in an objective manner; [18947]

(3) which Minister in his Department is responsible for integrating development issues into the national curriculum. [18948]

Ms Estelle Morris: I am responsible for the school curriculum, including the National Curriculum, and its assessment. There are already requirements and opportunities for pupils to study development issues through the National Curriculum, particularly in geography and history. The choice of materials to support the school curriculum is primarily a matter for individual schools. I understand, however, that the Department for International Development makes funds available to support organisations which produce materials to help schools address these issues.

There are legal safeguards against biased teaching in schools. Schools are required to ensure that pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views when they are taught about any political issue.

E-mail

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *441*, if he will list the e-mail addresses of *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* senior officials and *(c)* chief executives of agencies for which he is responsible. [15879]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 13 November 1997]:* The Department is planning to introduce a Department-wide Internet e-mail service by the end of this year. We will publish the information requested, on the Department's Internet home page, in the New Year, as soon as implementation of the new service has been completed.

Pupil Admission Appeals

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many appeals he has heard concerning pupil admissions to *(a)* GM primary schools; and *(b)* non-GM primary schools; and, in each case, how many time she has ruled that schools should accept additional pupils in classes in excess of 29 pupils. [19491]

Ms Estelle Morris: School admission appeals are heard by statutory independent appeal committees. The Secretary of State does, however, have a duty to consider any referral from a school directed under section 431 of the Education Act 1996 to accept a pupil. Since 1 May, he has only considered two primary school referrals, both from the same GM school. In each case the directions were issued by Essex LEA and resulted in a decision by the Secretary of State that the school should admit the pupil to a class in excess of 29.

Careers Service

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money was allocated to the Careers Service in London in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1994–95, *(e)* 1995–96 and *(f)* 1996–97; what sums have been allocated for (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [19373]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The former Employment Department, which became part of the Department for Education and Employment in July 1995, allocated money for the careers services in London as follows:

	£ million
1994–95	25.3
1995–96	26.2
1996–97	26.5
1997–98	25.8

Amounts for 1998–99 are not decided.

Until 1994 careers services were largely financed through the Department of the Environment's Revenue Support Grant. Separate budget allocations for careers service regions within this budget are not available.

Child Care

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to publish the National Strategy for Child Care. [19948]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We are currently developing the National Child Care Strategy which will help parents, especially women, to balance family and working life and will make an announcement in the first part of next year.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to vary the level of grant in aid to the Equal Opportunities Commission. [19987]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The grant in aid for the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1998–99 will be set out in the DfEE Departmental Report, to be published in the new year.

National Targets

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to update the national targets for education and training. [15144]

Mr. Blunkett: I will today announce the publication of a Consultation Document on the National Targets—"Targets for our Future", copies of which are being placed in the Library. The Government are inviting views on a number of new Targets which they believe better reflect their priorities and are more likely to generate the widespread commitment that is essential if we are to improve skills levels and be a competitive and inclusive nation.

Education and Work

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve the range and quality of opportunities for young people to link their education to work. [18478]

Mr. Blunkett: Today I shall be making a public announcement about investing in Young People, a strategy designed to tackle the problem of under-achievement, widen the range and improve the quality of education and training available to young people aged 14–18 and prepare them for the world of work. The strategy is aimed at making sure as many as

possible of our young people stay on in education and training after the age of 16, and that everyone in this age group achieves their full potential. As a Government we are committed to ensuring that all education and training for these young people provide the essential foundation for lifelong employability.

The measures which make up the investing in Young People strategy include:

I. All schools to set targets for raising attainment of qualifications at NVQ Level 2 at age 16.

II. Widening the range of vocational options and the work relevance of the curriculum for 14–16 year olds.

III. Introducing a single school leaving date at the end of June each year, so that no child should be able to leave school, in the year they become 16, until they have had a chance to sit for GCSE or other external examinations.

IV. Measures to help young people plan and manage their own learning—including a new National Record of Achievement.

V. The introduction of a Learning Card, promoting young people's entitlement to continue in learning post-16.

VI. Refocusing the Careers Service to target support and guidance on those who need it most.

VII. Developing a New Start strategy to re-engage disaffected young people from age 14 upwards in learning, where they have already dropped out or are in danger of doing so.

VIII. Legislating to ensure that all young employees—with the support of their employer—can undertake education and training up to NVQ Level 2.

IX. Introducing National Traineeships as a high-quality work-based route to NVQ level 2, building on the successful Modern Apprenticeships and including key skills.

X. Raising Standards by improving the quality of all post-16 provision: setting targets, identifying success, spreading good practice, and eliminating failure.

Schools, colleges TECs, careers services and the Youth Service all have a part to play in achieving our goals. But the involvement of employers is also essential. We want all employers to commit themselves to the training needs of all their young employees. If all our employers emulate the performance of the best, we will have the best-trained workforce in Europe.

A booklet accompanying the launch of the investing in Young People strategy is being widely distributed to partners throughout industry, education and training, and copies will be available in the Library.

Employment Zones

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made on introducing prototype employment zones; and if he will make a statement. [20116]

Mr. Andrew Smith: On 17 November, I received bids from local partnerships in the eight areas invited to put forward proposals for prototype Employment Zones. All were of a high standard and included innovative solutions to local problems.

I am pleased to announce that I have now decided to make funds available to the following five areas to develop prototype Employment Zones: Glasgow, Liverpool, North West Wales, Plymouth and South Teesside.

We will also be examining how best to carry forward the good work completed in the other three areas which submitted proposals.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potato Sprays

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has evaluated into the effect on wildlife of spraying potato crops with sulphuric acid. [19242]

Mr. Rooker: All pesticides are carefully evaluated and approval for marketing or use is given only if it is established that a given product can be used without unacceptable risks to people, wildlife and the wider environment.

The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides reviewed the approval of sulphuric acid in October and recommended that use could continue subject to specific restrictions.

Food Packaging

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of whether consumers have adequate information about food packaging which is potentially disruptive to endocrine systems. [19711]

Mr. Rooker: It is recognised by most scientists that evidence of the disruption to endocrine systems by chemicals which might migrate from packaging is not conclusive at present and that considerable further research is required before there is adequate information about effects and causes. The Government have an active programme of research and surveillance on the migration of chemicals from packaging including possible "endocrine disrupters". The results of this work are reported in the MAFF/DH "Food Safety Information Bulletin" together with advice from expert committees.

Irradiated Food

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of irradiated foodstuffs. [19791]

Mr. Rooker: The irradiation of food is permitted provided it has been irradiated in accordance with the Food (Control of Irradiation) Regulations 1990 and labelled in accordance with the Food Labelling Regulations 1996. The Government support the common position text of the proposed food irradiation Directive agreed by the Council of Ministers on 27 October 1997.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of diagnostic tests to detect food that has been irradiated. [19790]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has developed an extensive range of methods to detect irradiated foods. Of these, four have been published in the Department's series of reports on non-statutory validated methods and a

further six are currently in the process of being validated. Together, these cover all the categories of food that might be irradiated.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *619*, (1) when he expects to make a statement on his preferred option for the disposal of meat and bonemeal arising from the over-30-months scheme; [19820]

(2) further to his answer of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *619*, if he will make a statement on the options for disposal of animal carcases under the over-thirty-months scheme. [19845]

Mr. Rooker: The Government will announce their decisions on the various disposal options when a wide range of investigations and negotiations are complete. Good progress is being made and the Intervention Board will write this week to companies which bid for incineration under its integrated tender.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he has issued on the use or disposal of tallow produced from the render of animals under the over-30-months scheme. [19781]

Mr. Rooker: The majority of tallow produced under the over-30-months scheme (OTMS) is being stored pending a decision being taken on the disposal options. These are under active consideration. In the meantime, subject to the consent of the local authority, a small amount of OTMS tallow is being burned as fuel to power the rendering process.

Beef Assurance Scheme

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to ensure that markets and processors are notified of the details of the Beef Assurance Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [19846]

Dr. John Cunningham: Further to the answer given to the hon. Member on 19 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *229*, the organisations which received details of the Beef Assurance Scheme included the main trade organisations representing livestock auctioneers, meat wholesalers, meat manufacturers, butchers and producers of meat products, as well as consumers and other bodies.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Ivan Lewis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what decisions were taken at the EU Ministerial Council on Telecommunications on 1 December; and what matters were voted upon. [20240]

Mrs. Roche: I represented the UK at the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 1 December.

The Council reached unanimous agreement on a multi-annual programme to stimulate the establishment of the information society in Europe (Stimulis). There was political agreement to adoption shortly of a common position on a directive, amending directive 97/33/EC on interconnection in telecommunications, concerning number portability and carrier pre-selection. The Council also unanimously adopted, without discussion, a directive on the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the telecommunications sector. There was also a televised debate on internet issues.

Following European Commission presentations, the Council adopted conclusions on two Commission Communications: on the further development of mobile and wireless communications in Europe (universal mobile telecommunications system); and on digital signatures and encryption in electronic communication. The Commission also made oral presentations on a Communication on implementation by Member States of Community legislation in the telecommunications sector, and on the forthcoming Commission Green Paper on convergence in broadcasting, telecommunications and information technology. The Council took note of a progress report on negotiations on a draft directive on terminal equipment.

I raised the problem of the century date change for computer systems and presented a paper on the subject.

Insurance Companies

Gillian Merron: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to change the regulations made under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 regarding financial reporting by insurance companies. [20242]

Mrs. Beckett: Regulations have been laid before Parliament which make certain amendments to the Insurance Companies (Accounts and Statements) Regulations 1996 in the light of experience of the first year of implementation. These amendments are set out below.

The information which life insurance companies are required to submit in respect of the long term business in their annual returns has been extended to provide the regulator with the additional detail necessary to be satisfied that "with profits" life insurance policies are meeting the reasonable expectations of policyholders.

Two areas of disclosure have been removed from the scope of audit. Firstly, it was the intention under the previous Regulations that the inclusion of directors' certification on compliance with the money laundering guidelines within the scope of audit be optional, in recognition that in the normal course of business auditors are unlikely to be in a position to give an opinion on the reasonableness of this statement. The amendment clarifies this position. Secondly, it is important that the regulatory framework provide for independent audit assurance that directors' statements that their companies' practices are consistent with representations to policyholders have been reasonably made.

The formulation in the existing regulations for obtaining this independent assurance has not provided satisfactory in practice and has been removed pending further consultation with the audit profession on how to introduce a more effective provision for future years. The statutory requirements relating to certificates by directors remain unaffected by these changes to the scope of audit.

Some of the wording and forms in the Insurance Companies (Accounts and Statements) Regulations 1996 have been clarified without materially changing their meaning.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Watts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what decisions were taken at the EU Ministerial Council on the Internal Market on 27 November; and what matters were voted upon. [20241]

Mrs. Beckett: My Noble Friend the Minister for European Trade and Competitiveness represented the United Kingdom at the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 27 November.

The Council reached political agreement by qualified majority voting on proposals on legal protection of biotechnological inventions, on insurance groups, on the extension of the KAROLUS programme (for exchanges of Single Market enforcement officials).

Common positions were agreed by qualified majority on proposals on Action Robert Schuman, an initiative to improve the training and informing of the legal profession about European law; on a proposal on *in vitro* diagnostic medical devices; on a modification of Directive 83/189/EC, to extend to information society services its mechanism for Member States to notify draft technical measures to the Commission and other Member States; on amendment of the food additives Directive 95/2/EC; and on a proposal on coffee and chicory extracts.

The Council discussed the Single Market Action Plan, legislative simplification, including proposals for revising the INTRASTAT regulations, and the proposals on chocolate, the Commission's Green Paper on food law, the legal protection of designs, and the free movement of goods.

The Council also received presentations from the Commission on proposals on foodstuffs, bus and coach construction, reform of the Community customs transit system, the European Company Statute, product liability, and the Community patent system.

Correspondence

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton dated Tuesday 30 September regarding the Inntrepreneur Pub Company. [19733]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: A letter from the hon. Member about the Inntrepreneur Pub Company dated 13 August was received by my Department on 19 August. A reply was sent on 26 August. My Department has not received a further letter from that hon. Member on this matter since that date. On receiving the Parliamentary Question my Department telephoned the hon. Member's office to obtain a copy of the letter dated 30 September. I have since replied to that letter.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many claims for unfair dismissal have reached an industrial tribunal; and what were the outcomes and compensation paid for *(a)* employment tribunals, *(b)* the Insolvency Service, *(c)* Companies House, *(d)* the Patent Office, *(e)* the Radiocommunications Agency and *(f)* ACAS in each of the last two years. [19517]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In the past two years, one unfair dismissal case brought by an employee of the Government Agencies was heard by an industrial tribunal. The case involved Companies House. At the hearing on 16 June 1997, the tribunal ruled that the applicant was not unfairly dismissed.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what export controls her Department operates in respect of the export of mixed oxide fuel; [18495]

(2) what non-proliferation measures her Department undertakes in respect of the export of mixed oxide fuel; [18492]

(3) what assessment she has made of the compliance of United Kingdom *(a)* manufacture and *(b)* export of mixed oxide fuel with the United Kingdom's international obligations in respect of (i) export control and (ii) non-proliferation. [18497]

Mrs. Roche: The UK's export controls on nuclear and nuclear-related goods are derived from international nuclear non-proliferation commitments and membership of international nuclear export control regimes, in particular the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) whose members have agreed common guidelines for the transfer of nuclear and nuclear-related goods and technology.

These commitments are given effect in the relevant legislation, which in this case is Council Regulation (EC) No. 3381/94 on the export of dual use goods and the related Council Decision 94/942/CSFP as amended.

In accordance with the legislation, mixed oxide fuel (MOX) requires an export licence. Individual applications for licences for exports of MOX are considered on their merits, but before any licence is issued certain conditions have to be fulfilled. These include assurances from the recipient government:

- that the goods will not be used for any purpose that would result in any nuclear explosive device;
- that the goods will be placed under effective physical protection;
- that the transfer will only take place once the receiving State has brought into an agreement with the IAEA requiring the application of safeguards on all source and special fissionable materials in its current and future peaceful activities;
- that the goods would only be transferred to a third country if the recipient country had provided the same assurances as those required by the supplier for the original transfer.

Both the manufacture and export of MOX are entirely consistent with the UK's international obligations in the field of export control and non-proliferation. In addition to the controls on the export of MOX outlined above, all civil nuclear materials in the UK, including MOX, are subject to Euratom safeguards.

Inward Investment

Dr. Fox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry)of 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *281*, on the concordat on inward investments, when she expects the concordat to be published. [18150]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 3 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *255*.

Investment (United States)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current annual level of *(a)* US inward investment into the United Kingdom and *(b)* United Kingdom investment into the US; and if she will make a statement. [19736]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In 1995, the latest year for which figures are available, the United Kingdom's net inward direct investment from the US was £9.1 billion. The UK's net outward direct investment in the US was £10.4 billion.

Barclays Bank (Dispute)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will request ACAS to invite Barclays Bank and the unions representing Barclays' staff to use its conciliation services to help resolve the current dispute. [19813]

Mr. Ian McCartney: ACAS is an independent body and the Government cannot and should not direct it to act in any particular way. ACAS of course stands ready to assist but can become involved in talks only where both sides agree.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from *(a)* Barclays Bank, *(b)* BIFU, *(c)* UNIFI and *(d)* ACAS on the current dispute between Barclays Bank and its staff; and if she will make a statement. [19812]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department has received some representations from the Banking Insurance and Finance Union and UNIFI about this dispute. ACAS is an independent body and it does not make representations to Government about individual disputes.

Industrial disputes are matters for the parties concerned to resolve with the assistance of ACAS where both sides agree.

Horticultural Industry

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how the Government's proposals for a minimum wage will take account of piece work payments in the horticultural industry. [18592]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The National Minimum Wage Bill make provision for the hourly rate of remuneration of workers to be determined in regulations following consideration by the Low Pay Commission. The statutory minimum pay rates for agricultural workers, including those on piece work in the horticultural industry, will not be set at a level lower than the National Minimum Wage.

Temporary Workers

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the legal rights applicable to temporary workers who have been employed for less than two years. [19578]

Mr. Ian McCartney: All employees, whether temporary or not, have the same statutory rights, some of which depend on the length of service. Many employment rights apply as soon as an employee starts work, including protection against unlawful deductions from wages, against adverse treatment on grounds of sex, race, disability, trade union membership or non-membership or activities, or for taking specified types of action on health and safety grounds, and against dismissal for maternity-related reasons or for seeking to enforce statutory rights.

Invest in Britain Bureau

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many overseas offices the Invest in Britain Bureau has; and if she will indicate *(a)* the number of staff operating out of each office, *(b)* the location of each office and *(c)* the countries or regions covered by each office. [19253]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Invest in Britain Bureau has an overseas sales force of 57 in 17 FCO posts abroad carrying out full time inward investment promotion work, the majority of whom are FCO staff. In addition a further 34 staff give some of their time to inward investment promotion work.

Details are shown in the following table.

Invest in Britain Bureau: Location of inward investment offices in overseas posts

Country	*City*	*Number of staff*	*Country/region covered*
North America			
Canada	Toronto	4	
USA	Atlanta	2	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee
	Boston	2	Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island Vermont
	Chicago	5	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Wisconsin
	Houston	2	Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas
	Los Angeles	4	Arizona, California (part), Hawaii, Nevada (Clark County), Utah
	San Francisco	2	Alaska, California (part), Idaho, Montana, Nevada (South), Oregan, Washington, Wyoming

Invest in Britain Bureau: Location of inward investment offices in overseas posts

Country	*City*	*Number of staff*	*Country/region covered*
USA *(cont.)*	New York	10	Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington DC, West Virginia
	Total	31	
Europe			
France	Paris	1	
Germany	Dusseldorf	2	Northern Germany
	Munich	2	Southern Germany
	Total	5	
Asia-Pacific			
Australia	Sydney	1	
Hong Kong (Post)		1	Hong Kong
Hong Kong (Regional Office)		3	Asia Pacific region excluding Japan
Japan	Tokyo	4	Eastern Japan
	Osaka (including Nagoya)	4	Western Japan
Taiwan	Taipei	4	
Korea	Seoul	4	
	Total	21	

[1] A further 34 staff in overseas posts give some of their time to inward investment work.

Energy Policy

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her energy policy. [19709]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government's broad energy policy is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable energy. We are reviewing a number of specific policy areas, such as the regulation of utilities' support for renewables and clean coal technology, and how the issues of security of supply and fuel diversity should be addressed in considering applications for power station developments.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many section 36 applications for permission to build and use gas-fired power stations are awaiting decision; [16535]

(2) what factors led her Department to approve BP's application to build a gas-fired power station at Baglan Bay; how long it took her Department to determine the application; and what has been the average time applications have taken to be determined since 1 May. [16524]

(3) if she will estimate the coal production the new Baglan Bay gas station will displace. [16575]

Mrs. Beckett: No decision has yet been made on the proposed power station at Baglan Bay. Following the announcement by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry on Wednesday 3 December, this is one of the 28 applications on which we propose to defer a decision until the work on the review has been completed.

Incorporated Financial Accountant Qualification

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will review the list of qualifications under the European Communities Professional Qualification Regulation 1991 to assess the advantages of adding the incorporated financial accountant qualification. [14267]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Regulation lists professions which are regulated by statute, law, administrative provision or, under a special paragraph applying to the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, by virtue of membership of a chartered professional body. The list is reviewed regularly and updated when necessary. The Institute of Financial Accountants does not fall within the above categories.

Trade Unions

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on trade union recognition in the workplace. [18777]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government believes that employees should be free to belong, or not to belong, to trade unions and, where a majority of a relevant workforce vote for it in a ballot, unions should be recognised for collective bargaining purposes. My Department will be publishing a White Paper on fairness at work, and principally on union recognition, in the first part of next year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on participation in stakeholder pensions. [16732]

Mr. Denham: Stakeholder Pensions will be a new type of pension scheme which will provide simple, secure, flexible and value-for-money pension arrangements for many of those who do not have the opportunity to build a secure retirement income under the current system; they include many women, part-time workers, those on temporary contracts and many of the self-employed.

In developing and promoting Stakeholder Pensions, the Government sees a key role for new partnerships involving financial services organisations, employers, employees, trades unions and other affinity groups. The Stakeholder Pension consultation document seeks views on how a detailed framework may best be established which allows these partnerships to develop.

Benefits Legislation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultation will be undertaken with the

local communities, members of the public, voluntary organisations and charitable groups in respect of forthcoming legislation on social security benefits. [17889]

Mr. Field: Our manifesto set out our commitment to review and reform welfare in consultation and partnership with the people. We aim to modernise the structure and delivery of Social Security to encourage financial independence, while simultaneously promoting social cohesion and well-being; to develop an active welfare system which supports work, savings and honesty; and to help tackle effectively unjustifiable social and economic inequalities.

We want to encourage widespread debate throughout the country. For example, we have already completed the first part of the consultation exercise on the Pensions Review. Further consultation will follow in due course. We will also be publishing a Green Paper on Welfare Reform at the turn of the year which will set out the principles underlying the new directions for welfare in the 21st Century.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the annual savings to date arising from the termination of invalidity benefit and the introduction of incapacity benefit; and what proportion of those savings have been achieved by the removal of or reduction in benefit from those in receipt of invalidity benefit. [18654]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

	£ million
1995–96	280
1996–97	790

1. Figures are in 1996–97 prices.
2. It is not possible to identify separately savings attributable to removal or reduction in benefit from claimants previously in receipt of invalidity benefit.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of persons prosecuted in England and Wales for making a false declaration in respect of benefit claims for 1996. [19374]

Mr. Denham: The total number of persons prosecuted in England and Wales for making a false declaration in the calendar year 1996 amounted to 12,408. This figure includes all benefits administered by the Benefits Agency and excludes Housing Benefit which is administered by Local Authorities.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations the Minister for Women has made to the Department for Education and Employment about the grant in aid for the Equal Opportunities Commission. [19985]

Ms Ruddock: As Ministers for Women, both I and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, are routinely in contact with Department for Education and Employment Ministerial colleagues on a range of matters of mutual interest, including the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Women's Issues (Cabinet Sub-Committee)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the membership of the Cabinet sub-committee on women's issues. [19988]

Ms Ruddock: The information is as follows:

Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women—right hon. Harriet Harman MP (Chair);

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—right hon. Dr. Marjorie Mowlam MP;

Secretary of State for International Development—right hon. Clare Short MP;

Financial Secretary, Treasury—Dawn Primarolo MP;

Minister of State, Home Office—Joyce Quin MP;

Minister of State, Scottish Office—Henry McLeish MP;

Minister of State, Department of Health—Tessa Jowell MP;

Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment—right hon. Andrew Smith MP;

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions—Glenda Jackson MP and Angela Eagle MP;

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry—Barbara Roche MP;

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office—Win Griffiths MP;

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of Public Service—Peter Kilfoyle MP.

Lone Parents

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are being taken to ensure that the insecurity of employment does not act as a disincentive to work to those lone parents eligible for income support before 5 April 1998. [19847]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Independent research suggests that the average additional income for lone parents already in work and on Family Credit is over £50 a week above the estimate of their out-of-work income. Research also shows that lone parents want to work but face a number of barriers that prevent them from doing so. In particular, they need practical help with job-search, training and with finding and paying for childcare. The Government has provided all of this with the New Deal for Lone Parents and the National Childcare Strategy. This will help make the transition to work seem much more attractive to those lone parents who currently feel trapped in benefit dependency.

The Government has taken steps to preserve work incentives for lone parents who are already receiving Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance. Those who are receiving either of these benefits with the lone parent rate of family premium at 5 April 1998 will be able to claim the lone parent rate of Child Benefit after 31 May 1998 if they move off benefit into work.

Attendance and Disability Allowances

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people in Warrington, North constituency are currently in receipt of attendance allowance; [19592]

(2) how many people in *(a)* the North West Region and *(b)* Warrington, North constituency are currently in receipt of disability living allowance; [19591]

(3) what estimate she has made of the number of new claims for disability living allowance which are likely to be made over the next five years in *(a)* the North West Region and *(b)* Warrington, North constituency. [19590]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Helen Jones, dated 8 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking for details of the number of people in Warrington North constituency and North West region who are currently in receipt of Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

The number of customers in receipt of AA in the Warrington North constituency is approximately 1,900, as at 31 August 1997.

The number of customers in receipt of DLA in the Warrington North constituency is approximately 4,100 and in the North West region is approximately 229,600, as at 31 August 1997. The North West Region consists of Cumbria, Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire counties.

These figures have been extrapolated from a 5% sample in conjunction with postcode data.

The forecast for New Claims for DLA is not available.

I hope you find this helpful.

HEALTH

Emergency Hospital Admissions

13. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to cater for an increase in emergency hospital admissions this winter. [18242]

Mr. Boateng: We have provided an additional £269 million for the NHS in England in the current financial year. This is being used to ease pressures on the health and social care system during the winter, as well as to start rebuilding the NHS for the future.

Buckinghamshire Health Authority

18. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with Buckinghamshire health authority on its plans for achieving equity of funding across their area. [18247]

Mr. Milburn: Officials from Anglia and Oxford Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive have held discussions with Buckinghamshire Health Authority. The Health Authority recognise the need to target resources at the area of greatest need in the county. An exercise comprehensively to map current expenditure is near completion and any proposed redistribution of resources will begin in 1998/99.

Waiting Lists

19. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the numbers of patients who will have been waiting for more than 12 months for treatment in May 1998. [18248]

Mr. Milburn: The substantial extra resources we have made available for the NHS for this year and next should enable us to make a start on restraining the growth in waiting lists and times we inherited from the previous administration. The programme of action announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 18 November will ensure we have shorter waiting lists and times by the end of the present Parliament. For the short term our priority is to eliminate 18 month waits for admission to hospital by 31 March 1988.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce hospital waiting lists. [18241]

Mr. Milburn: On 18 November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a wide-ranging programme of action for reducing waiting lists.

We are determined that waiting lists will be shorter by the end of this Parliament.

Haemophilia

20. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the provision of recombinant factor VIII for the treatment of haemophilia sufferers. [18249]

Mr. Boateng: We take the same sound and fair approach to all treatments, namely that they should be clinically effective and based on sound evidence.

Concerns have been raised about access to this particular treatment. We are actively addressing them.

Private Health Insurance

21. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to address the additional burden placed on the National Health Service arising from elderly persons cancelling their private health insurance. [18250]

Mr. Boateng: In allocating resources to the National Health Service there is no account taken of the incidence of private medical insurance. Health authorities are charged with assessing the total health needs of their local population and do so based on clinical need and not ability to pay.

Nutrition Standards

22. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has for improving nutrition standards in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on health initiatives in this area. [18251]

Ms Jowell: Our new health strategy for England will be set out in a Green Paper and issued for consultation later this winter. The underlying principle is to improve the health of all the population and, especially, to improve the health of those who are worst off. We know that a healthy and balanced diet has an important part to play.

Improving nutritional standards in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and any associated health initiatives, are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Improving nutritional standards of school meals is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Expensive Drug Treatments

23. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the basis on which patients in different parts of the country are given access to expensive drug treatments. [18252]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper gives details of our plans to ensure that patients have access to the treatment they need, wherever they live.

Elderly People (Treatment Costs)

24. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates his Department has made of the cost of treating people over 60 years of age. [18253]

Mr. Boateng: Information is not collected centrally that would enable an estimate to be made of the costs of treating people aged 60–64. Treatment for people aged 65 and over, who make up about 16 per cent. of the population, accounts for about 40 per cent. of expenditure on hospital and community health services. Elderly people use a proportionately greater volume of services than those used by the rest of the adult population, primarily because their incidence of disease is higher, but also because their pace of recovery after illness may be somewhat slower. People aged 75 and over in particular show more complex patterns of health problems. They often have a combination of several conditions and these may be complicated by general frailty and social problems such as the recent death of a spouse or relatives living some distance away.

Telemedicine

25. **Ms Stuart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to increase the use of telemedicine in the National Health Service. [18254]

Ms Jowell: We are encouraging developments in telemedicine in the National Health Service. Telemedicine is a research priority within the Health Technology Assessment programme and several projects to assess its effects on the NHS will be announced shortly.

NHS (Co-operation)

26. **Mrs. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take to increase co-operation between purchasers and providers in the National Health Service. [18255]

31. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to overcome fragmentation between trusts and health authorities in the NHS. [18260]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper on the National Health Service sets out our plans to replace the fragmentation and competition of the internal market which we inherited with co-operation and a single National Health Service.

Annual Contracts

27. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he plans to make to the system of annual contracts in the national health service. [18256]

30. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he plans to make to the system of annual contracts in the NHS. [18259]

Mr. Milburn: The short-termism of the market which was characterised by annual contracting will be replaced by longer-term agreements.

NHS Trusts (Non-executive Directors)

28. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role and experience of non-executive directors of national health service trusts. [18257]

Mr. Milburn: Non-executive Directors come from a variety of different backgrounds and experience. What they are expected to share is a commitment to the aims of the National Health Service and to meeting the healthcare needs of their local community.

NHS Management and Finances

29. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the management and finances of *(a)* Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals Trust and *(b)* West Hertfordshire health authority. [18258]

Mr. Milburn: The health authority and trusts in West Hertfordshire face an underlying recurrent deficit of £12.5 million. A discussion document has been issued for local comment, prior to formal consultation in the spring, on options to restore financial balance within the next 2–3 years. The authority has been awarded an additional £9 million in 1998–99 of which £3 million is growth money.

The Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals National Health Service Trust is currently facing financial constraints but a financial recovery plan has been agreed with the NHS Executive, North Thames Regional Office to restore financial balance over the next 2–3 years.

NHS Best Practice

32. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to promote best practice throughout the NHS. [18261]

Mr. Milburn: "The New NHS" White Paper sets out a fresh approach to promoting best practice in the National Health Service.

Health at Work

33. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priorities for promoting health at work he intends to set NHS trusts. [18262]

Mr. Milburn: The Government attach very high priority to the occupational health and safety of National Health Service staff. Our priorities include stopping avoidable accidents, developing proper strategies for avoiding violence, and recognising the effect of occupational stress, addressing its causes and supporting staff accordingly. The Government have, through the

Health at Work in the NHS project, piloted work on organisational stress, developed networks for the exchange of best practice and produced guidance on risk assessment, and sickness absence management, and are working with the Health and Safety Executive to produce guidance on avoiding violence to staff.

Barnet Health Services

34. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the delivery of National Health Service services in the Borough of Barnet, with particular reference to the future of the Edgware Hospital site. [18263]

Mr. Milburn: Barnet Health Authority's review of local health services, which included services to be provided from the Edgware Hospital site, has just been concluded. The health authority will now consider the findings of the review.

Managers

35. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce the number of managers in the National Health Service. [18264]

Mr. Milburn: The Government are committed to maximising the proportion of National Health Service resources that are dedicated to patient care. We have no doubt that good management is essential to the effective running of the National Health Service. But we want to target unnecessary bureaucracy so that management effort is focused on improving health and health services. Our action to reduce management costs, including the changes announced in today's White Paper, will release £1 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament which will be ploughed back into direct patient care.

Private Finance Initiative

36. **Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress with the PFI hospital building programme. [18265]

Mr. Milburn: The prioritisation of major acute hospital Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes and the passing of the National Health Service (Private Finance) Act 1997 in July have resulted in financial close and start on site for the first two whole-hospital PFI schemes, at Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust (£115 million) and Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust (£87 million). The other 13 major acute PFI schemes that have been prioritised are scheduled to reach financial close by the end of 1998. We are also considering how PFI can usefully be extended into the non-acute and primary care fields.

Commissioning

37. **Ms Blears:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to involve patients in the new GP commissioning pilot projects. [18266]

Mr. Milburn: One of the selection criteria for the General Practitioner Commissioning Group pilots was that they should have plans to work closely with carers and patients in planning and commissioning services. Each GP Commissioning Group will need to explore locally how best to achieve this. The pilots are to be evaluated so that best practice can be identified and shared. Arrangements for involving patients will form part of the evaluation.

Long-term Care

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plan to establish a Royal Commission on the funding of long-term care, indicating its start date. [17942]

Mr. Boateng: Details of the Royal Commission on long-term care were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the House on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns 489–99.

Chitosan

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the Government's guidance ont he sale of the amino polysaccharide Chitosan as a slimming product; [18590]

(2) what clinical trials his Department has evaluated in respect of the *(a)* safety and *(b)* effectiveness of the amino polysaccharide sold as Chitosan for slimming purposes. [18588]

Ms Jowell: The sale of Chitosan is not controlled by the Foods Intended for Use of Energy Restricted Diets for Weight Reduction Regulations 1997. Chitosan is classed as a food product and as such it is covered by the general provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990, which provides that all foods shall be safe, of the quality intended and not misleadingly labelled.

The Department is not aware of any clinical trials of this product.

Aricept and Beta-interferon

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce national prescribing policies for *(a)* Aricept and *(b)*beta-interferon. [18599]

Mr. Milburn: We have no plans to introduce national prescribing policies specific to Aricept or beta-interferon. EL(94)72, issued in 1994, asked health authorities to set up Area Prescribing Committees to ensure the appropriateness of hospital-led prescribing and to develop authority-wide policies for the managed entry of new drugs such as Aircept and beta-interferon into the NHS. Copies of EL(94)72 are available in the Library.

The White Paper, published today, sets out plans for a National Institute for Clinical Excellence which advises the NHS on the clinical and cost effectiveness of treatments. Individual health authorities will then be able to make more informed judgments on the relative benefits of treatments.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the resistance of tuberculosis to drugs; and if he will make a statement. [18399]

Mr. Boateng: The Department has not directly commissioned any research into the resistance of tuberculosis to drugs. The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC supports a number of studies into tuberculosis and these take the form of both grants to Universities and research funded in its own Units and Institutes. In 1995–96, the MRC's spend on tuberculosis research was £1.5 million. However, little of this research addresses the issue of drug resistance *directly*; it is largely basic research which will underpin and inform future work in the area.

The Department and its expert advisers do keep under review the results of studies in this field.

The Public Health Laboratory Service, together with similar organisations throughout the United Kingdom, has heightened its surveillance of drug resistance in tuberculosis. An Expert Working Group has been set up under the Interdepartmental Working Group on Tuberculosis to make recommendations for the prevention and control of tuberculosis in immunocompromised patients and of drug resistant tuberculosis. Consultation on its draft guidance has been completed and the final report is expected to be issued shortly.

Internal Market

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the savings across the NHS from ending the internal market; how this money will be redistributed; and over what time scale. [19685]

Mr. Milburn: The action the Government are taking to abolish the internal market and reduce bureaucracy, including the changes announced in the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807), which has been published today, will reduce the amount spent on management costs by £1 billion over the lifetime of the Parliament. Savings will be re-invested in direct patient care.

Locality Commissioning

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the terms of reference of *(a)* the Audit Commission and *(b)* other bodies involved in the process of replacing the internal market system in the National Health Service with a system of locality commissioning. [19684]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807) published earlier today sets out the new roles and responsibilities of health authorities, National Health Service trusts, Primary Care Groups and other bodies in securing quicker, better treatment and care for patients.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incentives the Government intends to give general practitioners to participate in locality commissioning projects. [19683]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807), which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House today, sets out the Government's plans for Primary Care Groups which will bring together general practitioners and community nurses to commission services.

The new arrangements will offer them the opportunity to shape services for their patients. They will have available their population's share of the local resources for hospital and community services, prescribing and the general practice infrastructure, and will have the opportunity to deploy resources and savings to strengthen local services and ensure that patterns of care best reflect their patients' needs. Further details are contained in the White Paper.

Local Health Care

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he intends to make to the role of NHS trusts in respect of the delivery of local health care. [18239]

Mr. Milburn: As set out in the White Paper "The New NHS" (Cm 3807), there will be a new focus on quality in National Health Service trusts.

They will no longer compete, but work in partnership with other local bodies to provide the best health care possible for local needs.

Ayaz Sheikh

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the case of Ayaz Sheikh of Thorpewell, Leicester; and what representations he has received from hon. Members on this case. [19947]

Mr. Boateng: We are aware of this case which is a matter for Leicestershire Health Authority. My hon. Friend wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about this case on 28 October 1997 and my noble Friend the Minister of State replied on 25 November 1997.

We have asked the Chairman of Leicestershire Health Authority, Mr. Neil Townsend, to write to my hon. Friend setting out the latest position as soon as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 December 1997

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Employment Trading Schemes

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals there are to exempt local employment trading schemes from benefit calculations undertaken by local government. [18930]

Mr. Raynsford: Local government does not undertake any benefit calculations on behalf of my Department. For information on benefit calculations undertaken on behalf of the Department for Social Security, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham).

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on planning regulations in respect of the building of telecommunication masts in the countryside. [19331]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning regulations governing the building of telecommunications masts in the countryside are found in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. This grants a general planning permission for certain telecommunications masts providing

- the mast is erected by a telecommunications code system operator licensed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under the Telecommunications Act 1984;
- the mast does not exceed 15 metres in height;
- the mast is not erected in a National Park, area of outstanding natural beauty, conservation area, or the Broads; and
- the mast is not refused prior approval by the local planning authority within the period allowed under the Order. The authority must be given the opportunity to say whether they wish to approve, within 28 days, details of the mast's siting and appearance. The authority may refuse approval if they consider there to be a serious threat to amenity.

A full application for planning permission is normally required for any mast which does not meet these criteria.

Road Deaths (A38 Cornwall)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many fatalities have occurred as a result of accidents on the A38 in Cornwall in each of the last 10 years. [19250]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The numbers of fatalities on the A38 in Cornwall in the past ten years are as follows:

Total number of fatalities on A38 Cornwall: 1987–1996

Year	*Number of fatalities*
1987	1
1988	3
1989	5
1990	6
1991	2
1992	3
1993	0
1994	4
1995	3
1996	6

Advisers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19302]

Dr. Strang: There are six paid special advisers in DETR. Two of these are employed on a part time basis each working for half of the week. Prior to 1 May, there were four special advisers in the Department of the Environment and one in the Department of Transport. Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

DETR sponsors eight task forces and review panels. The members of these bodies are drawn from bodies including local authorities. The voluntary sector, industry, green bodies and academics. Some members are unpaid or are paid expenses only. Where members are paid their fees are negotiated individually and remain confidential. Information on the membership of task forces and review panels prior to 1 May is not held centrally.

Local Government (Political Activity)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many local government posts are subject to regulations on political activity; and how many officials have been disciplined under these regulations in each of the last three years. [19256]

Mr. Raynsford: I understand that about 47,000 local government posts in England and Wales are politically restricted under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Information on the number of officials who have been disciplined under these regulations is not held centrally.

National Parks

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account is taken of PPG Note 22 in determining applications for visible power generation in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. [19564]

Mr. Raynsford: Local planning authorities are expected to have regard to relevant published statements of national planning policy, including Planning Policy Guidance notes, in the exercise of their planning functions. PPG22 states that in assessing proposals in designated areas there is a need to take full account of the specific features or qualities which justified designation.

London Underground

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on current expenditure on the modernisation of the London underground service; and if he will list the current modernisation projects. [19810]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Transport expect to invest some £324 million in the Underground network in 1997–98 (excluding investment in the Jubilee Line Extension and in Private Finance Initiative projects). We are looking urgently at public-private partnerships for the Underground in order to increase this level of investment substantially and to create a modern, reliable Underground system.

Among the larger projects completed or in progress this year are the installation of a new signalling and control system on the Central Line, the refurbishment of the East London Line, the modernisation of stations at the southern end of the Northern Line (including Tooting Bec and Tooting Broadway) and investment in new trains for the Northern Line under a PFI contract with GEC-Alsthom.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the standard spending assessment per head of population for each English shire county in ascending order *(a)* for 1996–97 and *(b)* under the draft 1998–99 settlement. [19944]

Mr. Raynsford: The figures for shire counties are shown in the tables enclosed. Note that the provisional 1998–99 and settlement 1996–97 Standard Spending Assessment figures are not comparable owing to changes in local government responsibility and local government reorganisation affecting Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Dorset, Durham, East Sussex, Hampshire, Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Wiltshire in 1997 and Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Devon, Essex, Hereford and Worcester, Kent, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire and Shropshire in 1998.

(a) 1996–97 standard spending assessment per head of resident population in ascending order for shire counties

Local authority	*Standard spending assessment (£/head)*
Surrey	544
Oxfordshire	553
Warwickshire	555
Hereford and Worcester	556
Wiltshire	559
Dorset	561
Hampshire	572
Norfolk	572
Somerset	572
Gloucestershire	574
West Sussex	576
Staffordshire	580
Derbyshire	582
Suffolk	583
Cambridgeshire	586
North Yorkshire	595
Devon	596
Cheshire	596
East Sussex	597
Shropshire	603
Nottinghamshire	605
Lincolnshire	607
Berkshire	608
Leicestershire	610
Northamptonshire	614
Cumbria	614
Essex	617
Cornwall	617
Durham	621
Buckinghamshire	621
Lancashire	625
Hertfordshire	635
Kent	644
Bedfordshire	645
Northumberland	652

(b) 1998–99 Provisional standard spending assessment per head of resident population in ascending order for shire counties

Local authority	*Standard spending assessment (£/head)*
Cambridgeshire	573
Surrey	580
Oxfordshire	583
Hampshire	584
Dorset	587
Wiltshire	590
Worcestershire	590
Leicestershire	591
Warwickshire	597
Derbyshire	605
West Sussex	608
Somerset	610
Norfolk	613
Gloucestershire	613
Shropshire	615
Suffolk	616
Nottinghamshire	618
Staffordshire	620
Cheshire	623
Devon	624
Buckinghamshire	631
North Yorkshire	632
East Sussex	643
Lincolnshire	645
Essex	650
Durham	658
Cumbria	659
Northamptonshire	659
Cornwall	659
Bedfordshire	668
Lancashire	671
Hertfordshire	681
Kent	684
Northumberland	686

Airport Signs

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require operators of major airports to display signs in languages in addition to English. [19788]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* No. The UK follows the Recommended Practice on international signs contained in the Chicago Convention, Annex 9, provision 6.9, published jointly by the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation for use at airports and Ports. Among the general principles set out in the joint publication (Document 9636) are that as far as possible symbols should be used without words on signs at airports and Ports.

Drink-driving Campaign

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources have been allocated for the campaign to deter drink-driving over the Christmas period. [19843]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The Department has allocated £1.9 million to the 1997 Christmas Drink/Drive campaign. The campaign uses national television supported by cinema and radio advertising. Print material for use in pubs, clubs and restaurants and by road safety officers has also been distributed.

The Department's campaigns have over the years helped to change the general public's attitude to drink driving to a point where such behaviour is no longer generally acceptable. Deaths have fallen from 1,643 in 1979 to 540 in 1993 and remain steady at this level.

This year's campaign takes a new approach and addresses those drivers who deceive themselves that they know how much they can drink and still be safe to drive, and who fail to recognise the increased risk they pose to themselves and other road users.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will appoint a new Chairman of the Rural Development Commission; and what criteria he will apply in making the appointment. [19748]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* We will appoint someone to chair the Commission, as soon as possible. Criteria include appropriate knowledge and experience, and the ability to take up the appointment without too much delay.

Registered Fishing Vessels

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce regulations governing the carriage of survival suits on board all United Kingdom registered fishing vessels. [19554]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The 1993 Protocol to the International (Torremolinos) Convention for the Safety of Fishing Vessels, though not yet in force, will require the carriage of immersion suits on larger new vessels. Its provisions will be applied within the European Union during 1999 by means of a Directive for a harmonised safety regime for fishing vessels of 24 meters in length and above. Accordingly, we will introduce regulations to require the carriage of immersion suits on new vessels of 24 meters in length and above. We have no plans to extend this requirement to other UK registered fishing vessels without further consultation with the industry.

Vehicle Safety

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made towards the introduction of measures to improve the safety of coaches and minibuses with particular reference to the transit of school children; and what additional measures he has evaluated. [19689]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Seat belts already have to be provided for children being taken on organised trips in coaches first used after 1 October 1988 and in all minibuses. From 10 February next year this requirement will also apply to older coaches.

We take the adequacy of seat belts very seriously. We are therefore proposing that all belts in minibuses and coaches are checked at the annual MOT test, and also that the Vehicle Inspectorate include the condition of all minibus and coach seat belts in the random roadside inspections which they carry out. We have consulted on details and hope to announce shortly how we intend to take this forward.

Mixed Oxide Fuel

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the risk of terrorist activity associated with the United Kingdom's export of mixed oxide fuel. [18496]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

Measures designed to minimise the risk of terrorist activity directed against nuclear materials in transit are reviewed constantly in the light of the risk assessments by the government's security experts.

All international movements of nuclear material carried out by the UK comply fully with the requirements of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and with the international guidelines on physical protection published by the IAEA.

Road Licences (Revocation)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many licences have been rescinded by the Traffic Commissioners, following inquiries, over the last six months. [19691]

Ms Glenda Jackson: During the 6 months ended 30 September 1997 the Traffic Commissioners revoked a total of 73 goods vehicle operator and public service vehicle operator licenses following disciplinary Public Inquiries.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Numeracy

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to introduce proposals for numeracy hours for schools; and if he will make a statement. [19753]

Mr. Byers: Numeracy and literacy are at the centre of the Government's drive to raise standards in schools. The Numeracy Task Force was set up in May and is expected to publish a consultative report in January. The length and content of teaching time for mathematics in primary schools will be covered in the report.

Departmental Information

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of the internal departmental guidance on the dissemination of information; and if he will make a statement. [16298]

Dr. Howells: The Department has no specific internal guidance about the dissemination of information but it has made available to its staff details of the Six Central Government Standards for correspondence, appointments, information, consultation, complaints and access. The third of these deals with providing information about services.

In general terms, the Department follows the Conventions of Central Government Publicity and Advertising in all of the information it makes available to the public via publicity materials and campaigns. It also follows the centrally agreed rules (currently being revised) for the Government Information Service when it supplies information to the media.

Finally, the Department's staff have been made aware of the requirements of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information to ensure openness.

Training (Road Haulage)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to safeguard training provision in the road haulage industry. [16679]

Dr. Howells: In July this year, the Road Haulage and Distribution Training Council was recognised by the Secretary of State as a National Training Organisation, one of a growing network of National Training Organisations currently being established. NTOs have the key responsibility for developing education and training arrangements in their sectors. TECs play a major role in the provision of training and contract with employers and training providers in that sector.

Out-of-school Hours Activities

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provision has been made in the current year for out-of-school hours activities *(a)* in general and *(b)* by training and enterprise councils. [19107]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department makes funds available for after-school childcare under the Out of School Childcare Initiative (OSCI). The Initiative is delivered locally by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) who have drawn up strategic plans which best meet the needs of their local labour market. For 1997–98 we made £4.1 million available under OSCI to create 7,200 new places.

We have made a further £50 million available for OSCI over the next five years as part of the £300 million investment in childcare announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. For 1998–99, this means that funding has more than doubled (from £4.1 million to £10.1 million) and will create 20,000 new places. The Initiative has already created some 78,000 places and offers parents, especially women, the opportunity to participate more fully in the labour market by increasing the supply of good quality, affordable out of school childcare.

University Tuition Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the proposed arrangements to means test parents or spouses for the payment of tuition fees; what procedure will be adopted for parents or spouses of EU students; and if he will make a statement. [19185]

Dr. Howells: New entrants to higher education in 1998–99, including EU students, who are eligible for a mandatory award will be eligible for assistance with their fees if they are from a lower income family. A parental or spouse's contribution to the award will be assessed by the student's local education authority in accordance with the provisions in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations for 1998–99 which will be laid before Parliament in due course. The means test arrangements will be the same as for 1997–98, subject to any changes which may be needed to ensure that it applies properly to EU citizens, and will ensure that the assessed contribution will be no greater in real terms than this year.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his Department's current estimate of the proportion of businesses which are exempted from the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 due to the exemption under the legislation for employers with fewer than 20 employees. [19352]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Around 95 per cent. of private employers have fewer than 20 employees and are therefore exempt from the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. There are also many businesses which have no employees and are therefore not covered by the Act's employment provisions.

On 3 December, I announced the beginning of a review of the exemption provision, including a wide-ranging consultation exercise.

School Sport

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements are in place for OFSTED to report to him on the range and quality of games offered as part of the PE curriculum. [19487]

Ms Estelle Morris: Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools reports to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on schools' compliance with the National Curriculum. This includes the National Curriculum for physical education, in which games is a compulsory area of activity for all five to 16 year-olds.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportions of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools are providing two hours or more per week for physical education; what proportions of *(a)* and *(b)* offer extra-curricular sport; and what is the average time spent on extra-curricular sport in *(a)* and *(b)*. [19473]

Ms Estelle Morris: This information is not collected or held centrally.

Further Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the expenditure per student on capital projects within the further education sector for each year from 1978–79 to 1998–99. [17402]

Dr. Howells: It is not possible to give figures since 1978–79 on a comparable basis. The following figures show capital expenditure in £s per full-time equivalent student in further education in England since the establishment of the FE sector.

Academic years	*[1]1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
FEFC funded	166	278	244

[1] The figure for 1993–94 relates to the 16 months April 1993–July 1994.

Student Funding

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will give details of the support that will be available to students in England and Wales through mandatory awards and student loans in the academic year 1998–99. [20568]

Dr. Howells: The total level of support available to students through grant and loan together in 1998–99 will be 3 per cent. higher than for 1997–98 in line with forecast price increases. I am placing a Memorandum in the Library giving full details of the new grant, loan and fee rates for 1998–99. These rates will be incorporated in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations and the Education (Student Loans) Regulations to be laid before Parliament in due course.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the 1996–97 annual report of the President of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal will be published; and if he will make a statement. [20567]

Ms Estelle Morris: The report has been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

I welcome the report. It demonstrates that the SEN Tribunal has achieved a great deal over the last year and has continued to meet and improve upon its targets for dealing with appeals.

The Tribunal provides a valuable and independent mechanism for considering appeals. It is to the credit of all those working for the Tribunal—the President, members and staff—that it has gained a reputation for fairness and impartiality, whilst also ensuring that its hearings are as informal as possible.

A great deal has been achieved over the three year life of the Tribunal and I am confident that it will continue to build on its excellent record.

General Teaching Councils

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if teachers working in the independent sector will be required to register with the appropriate general teaching council. [19851]

Mr. Byers: It will be open to teachers in independent schools who have Qualified Teacher Status to choose to register with the GTC but they will not be required to do so for the purposes of continued employment.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances *(a)* non-practising teachers and *(b)* retired teachers will be allowed to register with the GTC; and how he proposes to collect their fees. [19849]

Mr. Byers: Retired or non-practising teachers will be free to choose to register with the GTC, provided they have Qualified Teacher Status, but will not be required to do so. We shall look to the GTC, when established, to decide how their registration fees will be collected.

National Education Initiatives (Consultation)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on consultation with teachers at school level on the introduction of national education initiatives. [19992]

Mr. Byers: The Government recognises the key role teachers have to play in raising standards in schools. All major consultation documents have been sent to schools as well as to the teacher associations. They responded in kind: 1,800 teachers or groups of teachers responded to the White Paper "Excellence in schools".

Head Teachers (Professional Qualifications)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to involve existing head teachers in the new professional headship qualification; and if his Department will fund in full the training costs for existing head teachers. [19850]

Ms Estelle Morris: The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is designed for aspiring head teachers rather than those already in post. We have asked the Teacher Training Agency to develop a separate training programme for existing head teachers, based on the same standards as the NPQH, for

introduction from September 1998. Support for heads following the training programme will be available through the Standards fund at the normal 50 per cent. grant rate.

Nursery Places

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in providing nursery for four-year-olds. [19993]

Ms Estelle Morris: Seventy-nine Local Education Authorities have in place an interim Early Years Development Plan which demonstrates how, through partnership between the maintained, private and voluntary sectors, a free good quality early education place is available for all four year-olds whose parents want one. By April 1998 all will have Early Years Development Plans in place, showing how places for four-year-olds in their areas will be secured through partnership by September 1998.

DEFENCE

Defence Contracts

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about negotiations with the companies involved in the payment of commissions to Gordon Foxley relating to defence contracts. [20507]

Mr. Spellar: On 31 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *466-67*, I announced that a settlement had been reached with the second of the three companies involved in the Foxley case, Junghans GmbH of Germany, under which the company paid an agreed sum in redress to the Ministry of Defence. The company became eligible from that time to be considered for Ministry of Defence orders, but normal commercial relations were not to be resumed for some months while the operation of the agreement was monitored. I am pleased to report that the company has continued to co-operate fully with the MOD since that date, including provision of full access to their relevant accounting records, and has satisfied us in respect of its management arrangements and approach to future contracts. We have therefore decided to resume normal commercial relations with the company.

MOD officials have had positive discussions with Simmel, the other company involved in the Foxley case, against whom proceedings are still in train.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ministerial announcements have not been made, in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18894]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* All major policy announcements are made to Parliament first when it is sitting. Since 1 May, my Department has made over 50 announcements by Press Release, including some relating to public speeches and Parliamentary announcements. Press briefings are often held to give further explanation to an announcement. In some cases, the importance of the subject matter may not warrant the issue of a Parliamentary announcement, a press notice as well as a press briefing or mention in a speech.

Royal Yacht

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decision he has reached on the future of Her Majesty's yacht Britannia. [20508]

Mr. George Robertson: I have decided that Britannia should be preserved for the wider public benefit, subject to the conclusion of satisfactory arrangements to safeguard her future appearance and use. Following an initial sift earlier this year on a wide range of proposals, seven very imaginative ideas have been considered in detail. I am grateful to all the organisations for their enthusiasm and hard work. Two proposals have been assessed as offering the best prospects for successful preservation, namely those for Edinburgh (Forth Ports plc) and Manchester (Peel Holdings plc). These two proposals stood out from all the rest with firm, costed plans for the appropriate preservation and care of Britannia, and finance already in place. Detailed discussions will begin on these with a view to a final decision in the Spring. Her Majesty the Queen has been kept closely advised.

RAF Quedgeley

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals his Department has for the future ownership of sites at RAF Quedgeley; and what is the current status of the development brief on options for the sites. [19688]

Mr. Spellar: RAF Quedgeley consists of several sites. The Main Site, is currently being advertised for sale inviting expressions of interest for the freehold on a Joint Venture basis. Gloucester City Council have identified the Main Site as being potentially suitable for redevelopment and are preparing a Planning Brief for the site and surrounding area. The brief will identify the opportunities and constraints for redevelopment.

The outlying sites, known as No. 2, 4 and 6 Sites, were marketed earlier this year. Site Nos 2 and 6 have been sold. We expect to exchange Contracts for Sale shortly in respect of Site No. 4.

British Army Weapons (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* number and *(b)* type of British Army weapons and of what description have been lost, stolen or otherwise unaccounted for in Northern Ireland in each of the past 10 years; how many of these weapons are believed to have fallen into the hands of *(a)* Republican and *(b)* Loyalist paramilitaries; and how many have been recovered subsequently. [19496]

Dr. Reid: The figures currently available relating to the numbers and types of British Army weapons lost, stolen or otherwise unaccounted for in each of the past 10 years is set out in the table below. These include the number of weapons believed to have fallen in the hands of *(a)* Republican and *(b)* Loyalist paramilitaries and the number of weapons recovered subsequently.

1988

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not Known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	2	2	4	3
2	Rifle	—	1	1	2	1
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1989

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	3	1	4	8	5
2	Rifle	1	—	1	2	1
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	1	1	1
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1990

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not Known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	1	—	6	7	3
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1991

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	2	3	5	4
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1992

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	1	—	4	5	2
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	1	—	1	1

1993

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	—	1	1	—
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1994

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not Known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	1	4	5	3
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1995

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not Known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	—	2	2	2
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1996

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	—	3	3	2
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

1997

Serial (a)	*Weapon (b)*	*Loyalist (c)*	*Republican (d)*	*Not Known (e)*	*Total (f)*	*Recovered (g)*
1	Handgun	—	—	1	1	1
2	Rifle	—	—	—	—	—
3	Sub Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
4	Light Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—
5	Medium Machine Gun	—	—	—	—	—

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Athletics (Lottery Funds)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will consider using Lottery funds available for athletics to revive the British Athletics Federation or create a successor body. [19773]

Mr. Banks: UK Athletics 1998, an interim successor body to the British Athletics Federation, was announced on 28 November. The United Kingdom Sports Council is proposing to make a significant investment through its Exchequer funding to support the body during its envisaged 12 months' life. The Government welcomes the formation of this new body and very much hopes that the consultation process which the new body is to manage will be the first step to establishing the most effective structures for athletics in this country. I am pleased that the United Kingdom Sports Council has been able to assist with this process.

Professional Athletics Coaching

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to help the British Athletics Federation to extend professional athletics coaching throughout the country. [19772]

Mr. Banks: A grant of £1.46 million has been awarded to British athletics by the National Lottery Sports Fund for their World Class Performance Plan, an agreed development programme for 195 of our top athletes. This includes provision for the employment of a Performance Director and four Technical Directors, as well as support for 18 National Event Coaches. This will ensure that our top athletes have access to the professional coaching they need to achieve greater success on the world stage. A separate stand-alone company has been established to receive the Lottery Grant and manage the programmes set out in the World Class Performance Plan.

The British Athletics Federation is currently in administration following a High Court decision on 13 October to appoint Insolvency Practitioners to advise on its future administration. As part of the process for

setting up a new governing body, the Trustees of its interim successor, UK Athletics 1998, will be examining how new structures for coach education can be established so that in future athletes at all levels receive appropriate coaching.

TREASURY

Duty Free

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of jobs in the UK directly related to the duty free sector and *(b)* the value of UK spirit sales in the duty free sector in (i) the UK and (ii) the rest of the EU in the last year for which figures are available. [19747]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Information requested is not available.

Income Tax

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *620–21*, and 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *167*, if he will model the effect on the number of people of working age who face combined marginal rates of withdrawal of tax, national insurance contributions and means-tested benefits of *(a)* under 50 per cent., *(b)* 50 to 59 per cent., *(c)* 60 to 69 per cent., *(d)* 70 to 79 per cent., *(e)* 80 to 89 per cent. and *(f)* 90 per cent. or above of introducing a 10 pence starting rate of income tax on (i) the first £1,000, (ii) the first £1,500 or (iii) the first £2,000 of taxable income if no other changes were made to the tax and benefit system. [19501]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *167*.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards completion fo the Comprehensive Spending Review. [19938]

Mr. Darling: The Comprehensive Spending Review is proceeding in accordance with the timetable I indicated in my announcement on 11 June. I expect the Review to conclude next summer.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the timing of the production of Government expenditure plans from 1999–2000 onwards, in relation to the timing of the announcement of the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review. [19937]

Mr. Darling: The conclusions of the Comprehensive Spending Review will inform the new set of public expenditure plans for 1999–2000 onwards. The Review is on course to report next summer.

Economic Growth

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the medium-term trend rate of growth of the UK economy. [19956]

Mr. Darling: The recent Pre-Budget Report (Cm 3804) sets out some of the key elements of the Government's approach to raising the trend rate of growth of the economy. Appendix A of the report includes a separate section on trend growth (paragraphs A08–A16).

Growth and Inflation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the risks to the economic outlook for growth and inflation, as set out in the "Pre-Budget Report". [19934]

Mrs. Liddell: As an indication of the degree of uncertainty surrounding the economic outlook, table A3 of the Pre-Budget Report includes average errors in autumn forecasts over the past ten years.

Tax and National Insurance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the per cent. of GDP which will be accounted for by non-North Sea taxes and national insurance contributions in the financial year 2001–02; and if he will list the ratio for each year since 1975. [19931]

Dawn Primarolo: Figures for non-North Sea taxes and social security contributions as a percentage of non-North Sea GDP from 1970–71 to 1998–99 were given in table B9 of the Pre-Budget Report. Projection for later years are as follows:

1999–2000: 37.7

2000–2001: 38.1

2001–2002: 38.5

Departmental Receipts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the use by departments of monies realised by disposal of surplus departmental assets; if departmental spending plans will be adjusted by the Treasury to offset such receipts; and if he will make a statement. [19952]

Mr. Darling: I refer the hon. Member to the measures set out in my answer of 24 November to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) when I announced the publication of the National Asset Register on 24 November, *Official Report*, columns. *359–60*.

Incontinence Products (VAT)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department first published its intention to apply the standard rate of VAT to incontinence products. [19716]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The wholesale supply of incontinence products has been

standard-rated since 1973. Supplies have been zero-rated since 1984 when made direct to handicapped persons, but this relief has been manipulated as part of an avoidance scheme designed to gain a tax advantage. The Value Added Tax (Drugs, Medicines and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997, laid before Parliament on 18 November 1997, has restored the position.

Supplies of incontinence products remain VAT-free to the user, either under the NHS or as part of healthcare in the private sector.

VAT (Health Service)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he undertook and representations he received concerning the proposals in the Value Added Tax (Drugs, Medicine and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 2744). [18977]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* The Order addresses a number of tax avoidance arrangements. Full consultations were therefore not undertaken. However, this Government announced its intention to legislate on 13 August 1997. Customs conducted very limited consultation, including with the health Departments. The Order was amended following their comments.

Statistics

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will restate Table B4 of Cm 3804 to show for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99 updated figures based on the accounting definitions and measurement conventions of the previous plans as published in Cm 3601. [19265]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The following table shows table B4 of Cm 3804, the Pre-Budget Report, based on the accounting definitions and measurement conventions used in Cm 3601, Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997–98.

General Government expenditure

£ billion

	Outturn 1996–97	*Estimate 1997–98*	*Forecast 1998–99*
Control Total	260.6	266.5	274.2
Welfare to Work spending	—	0.2	1.2
LA spending under the capital receipts initiative	—	0.2	0.7
Cyclical social security	14.0	12.7	13.5
Central government debt interest	22.0	24.6	25.0
Accounting adjustments	10.8	9.8	10.3
GGE(X)	307.4	314.0	324.8

General Government expenditure

£ billion

	Outturn 1996–97	*Estimate 1997–98*	*Forecast 1998–99*
Privatisation proceeds	–4.4	–2.0	0.0
Other adjustments	5.2	6.1	6.6
GGE	308.1	318.1	331.4

There are three differences as compared with the table published in the Pre-Budget Report:

(i) The full receipt from the student loanbook sale (including the capitalised value of future subsidies) is scored as reducing general government expenditure (GGE) in 1997–98 and 1998–99;

(ii) Local authority debt interest payments ultimately financed by the housing element of the central government housing subsidy are included in the Control Total;

(iii) Certain licence fee receipts are excluded from the Control Total.

These differences do not affect the PSBR.

The Control Total figure for 1998–99 reflects the decision not to proceed with the commutation of £4.5 billion of local authorities housing debt to central government that was assumed in the 1997–98 FSBR. The commutation was cancelled because it would have had a net cost to the government and the PSBR, mainly because of administrative costs, and because it had no merits in terms of housing policy. However, it appeared to reduce public spending because of an anomaly in the old definition of the Control Total which scored both the subsidy paid to local authorities' housing revenue accounts by central government and the interest payments by local authorities that the subsidy financed. As the Pre-Budget Report announced, this double counting has now been removed from the Control total.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an expanded version of table B4 of Cm 3804 to show *(a)* a disaggregation of the Control Total in each year by Department as in table 1.2 of Cm 3601, but adjusting for machinery of government and classification changes, and separately identifying releases from the Reserve for 1997–98 and 1998–99, *(b)* the use of windfall tax proceeds for uses other than Welfare to Work spending and *(c)* lottery-financed spending separately from other adjustments identified in the reconciliation of GGE(X) and GGE. [19266]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The following table shows the figures for table B4, with the departmental elements of the Control Total and lottery-financed spending identified separately. Differences from previous plans, which are allocations from and benefits to the Reserve, are identified separately for 1997–98 and 1998–99. Further details on these changes are set out in the answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms). Figures for spending financed by the windfall tax were set out in table 2.1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report July 1997, HC85.

Control total by department

£ billion

	Plans			Differences from previous plans[1]	
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Defence	21.4	21.0	22.2	–0.2	—
Foreign Office	1.1	1.1	1.1	—	—
Department for International Development	2.3	2.2	2.3	—	—
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	4.2	3.7	3.4	—	—
Trade and Industry	2.7	3.0	2.8	–0.1	—
Export Credits Guarantee Department	—	—	—	—	—
DETR—Transport	4.8	5.2	4.6	—	—
DETR—Housing	5.9	5.1	5.6	–0.2	—
DETR—Urban and Environment	2.4	2.3	2.0	0.1	—
DETR—Local Government	31.3	31.4	32.8	—	0.9
Home Office	6.5	6.9	6.9	—	—
Legal Departments	2.7	2.7	2.7	—	—
Education and Employment	14.5	14.1	13.4	0.2	—
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1.0	0.9	0.9	—	—
Health	33.8	35.2	36.7	0.2	1.0
Social Security	77.0	80.1	83.9	0.2	0.9
Scotland	14.5	14.5	14.6	0.2	0.2
Wales	6.8	6.9	7.0	—	0.1
Northern Ireland	8.0	8.2	8.3	—	0.1
Chancellors' Departments	3.2	3.2	3.1	—	—
Cabinet Office	1.2	1.1	1.4	—	—
European Communities	1.7	1.8	2.4	–0.5	0.1
Local authority self-financed expenditure	12.7	13.1	13.6	—	—
Further EYF takeup	—	0.7	—	0.7	—
Reserve	—	1.4	2.0	–0.9	–3.0
Control total	259.9	265.8	273.5	0	0
Welfare to Work spending	—	0.2	1.2	—	—
LA spending under the capital receipts initiative	—	0.2	0.7	—	—
Cyclical social security	14.0	12.7	13.5	—	—
Central government debt interest	22.0	24.6	25.0	—	—
Accounting adjustments	11.5	11.1	11.5	—	—
GGE(X)	307.3	314.6	325.4	—	—
Privatisation proceeds	–4.4	–2.0	—	—	—
National Lottery	0.4	1.2	1.5	—	—
Other adjustments	4.9	4.9	5.1	—	—
GGE	308.1	318.7	332.1	—	—

[1] After adjusting plans published in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses, Cm 3601, for the effects of classification and transfer changes, including a switch of £530 million from the Department for Education and Employment to the DETR Local Government programme for Nursery Vouchers and a switch of £350 million from the DETR Local Government programme to the Department of Health for Community Care, both in 1998–99. There is a real terms income in overall provision for education in 1998–99.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table, revising table S2.6 of the Pre-Budget publication, The Economy and the Public Finances; Supplementary Material, to show *(a)* changes between the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98 and FSBR July 1997, *(b)* changes between FSBR July 1997 and the Pre-Budget Report November 1997 and *(c)* changes between FSBR 1997–98 and the Pre-Budget Report: November 1997. [19269]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* Table A shows the changes between the 1997–98 FSBR (published in November 1996) and the July 1997 FSBR. Table B gives changes between the July 1997 FSBR and the November 1997 Pre-Budget Report. Changes between the 1997–98 FSBR and the November 1997 Pre-Budget Report are given in table C.

Table A: Changes between the July 1997 FSBR and the 1997–98 FSBR[1]

£ billion

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Expenditure			
Control Total	–0.2	0.0	0.0
Welfare to work spending	—	0.2	1.2
LA spending under the capital receipts initiative	—	0.2	0.7
Cyclical social security	0.0	–0.5	–0.3
CG debt interest	0.1	–0.2	0.0
Accounting adjustments	1.1	0.9	0.8
GGE(X)	0.9	0.6	2.5
Privatisation proceeds	0.1	0.0	1.5
Other adjustments	–0.5	–0.2	0.1
Total GG expenditure	0.5	0.4	4.1
Receipts			
Income tax	1.3	4.7	7.8
Corporation tax	1.6	2.9	2.6

Table A: Changes between the July 1997 FSBR and the 1997–98 FSBR[1]

£ billion

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Windfall tax	—	2.6	2.6
Value added tax	–0.8	–0.7	–1.2
Excise duties	–0.4	–0.6	–1.5
Other taxes	3.5	1.6	2.8
Social security contributions	0.7	0.4	0.4
Other receipts	–0.4	–1.9	–0.9
Total GG receipts	5.5	8.9	12.4
Public corporations' market and overseas borrowing	1.3	0.2	0.1
PSBR	–3.6	–8.3	–8.2

[1] For explanatory footnotes see table S2.6 of the Economy and Public Finances Supplementary Material.

Table B: Changes between the Pre-Budget Report and July 1997 FSBR[1]

£ billion

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Expenditure			
Control Total	0.2	0.0	0.0
Welfare to work spending	—	0.0	0.0
LA spending under the capital receipts initiative	—	0.0	0.0
Cyclical social security	–0.3	–1.0	–0.5
CG debt interest	–0.3	0.0	0.5
Accounting adjustments	–0.6	–0.4	0.1
GGE(X)	–1.0	–1.3	0.1
Privatisation proceeds	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other adjustments	0.1	–0.1	0.0
Total GG expenditure	–0.9	–1.4	0.1
Receipts			
Income tax	–0.4	–1.0	–0.4
Corporation tax	0.1	0.2	–0.5
Windfall tax	—	0.0	0.0
Value added tax	0.0	0.1	0.0
Excise duties	0.0	–0.6	–0.6
Other taxes	0.1	0.5	0.1
Social security contributions	0.0	0.0	0.2
Other receipts	–0.8	0.2	0.7
Total GG receipts	–0.9	–0.6	–0.5
Public corporations' market and overseas borrowing	–0.2	–0.6	0.0
PSBR	–0.2	–1.4	0.6

[1] This table differs from table S2.6 of the Pre-Budget Report in that it adjusts for the changed accounting treatment of the student loans sale (see paragraph S2.24 of the Pre-Budget Report) and corrects small errors in the 1996–97 outturn data for corporation tax, VAT and other receipts.

Table C: Changes between the Pre-Budget Report and the 1997–98 FSBR

£ billion

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Expenditure			
Control Total	0.0	0.0	0.0
Welfare to work spending	—	0.2	1.2
LA spending under the capital receipts initiative	—	0.2	0.7
Cyclical social security	–0.3	–1.5	–0.8
CG debt interest	–0.2	–0.2	0.6
Accounting adjustments	0.5	0.5	0.9
GGE(X)	–0.1	–0.7	2.6
Privatisation proceeds	0.1	0.0	1.5
Other adjustments	–0.4	–0.2	0.1
Total GG expenditure	–0.4	–1.0	4.2
Receipts			
Income tax	0.9	3.7	7.3
Corporation tax	1.7	3.1	2.1
Windfall tax	—	2.6	2.6
Value added tax	–0.8	–0.6	–1.3
Excise duties	–0.4	–1.3	–2.2
Other taxes	3.6	2.1	2.9
Social security contributions	0.7	0.4	0.6
Other receipts	–1.2	–1.8	–0.2
Total GG receipts	4.6	8.4	11.9
Public corporations' market and overseas borrowing	1.2	–0.4	0.1
PSBR	–3.8	–9.7	–7.7

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the table 6.4 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97 for the Private Finance Initiative, to show *(a)* outturns for each year from 1990–91 to 1995–96, *(b)* a comparison of the table 6.4 projections with outturns for 1996–97 and *(c)* comparisons of table 6.4 projections with current projections for 1997–98 and 1998–99. [19267]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* Table 1 shows latest figures for publicly sponsored capital expenditure. The differences between the latest figures and the projections for 1996–97 to 1998–99 shown in both the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97 (published in November 1995) and the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98 (published in November 1996) are given in table 2.

Table 1: Public sector capital expenditure[1]

£ billion

	Outturn						Projection	
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*[2]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Central government	9.6	10.3	10.9	9.8	9.1	8.7	7.1	6.0	6.9
Local authorities[3]	5.9	7.0	7.2	6.7	7.3	7.2	6.4	6.8	7.1
Public corporations[4]	2.0	2.0	3.6	3.4	4.2	4.7	4.4	4.7	4.3
Notional allocation of the Reserve	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.2
Total public sector capital expenditure	17.5	19.3	21.6	19.9	20.6	20.6	17.9	17.6	18.6
Estimated capital expenditure under the Private Finance Initiative	—	—	—	0.1	0.2	0.4	1.0	2.7	3.7
Total publicly sponsored capital expenditure	17.5	19.3	21.6	20.0	20.8	21.0	18.9	20.3	22.3
Memo: Public sector capital[5]									
gross of depreciation	20.7	21.6	23.5	21.3	21.7	21.3	18.0	17.6	18.4
net of depreciation[3]	9.7	11.8	14.2	12.1	12.1	11.2	8.6	8.2	8.9

[1] Figures are shown for the national accounts definition of capital spending (including expenditure out of the proceeds of the National Lottery). See paragraph 5A.10.
[2] Outturn figures for 1996–97 are not yet final and will be subject to revision.
[3] The figure for local authority capital spending in 1997–98 corrects that used in preparing figures for the Pre-Budget Report. Cm 3804, which was £0.3 billion too high. The figure for net capital spending in Table B1 of the Pre-Budget Report is therefore inconsistent with the figure shown here for public sector capital expenditure net of depreciation.
[4] Excluding the capital expenditure of industries privatised or planned to be privatised before 31 March 2000.
[5] Including industries now privatised while they were in the public sector.

Table 2: Public sector capital expenditure: changes

£ billion

	Differences since FSBR November 1995			*Differences since FSBR November 1996*		
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Central government	–1.0	–1.7	–0.6	0.2	–0.2	—
Local authorities	–0.1	0.7	1.2	–0.9	0.5	1.2
Public corporations[1]	–1.2	–0.6	–0.7	–1.1	–0.4	–0.2
Notional allocation of the Reserve	–0.2	–0.5	–0.6	—	–0.2	–0.3
Total public sector capital expenditure	–2.5	–2.2	–0.7	–1.8	–0.4	0.7
Estimated capital expenditure under the Private Finance Initiative	–0.9	0.1	1.0	–0.1	0.2	—
Total publicly sponsored capital expenditure	–3.5	–2.1	0.3	–1.9	–0.2	0.8

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of tax loss resulting from value-shifting within the travel industry and the basis on which the tax loss has been estimated. [19664]

Dawn Primarolo: The evidence to date suggests that the higher rate of insurance premium tax has prevented any tax loss from value shifting in all those business sectors where it has been applied.

Music Industry

Mr. Collins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the representatives of the United Kingdom music industry he has met in his official capacity since 1 May. [18330]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I meet a wide range of people from all industries in the course of my duties as Chancellor, but since I became Chancellor I have not met a delegation specifically from the music industry.

"Financial Statement and Budget Report"

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish updated versions of tables 5A.4 and 5A.5 from the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98". [19125]

Mr. Darling: The attached tables are an update of the tables included in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. The figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are based on the plans announced in November 1996 and revised to take account of any announced changes in spending plans including the Summer Winter Supplementary Estimates.

These figures include:

the £1.2 billion allocated to the NHS and the £1 billion allocated to schools for 1998–99 in the July Budget.

the additional £300 million for patient services in the NHS for this year announced in October.

the extra £190 million provision this year and next for pensioners' fuel bills announced in the Pre Budget Report.

the effect of the abolition of nursery vouchers and the transfer of money to local authorities to fund their early year development plans.

There are no figures for new plans for 1999–2000 and beyond as new plans will not be set until the completion of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

In addition we have allocated substantial funds outside the Control Total; over £5 billion for the Welfare to Work programme and for investment in housing. the expected spending in 1997–98 and 1998–99 is shown in the following table. We have also announced a change in allocations from the National Lottery; £1 billion will be allocated over the next four years for the Government's priorities of health and education including spending on out of school activities and on National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts.

Expenditure outside the Control Total

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Spending by programme[1]:		
A New Deal for the under 25s unemployed over six months	100	700
A New Deal for people unemployed over two years	0	100
A New Deal for lone parents	0	25
Childcare[2]	0	40
A New Deal for Schools	100	300
Total expenditure	200	1,165
Capital Receipts Initiative	200	700

[1] Illustrative levels of spending based on current levels of unemployment. Actual provision for any particular year will be decided in the light of the number of eligible people and the effectiveness of the programme.
[2] Including changes to Family Credit, and Out of School Clubs.

Control total by department

£ million

	Outturn					*Plans*	
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Defence (excluding married quarters)	22,910	22,757	22,562	21,517	22,345	21,660	22,250
MoD Married Quarters	—	—	—	—	–962	–700	—
Foreign Office	1,242	1,244	1,263	1,339	1,059	1,100	1,070
Department for International Development	2,126	2,235	2,385	2,338	2,343	2,210	2,320
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	2,186	2,937	2,445	2,827	4,205	3,740	3,400
Trade and Industry—Programmes	2,812	2,737	2,811	3,223	3,092	3,090	3,020
Trade and Industry—Nat Inds	1,300	1,278	577	25	–394	–100	–180
Export Cre Guar Department	117	–60	–26	16	15	10	—
DETR—Transport	6,557	5,959	5,974	4,619	4,838	5,220	4,590
DETR—Other	10,371	10,284	9,635	8,915	8,300	7,440	7,530
DETR—Local Government[1]	31,175	29,378	29,913	30,298	31,321	31,380	32,760
Memo: Education SSA[1]	—	—	—	—	17,764	17,840	19,380
Education and Employment[1]	10,762	13,616	14,364	14,449	14,494	14,090	13,360
Home Office	5,824	5,965	6,259	6,480	6,532	6,920	6,860
Legal Departments	2,334	2,415	2,585	2,684	2,749	2,710	2,680
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1,005	977	978	1,026	978	890	910
Health	28,212	29,763	31,575	32,907	33,817	35,160	36,700
of which NHS	27,970	28,941	30,570	31,958	33,044	34,590	36,120
Social Security	61,130	67,091	69,457	72,748	76,970	80,060	83,910
Scotland[1]	12,723	13,580	14,082	14,312	14,490	14,500	14,590
Wales[1]	5,992	6,296	6,551	6,719	6,820	6,940	6,980
Northern Ireland[1]	6,606	7,108	7,426	7,717	8,030	8,230	8,330
Chancellors' Departments	3,478	3,393	3,329	3,288	3,201	3,180	3,130
Cabinet Office	1,012	1,054	966	1,248	1,214	1,050	1,350
European Communities	1,912	1,877	1,268	3,370	1,717	1,780	2,440
Local authority self-financed expenditure	8,815	7,999	10,718	12,887	12,718	13,100	13,600
Further EYF Takeup[2]	—	—	—	—	—	700	—
Reserve	—	—	—	—	—	1,400	2,000
Control total	230,602	239,885	247,098	254,952	259,893	265,800	273,500

[1] Education

The £1 billion provided for schools in 1998–99 in the Budget has been added to support for local authorities and appear in the figures for DETR—Local Government, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Education SSA line shows central government's provision for a nominal "standard level of service" in education. The amount of money is a broad indicator of local authority spending on education; the final decisions are made by individual local authorities. The Education SSA line includes the 1998–99 money transferred to DETR—LG following the abolition of nursery vouchers.

The spending plans for the Department of Education and Employment are reduced on 1997–98 and 1998–99 by the expected proceeds from sales of student loans (£1.6 billion in each year). The apparent reduction in spending between 1997–98 and 1998–99 principally consists of transfers to other departments including DETR—Local Government and DSS. There is a real terms increase in overall provision for education in 1998–99.

[2] Further EYF Take-up

This is the Treasury estimate of likely further take-up by departments before the end of 1997–98 of unspent provision carried forward from last year under the end-year flexibility rules. Some £450 million of EYF has already been taken up in the Winter Supplementary Estimates and is included in the departmental totals.

Control Total by department in real terms (1996–97 prices)

£ billion

	Outturn					*Plans*	
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Defence (excluding married quarters)	25.3	24.4	23.8	22.1	22.3	21.1	21.1
MoD Married Quarters	—	—	—	—	–1.0	–0.7	—
Foreign Office	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.1	1.0
Department for International Development	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.2
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	2.4	3.1	2.6	2.9	4.2	3.6	3.2
Trade and Industry—Programmes	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.0	2.9
Trade and Industry—Nat Inds	1.4	1.4	0.6	0.0	–0.4	–0.1	–0.2
Export Cre Guar Dept.	0.1	–0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
DETR-Transport	7.2	6.4	6.3	4.7	4.8	5.1	4.3
DETR-Other	11.4	11.0	10.2	9.2	8.3	7.2	7.1
DETR-Local Government[1]	34.4	31.5	31.6	31.1	31.3	30.6	31.0
Memo: Education SSA[1]	—	—	—	—	17.8	17.4	18.4
Education and Employment[1]	11.9	14.6	15.2	14.9	14.5	13.7	12.7
Home Office	6.4	6.4	6.6	6.7	6.5	6.7	6.5
Legal Departments	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.5
Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.9
Health	31.1	31.9	33.3	33.8	33.8	34.2	34.8
of which NHS	30.9	31.0	32.3	32.8	33.0	33.7	34.2
Social Security	67.4	71.9	73.3	74.8	77.0	78.0	79.5
Scotland[1]	14.0	14.6	14.9	14.7	14.5	14.1	13.8
Wales[1]	6.6	6.7	6.9	6.9	6.8	6.8	6.6
Northern Ireland[1]	7.3	7.6	7.8	7.9	8.0	8.0	7.9
Chancellors' Departments	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.0
Cabinet Office	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.3	1.2	1.0	1.3
European Communities	2.1	2.0	1.3	3.5	1.7	1.7	2.3
Local authority self-financed expenditure	9.7	8.6	11.3	13.2	12.7	12.7	12.8
Further EYF Takeup[2]	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Reserve	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.9
Control Total	254.4	257.1	260.9	262.0	259.9	258.8	259.1

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update Table 6.5 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97 to show comparisons of the outturns with Table 6.5 estimates for 1996–97, and comparisons of current estimates for 1997–98 and 1998–99 with such estimates for these years as appeared in Table 6.5 (FSBR 1996–97). [19268]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The Government is wholly committed to PFI, and has wasted no time putting into place the changes needed to revitalise the initiative. Following consultation with PFI practitioners, Malcolm Bates' review identified a number of areas that warranted attention, and the Government has acted quickly to issue guidance and help from the centre, to encourage departments to set realistic priorities, to work on establishing standard templates to reduce the need for repetition of effort, and to put in place legislation to facilitate the flow-through of contracts in the health and local authority sectors. We are already seeing positive results, with contracts signed for two major hospitals, and education establishments at Clarendon College and Colfox School in Dorset.

This table is compiled every six months. The latest version, set out below, represents the latest figures that have been collected centrally. These are estimates, and not targets to be met at any price. The Government's priority is to conclude good value for money projects. We are also promoting a wide range of other public-private partnerships, many of which would not be captured by this table:

Table 6.5 (FSBR 1996–97):

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*Total*
Defence	30	80	210	320
FCO	10	10	10	30
MAFF	10	20	10	40
DTI	10	10	10	30
Transport	1120	1320	1260	3700
DfEE	20	40	50	110
Environment	30	30	30	100
Home Office	50	110	60	220
Legal Departments	10	20	10	40
National Heritage	20	30	30	80
Health	170	200	300	670
DSS	130	70	100	300
Scotland	140	360	420	920
Wales	60	150	150	360
Northern Ireland	50	80	80	210
Chx's departments	40	40	30	110
Total	1900	2570	2760	7240

Latest Estimates:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*Total*
Defence	50	270	390	710
FCO	0	20	30	50
MAFF	0	0	0	0
DTI	0	10	10	20
Transport	570	1,220	1,340	3,130
DfEE	0	10	10	20
Environment	70	80	140	290
Home Office	120	230	160	510
Legal Departments	10	10	10	30
National Heritage	0	20	30	50
Health	60	110	270	440

Latest Estimates:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*Total*
DSS	80	410	170	660
Scotland	20	200	510	730
Wales	10	10	80	100
Northern Ireland	0	20	50	70
Chancellor's departments	0	70	240	310
Local Authorities	0	25	315	340
Total	1,000	2,705	3,745	7,460

Company Vehicles

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide tax relief on the use of company minibuses where they are used to reduce the use of private cars by employees; and if he will make a statement. [19243]

Dawn Primarolo: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Unemployment Figures

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will change the method of collating unemployment figures to that which was used in 1979. [19965]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 10 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent question on the method of collating unemployment figures.

ONS uses the International Labour Organisation (ILO) measure of unemployment, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), and counts as unemployed people who are: (a) without a paid job; (b) available to start work within the next two weeks and (c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained. The LFS has used the ILO measure since 1984. Prior to this a slightly different definition was used. This included people who were without a paid job who were looking for work in the reference week, or prevented from seeking work by temporary sickness or holiday, or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained or were waiting for the results of a job application. Full-time students who were seeking work but who were not available to start work in the next two weeks because they had to complete their education were excluded. The LFS moved over to the ILO measure because it is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis and the ONS does not intend to revert to the earlier definition.

Since October 1983, the ONS has also published the monthly claimant count, which is based on the administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployment-related benefits (i.e. Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits) at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as unemployed and available to do any suitable work. Essentially, all people who attend an Employment Service office to sign on the designated day are counted.

No official estimates are available for current claimant count under any previous coverage as no information is available on how many people would be registered unemployed now, on the basis of old procedures which no longer exist. The effects of changes in the coverage of the monthly claimant count vary over time. Attempting to calculate their effects today would involve speculative estimates about economic, demographic and other factors.

Methadone (Deaths)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths have been attributed to methadone in each region of the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [19015]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Brian Iddon, dated 10 December 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent parliamentary question on deaths attributed to methadone.

The number of deaths in the United Kingdom for which methadone was mentioned on the death certificate are given in the table below, for 1993 to 1996.

The deaths included correspond to those with an underlying cause of death of drug dependence, nondependent abuse of drugs, accidental poisoning, suicidal poisoning or poisoning undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted.

The figures include deaths attributed to methadone in combination with other drugs. In some cases, therefore, the deaths may not be directly or solely due to methadone.

Deaths involving methadone in each region in the United Kingdom, 1993–1996

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
North	3	3	19	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	16	28	26	33
East Midlands	10	6	10	16
East Anglia	6	14	13	18
South East	77	87	80	105
South West	13	4	20	31
West Midlands	15	20	12	22
North West	70	84	93	88
Wales	5	8	18	16
Scotland	25	55	58	101
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0
Non-resident	1	2	3	7
Total	241	311	352	452

Note: Since 1993, the ONS has coded all diseases, injuries, drugs, operations and external causes mentioned on death certificates for England and Wales. This information is held electronically and we were able to extract data from 1993 to 1996. Comparable figures for years prior to 1993 could only be produced at disproportionate cost. A revised system for collecting information on drug-related deaths in Scotland was introduced in 1994. It is likely that the increase in numbers since 1993 is in part due to better information being provided by this new system.

Self-assessment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what criteria individuals were selected for self-assessment for income tax purposes; and how many people were so selected. [19335]

Dawn Primarolo: In broad terms, tax returns are issued to the self employed (including business partners), trustees, directors, employees liable to pay higher rate tax and some other employees with more complex affairs. Around nine million 1996–97 tax returns have been issued.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the United Kingdom joining EMU on funds invested in private pension provision in the United Kingdom. [18988]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, made it clear in his statement of 27 October that, whether the UK is in or out of EMU, the Government's assessment is that the financial services industry, including the pensions industry, has the potential to thrive as long as it is properly prepared.

Ministerial Interests

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the Paymaster General's press statement of 29 November (1) if the Orion Trust owns properties *(a)* in France, *(b)* in Italy and *(c)* elsewhere abroad which are used by the Paymaster General; [19007]

(2) if he will list the trustees of the Orion Trust; when it was established; and what assets it possessed in the United Kingdom at that time; [19005]

(3) if the Paymaster General receives regular payments from the Orion Trust; [19714]

(4) if the Paymaster General receives any benefits in kind from the Orion Trust. [19750]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answers 4, 8 and 9 December 1997]:* The Paymaster General has issued a detailed statement, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Inland Revenue has agreed the tax returns in which the Paymaster General reported the sale to the Orion Trust of shares that arose from the rights issue by Trans Tec. [19719]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The position under successive Governments has been that the law on taxpayer confidentiality prevents the Inland Revenue from disclosing any information relating to the tax affairs of any particular taxpayer.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he took to ensure that no conflict of interest arose as a result of the Paymaster General's role in sponsoring the working group on the financing of high technology companies and his beneficial interest in Trans Tec plc. [19112]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The report of the working group on high-tech companies is being prepared for me and the President of the Board of Trade as part of our wide-ranging look at ways of improving the UK's record of investment in R and D.

Offshore Trusts

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax treatment of capital gains on shares held for a United Kingdom beneficiary in an offshore trust in Guernsey. [19006]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The tax treatment is set out in Section 86 and Schedule 5 of the Taxation of chargeable Gains Act 1992.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Paymaster General *(a)* receives papers and *(b)* participates in meetings relating to taxation of offshore trusts and the closing of tax loopholes. [19004]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* I consult widely with colleagues on a variety of policy issues but any decisions are made by me.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the Paymaster General has been involved in policy discussions relating to the taxation of offshore trusts. [19002]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* Wide ranging reviews of taxation issues are currently under way. The results of these reviews will be announced to Parliament in the usual way.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the current Inland Revenue review of tax avoidance measures will cover the use of discretionary trusts set up by foreign nationals for the benefit of United Kingdom residents. [19111]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The present tax treatment of offshore trusts is being considered in the wide ranging review of areas of tax which I announced in my Budget Statement.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the advantages of extending legal aid eligibility to recipients of *(a)* incapacity benefit at the long-term rate and *(b)* severe disablement allowance. [19857]

Mr. Hoon: The recently announced proposals for the reform of the legal aid scheme are aimed at controlling expenditure. It is only when spending is under better control that we can consider extending the number of benefits which automatically qualify an applicant for legal aid.

Recipients of the benefits mentioned are not excluded from the legal aid scheme. However, they do not automatically qualify. Since the award of these benefits is not means tested a financial assessment must be undertaken before legal aid can be granted.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Presidency (Environment)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received in relation to environmental issues in respect of the United Kingdom's Presidency of the European Union. [19945]

Mr. Fatchett: FCO and DETR Ministers and officials are in contact with a wide range of interests to discuss environmental aspects of the UK Presidency. These include governments of other EU Member States, members of the European Parliament and representatives of business and Non-Governmental Organisations. It will be an important theme of the UK Presidency to make progress on environmental issues which have a direct impact on people's lives in Europe.

India (P and O)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the proposed port development by P and O at Vadhavan in Dahanu Taluka, India. [19913]

Mr. Fatchett: This and other Government Departments have received a number of letters on this subject.

Indonesia

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his Answer of 23 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *604*, if his Department has *(a)* completed the study into the alleged use of United Kingdom supplied water-cannons in Indonesia in summer 1996 and *(b)* reached any conclusions. [19741]

Mr. Fatchett: One or more British water-cannon may well have been used in incidents at Bandung in June 1996, but the exact circumstances are not clear. The findings of our extensive enquiries into this and other incidents are inconclusive. But the Indonesians are well aware of our concerns.

Caribbean Dependent Territories

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policies for the Caribbean Dependent Territories. [18442]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We remain committed to the prosperity, well-being, good government and defence of the Caribbean Dependent Territories for as long as the Territories wish to maintain the link with the United Kingdom. This will be one of the underlying principles of the review of policy towards the Dependent Territories which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on 27 August.

Child Labour

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the alleged sale of children from Bangladesh to the United Arab Emirates. [20001]

Mr. Fatchett: I asked our Embassy in Abu Dhabi to look carefully into recent media reports of young children from Bangladesh and other countries being sold into employment as camel jockeys in the UAE. They have been unable to substantiate these allegations of trafficking. I have asked them to continue to monitor the situation closely.

In 1993, the UAE Government prohibited the employment of children under 15 as jockeys (as well as of jockeys weighing less than 45 kilograms). The UAE Camel Racing Association is responsible for enforcing these regulations.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Information

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Attorney-General what was the aggregate amount spent by his Department and its agencies during 1996–97 on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* public relations, *(c)* promotions, *(d)* public information campaigns, *(e)* press and information services and *(f)* market research and opinion polls. [19164]

The Attorney-General: During 1996–97 my departments and agencies (namely the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the Government Property Lawyers Agency, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office) spent the following amounts under the heads described:

(a) £3,037
(b) £4,818
(c) £189,169
(d) Nil
(e) £21,218
(f) £458

The figures at *(a)* do not include advertising costs associated with recruitment to fill particular posts.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Portcullis House

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee when construction of Portcullis House will begin on the site above the new Westminster underground station; and if he will make a statement. [20117]

Sir Sydney Chapman: Since my predecessor as Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell), last reported to the House on 20 March 1997, *Official Report* column 686, good progress has been made by our designers and contractors. However, we have had to wait 11 months longer than London Underground Ltd. promised for its Jubilee Line Extension works at Westminster Station to be completed to an acceptable standard, so that construction on our site above the new station could start. On 13 October 1997 London Underground Limited made part of the site available so that the House's contractor could start preliminary work, and it is planned that our contractor will occupy further parts of the site, sufficient for the main construction to begin, on 5 January 1998.

When complete, Portcullis House will dramatically reduce the pressure on parliamentary accommodation and in particular it will help to relieve the severe overcrowding in the Palace of Westminster. It will provide offices for over two hundred Members and their staff; with six select committee rooms, two of which can

be used flexibly in the manner of the Jubilee Room and one of which is equipped for simultaneous interpretation. There will also be eight conference rooms, a library, a vote office, exhibition space, appropriate refreshment facilities, a post office and a necessities shop.

The project remains on budget: £250 million including an allowance for forecast construction price inflation up to the year 2000. The figure includes the purchase of the site, all fees and expenses, furnishing and fitting out costs, and VAT. The total also includes the additional committee accommodation, security aspects, data and communications facilities which the House of Commons Commission agreed should be added to the brief.

The House commissioned the architects, Michael Hopkins and Partners to produce a building, designed for a life of 200 years or more, using materials of high quality including natural stone, bronze and English oak, as befits a site of international importance. The structural engineers, Ove Arup and Partners, have had to resolve complex design issues to span the building over the District and Circle lines and the Jubilee Line extension, and to accommodate special security requirements. Our construction managers, Laing Management Limited, also face a most demanding engineering task in assembling this unique structure and commissioning the building. Manufacture of components is now proceeding satisfactorily to meet requirements of the programme, and it is planned that the House will be able to occupy the building from the beginning of 2001.

WALES

Immunisation

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has to ensure that children whose parents refuse to have them immunised are registered with local GP practices; [18621]

(2) if he will make a statement on the number of GPs in Wales refusing to register children whose parents choose not to have them immunised. [18622]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Every patient has a right to be registered with a GP. Health Authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure that patients resident in their administrative area have adequate access to general medical services. Health Authorities have the power to allocate patients to GPs in exceptional circumstances where no GP is willing to take them on.

Information on the number of GPs refusing to register children whose parents choose not to have them immunised is not available. This is because GPS are not obliged to give their reasons for refusing to register patients or to notify their Health Authority of the overall number involved. However, information relating to number of patients removed from GPs' lists is collected. Reasons for removal vary and include an act or threat of violence against a GP, a breakdown in the GP/patient relationship and patients themselves requesting a transfer to another GP. In 1995–96, 2,913 patients were removed from GP lists in Wales (out of a total patient registration of nearly 3 million). A breakdown of this figure is attached. The General Medical Council has signalled clearly that it is unprofessional for any GP to discriminate against patients.

Patients removed from GP lists—1995–96

	Number
Patients transferred at their own request	35
Patients transferred at the request of a GP	2,830
Patients removed from a GP's list because of an act or threat of violence	48
Total	2,913

Montserration Evacuees

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements will be put in place to assist local authorities in Wales that provide accommodation for evacuees from Montserrat. [20456]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced on 29 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *817*, that a special Grant Scheme would operate in England. I can confirm that a similar scheme will operate in Wales.

A special grant will be provided under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and we intend to submit a report for the House's approval early next year. Officials in the Welsh Office will write today to Chief Executives and Chief Housing Officers of Welsh local authoritie setting out details of the scheme and arrangements for making claims. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library. Subject to the approval of the House, £1,500 will be made available for each unit of accommodation provided for qualifying households placed with local authorities by the Home Office between 27 August 1997 and 31 January 1998. The grants scheme has been drawn up after consultation with the Welsh Local Government and Tai Cymru.

Finance

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his plans for allocating the Welsh Block provision in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [20457]

Mr. Ron Davies: In 1998–99, the Welsh Office budget will amount to over £7.1 billion. This provision is based on plans set by the previous administration. The Government took the view that it would not be sensible to make hasty decisions about changing existing public expenditure plans. We do not want to put money into areas where the objectives are unclear and the outputs uncertain. Instead, we are conducting a Comprehensive Spending Review of public expenditure across all Government Departments. In Wales, the Review is well underway and I expect it to be completed in the spring of 1998. This will help to ensure that we are better equipped to make informed judgments of where to target public expenditure to meet our priorities and achieve the best results. It will provide a sound basis for the Assembly to set its own priorities. In the meantime, we have recognised that there are some sectors which require immediate help and that is why we have made additional provision for health and education.

In a written answer to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) *Official Report*, 2 December 1997, columns *117–20* I have already announced the provisional settlement for local government. I have now allocated the remainder of the Welsh Block resources and the major elements are set out in the following table. It is my intention to discuss the details of the allocation at a sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee on 16 December.

In the consultation document which I issued on 27 October, I made it clear there would be difficult decisions to make. The plans which I inherited have left little scope for manoeuvre. As a consequence, while I have been able to redistribute some cash this inevitably means those programmes which gain do so at the expense of others.

For the NHS, I have allocated £2,455 million which is an increase of over £113 million or 4.9 per cent. in cash terms over 1997–98. This will provide real growth on health authority revenue allocations which will be announced soon.

I have increased the plans I inherited for the Education Sector. In addition to the £65 million extra announced for schools in the July budget, the reallocations I have made to my Block enables me to provide £175 million for the Further Education Funding Council which will provide for an increase of 2,100 students on the original plan for 1998–99. £232 million is provided for the Higher Education Funding Council which will give an extra 1,000 students over the original planning figure.

Although the Training and Enterprise budget shows a reduction from the current plans, this should be seen in the context of the range of measures which have been introduced to help unemployed people. Under these "New Deal" arrangements I expect Wales to benefit by around £190 million during the lifetime of this Parliament.

For Industry programmes, I have made provision to meet the forecast demand for Regional Selective Assistance.

I have looked closely at the budgets of all the quangos in Wales. I have taken particular interest in those which will form the Economic Powerhouse, and collectively, I have increased the amount of grant-in-aid available to these bodies to take account of the fall in the level of receipts that they will be able to generate. This will allow for a total gross programme of the combined bodies of £185 million.

Although there is a reduction in the overall provision for Roads and Transport, I am able to allow a start on some integrated transport schemes.

In the housing sector, I have allocated sufficient funding to housing associations so as to allow around 2,300 new homes to be started next year which is an increase of 500 over the plans I inherited.

I have maintained spending on the Arts bodies.

For all the other bodies which receive funding from the Welsh Office I have retained the same provision as planned, although I have increased the budget for the Countryside Council for Wales to help it progress the new agri-environmental programme.

I have also provided a sum of £17 million to enable suitable accommodation to be obtained to house the National Assembly of Wales.

Further to my announcement of the proposals for local government revenue spending for 1998–99 on 2 December, my officials have today written to all Welsh councils setting out my proposals for capping and council tax damping. The letter also gives councils details of their provisional standard spending assessment or SSAs—the amount included in my expenditure plans (total standard spending) for their individual spending.

My capping proposals will enable Welsh councils overall to increase 1997–98 budgets by around £125 million or over 4.6 per cent., if they see fit to do so. Each authority will have a 3 per cent. basic increase in its budget. In addition they will each receive a share of the £26.5 million I am making available for community care, education for 4-year-olds and the National Grid for Learning. Around half of Welsh authorities will also benefit from the "passporting" of year-on-year SSA increases which are greater than the cash increase they receive under the 3 per cent. basic increase.

Within each authority's SSA I propose to identify the sums relating to the extra £50 million I am providing for schools; the $41.5 million (which includes the £37.1 million in returned nursery voucher money) which I am making available for 4 year olds education; and community care.

In my Answer of 2 December I said that the increased discretion my capping proposals give local authorities mean that the average band D council tax could rise by £60. I also emphasised the need for local authorities to take full account of the impact on council taxpayers in using their discretion. My hope is that the average band D increase will not exceed £50-or one pound per week.

I accept, however, that there will be variations in tax increase between authorities, and for this reason I am proposing a community-based council tax reduction scheme for 1998–99 which will ensure that no council taxpayer faces an increase at band D of more than £70. For the majority of people, who live in properties in bands A to C the increase will be less—slightly over £1 a week for those living in bands B and C; under £1 a week for those in band A properties.

I am making £31 million available within aggregate external finance to fund the tax reduction scheme. This includes £6 million extra I am providing specifically for damping.

Welsh Office Block—main allocations: 1998–99

£ million

Programme	*1997–98 Plans*	*1998–99 Plans*
Local Authority Total Standard Spending	2,757.3	2,868.6
National Health Service	2,341.5	2,455.3
Further Education Funding Council	176.8	175.0
Higher Education Funding Council	236.8	232.3
Curriculum Council and Assessment Authority	9.9	9.4

Welsh Office Block—main allocations: 1998–99

£ million

Programme	*1997–98 Plans*	*1998–99 Plans*
Training and Enterprise	132.5	123.8
Regional Selective Assistance	70.0	61.3
Welsh Development Agency	84.7	114.0
Development Board for Rural Wales	9.5	9.0
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	47.9	44.9
Wales Tourist Board	14.6	14.7
Central Government Roads and Transport	115.1	100.4
Housing for Wales	60.2	62.9
Welsh Language Board	3.7	3.8
Arts Council of Wales	14.5	14.3
National Library for Wales	6.0	6.0
National Museums and Galleries of Wales	12.4	12.4
Cadw (including Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments)	7.8	7.8
Sports Council for Wales	6.6	6.6
Countryside Council for Wales	23.2	23.7
Local Government Capital Settlement (not including LGR and Fire Service[1])	440.8	423.8
National Assembly for Wales Capital Costs	—	17.0

[1] Includes non-block items and other Government Departments.

General Teaching Council

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons the General Teaching Council for Wa es will not be set up simultaneously with the General Teaching Council for England. [19848]

Mr. Hain: Clause 1 of the Teaching and Higher Education Bill will allow for the establishment of a General Teaching Council for England and Wales and Clause 6 allows for the establishment of the General Teaching Council for Wales as and when the Secretary of State decides. The Welsh Council could be set up at the same time as the English one or at a later date. In deciding when it should be established, the Secretary of State will take account of the emerging constitutional changes affecting the governance of Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

Green Belt (Hertfordshire)

7. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will review the measures to protect the green belt contained in the proposed Hertfordshire county structure plan revision. [18457]

The Prime Minister: We are committed both to protecting the countryside and to regenerating our towns and cities. Policy on the Green Belt remains unchanged. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will consider the proposed modifications to the Hertfordshire County Council's Structure Plan, which are open to public objection until 16 January 1998.

North-West Leicestershire

9. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next intends to visit North-West Leicestershire. [18460]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to visit the hon. Member's constituency, but will continue to visit all regions of the country.

Meirionnydd Nant Conwy

12. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to visit the constituency of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy. [18463]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to visit the hon. Member's constituency at the present time.

Sanctions

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the oral statement of the Secretary of State for International Development of 5 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 328, what steps he has taken to ensure that sanctions affect elites more than poor people in *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* Libya. [18648]

The Prime Minister: The impact of sanctions regimes on poor people is under review by the Department for International Development. In the context of Iraq DFID officials have visited northern Iraq, and are studying the 180 day report of the Secretary General, issued on 1 December, on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 986 and 1111 in order to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian assistance provided under those arrangements in helping meet the needs of Iraqi people. The vast majority of Libya's exports and imports are unaffected by sanctions.

Heads of State (Gifts)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how much has been spent from public funds in respect of gifts given by *(a)* the Queen and *(b)* other members of the Royal Family to heads of state in the last year for which figures are available; and how many gifts such funding supported. [19789]

The Prime Minister: During 1997 The Queen has given 4 gifts to Heads of State at a total cost of £11,734.99. Other members of the Royal Family have to date given 13 gifts to Heads of State at a total cost of £4,233.23.

Security Services (Commissioner)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what arrangements have been made to appoint a Commissioner under section 4 of the Security Service Act 1989 when Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's appointment expires on 14 December; [20453]

(2) what arrangements have been made to appoint a Commissioner under section 8 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 when Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's appointment expires on 14 December. [20454]

The Prime Minister: Lord Justice Stuart-Smith has accepted re-appointment for a further two years until 13 December 1999.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Service Management

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the Government's response to the Home Affairs Committee report into the management of the Prison Service (Second Report of Session 1996–97 HC57). [20455]

Mr. Straw: I am pleased to report that I will tomorrow publish the Government's response to the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry report into the management of the Prison Service. Copies will be placed in the Library.

I am grateful for the Committee's report, and have studied its conclusions and recommendations carefully. I agree with the Committee's conclusion that the Prison Service has done well to manage a rapidly rising prison population and, against this background, has made considerable progress in providing acceptable accommodation for prisoners. The Government accept in principle the desirability of reducing the present high levels of overcrowding, although the Audit of Prison Service Resources, published on 25 July, shows that this will be difficult to achieve in the current circumstances. In the meantime, it will be a priority for the Prison Service to seek to provide adequate regime activities for those prison which are overcrowded. In order to ensure that the projected numbers can be accommodated safely, I have provided the Prison Service with an additional £43 million this year and next to increase capacity and to pay for the costs of overcrowding and purposeful activity. Longer term resourcing issues will be considered as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Committee's conclusions that the needs for accountability and responsibility require Ministerial involvement are correct, and support the steps I have already taken to implement the Government's manifesto commitment to take proper Ministerial responsibility for the Prison Service. I have made clear that there are no present plans to end the Prison Service's agency status. I have considered and endorsed the findings of the Director General's organisational review of the Service, published on 10 November, which included measures to re-assert and reinforce Ministerial responsibility for the Prison Service.

The Committee also endorses the role of the private sector, and recommends that its involvement in the Prison Service should be allowed to develop further. The Government have expressed reservations about the principle of contracting out the management of prisons. It is generally accepted that responsibility for the incarceration of offenders must remain with the state. As I explained in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) on 19 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *247–49*, the issue is whether that responsibility should, as a matter of principle, be discharged through direct management in the public sector or whether it can properly and effectively be discharged under a regulatory framework. The Government will give careful consideration to the conclusions put forward by the Home Affairs Select Committee before settling their overall approach to this issue.

Animal Experiments

Mrs. Fiona Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his Answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) of 6 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *284*, if additional funds have been secured for research into alternatives to animal use in scientific procedures. [20615]

Mr. George Howarth: I am pleased to announce that the budget which will be made available to the Animal Procedures Committee on 1998–99 to sponsor research to reduce, refine or replace animal experiments will be £259,000. This is an increase of £77,000 compared to the 1997–98 figures.

Prison Service (Health Care)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* other staff currently working in the Prison Service have undergone recognised training courses in dealing with mentally disordered offenders. [19292]

Ms Quin: Fourteen doctors (8 per cent.) are members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Since 1 April 1997, 63 doctors (32 per cent.) attended two Mental Health training days organised by the Prison Service. These courses have received recognition from the Postgraduate Education Offices of the Regional Health Authorities. In addition, 20 doctors are currently studying for a Diploma in Prison Medicine which has a significant training element in dealing with mentally disordered offenders.

A further 332 other members of staff are Registered Mental Nurses, representing 21 per cent. of the total Health Care Officer and Nursing grades.

Prison Suicides

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of *(a)* female prisoners held, *(b)* female deaths in prison and *(c)* female suicides in prison in each of the last 10 years. [19835]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The following table shows the numbers of female prisoners held, female deaths (other than self-inflicted) in prison and female self-inflicted deaths in prison in each of the last 10 years.

Year	Female[1] prisoners held	Female deaths	Female self-inflicted deaths	Total female deaths
1988	1,789	0	0	0
1989	1,767	0	2	2
1990	1,597	1	1	2
1991	1,561	0	0	0
1992	1,577	0	2	2
1993	1,561	2	1	3
1994	1,811	0	1	1
1995	1,979	1	2	3
1996	2,262	2	2	4
1997[2]	2,926	1	3	4

[1] Average female prisoner population.
[2] Figures as at 8 December 1997.
Not all self-inflicted deaths conclude with a verdict of suicide.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each financial year since 1992–93 and for the present year to date *(a)* the total number of suicides in establishments which are his responsibility and *(b)* the numbers of those who were aged under 21 years at the time of death. [18841]

Ms Quin: The total number of self-inflicted deaths in Prison Service establishments for each financial year since 1992–93 and for the present year to date, together with the numbers of those who were aged under 21 years at the time of death, are as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*[1]1997–98*
Total number of self-inflicted deaths	43	47	65	59	65	50
Numbers of prisoners who were aged under 21 years	6	4	8	7	16	5

[1] Figures for 1997–98 as at 1 December 1997. Not all self-inflicted deaths conclude with a verdict of suicide.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has undertaken into *(a)* prison suicides and *(b)* female prison suicides in the last five years. [19838]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* During 1992, the Prison Service reviewed existing research and best practice in suicide prevention. This review formed the basis for the revised suicide awareness strategy and is described in "The Way Forward".

The revised strategy was piloted in 1993 prior to implementation in 1994. The results of this research were published in the Guidance Pack "Caring for the Suicidal in Custody".

A research and development group on suicide and self-injury at Prison Service headquarters acts as a forum for formulating and co-ordinating research into suicide and self-injury in forensic settings.

Routine research, reviewing patterns and trends of completed suicides is undertaken, and a range of research has been conducted, including: the effectiveness of prisoner Listener schemes; the effect of staff attitudes in managing suicidal behaviour; audits of completed suicides; suicides amongst life sentence prisoners; developing risk screening procedures amongst young offenders; evaluation of the 1994 revised strategy; the impact of staff training; reception and induction procedures within local prisons and communication of risk information between criminal justice agencies. Current commissioned research includes a project being undertaken at the University of Kent at Canterbury, examining current practices of recording and monitoring self-injury and suicidal behaviours, with the objective of identifying more effective methods of management.

The majority of research conducted on suicide and self-injury amongst female prisoners has been undertaken locally and includes research into the links between coping styles and suicidal behaviour; an evaluation of cognitive behavioural interventions in reducing risk of suicide; an examination of the distinctions between staff and women prisoners' perceptions of self-injury and a review of completed suicides by female prisoners since 1989.

The 1997 publication "Suicide and Self-Injury in Prisons" (by the British Psychological Society) includes an overview of recent and current research in the area.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms he has in place to provide suicide counselling and monitoring for female prisoners. [19836]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The Prison Service is actively involved in identifying and caring for all prisoners, both female and male, who are at risk of suicide and/or self-harm. Their strategy on caring for the suicidal in custody involves being able to identify and support prisoners at risk of suicidal behaviour. Every prison has a local Suicide Awareness Team which has oversight of the strategy in their establishment.

The strategy involves the Samaritans, who befriend prisoners in crisis through visits to prison and by phone. Over the last five years, the Samaritans have been actively involved in setting up Listener/Befriender schemes in prisons where selected prisoners are trained to provide peer group support for fellow prisoners in crisis. These schemes have been effective in reducing instances of suicide and self-harm

Female Prisoners

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of detaining convicted and remand female prisoners in the same prison. [19830]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* It is Prison Service policy to detain convicted and unconvicted female prisoners in the same prison to enable them, on their return from court, to await transfer to a training prison, to serve a short sentence, to be held close to their homes and, for those facing further charges, to remain near the courts.

This does not necessarily mean that unconvicted prisoners should mix with convicted prisoners, unless they are willing to do so. At most local prisons, however, overcrowding prevents complete separation and some mixing is unavoidable, both for activities and in living areas. Where unconvicted prisoners have to live on the same landing as convicted prisoners, they cannot be required to share cells with convicted prisoners.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned into the psychological effect of incarceration on female prisoners. [19837]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The Prison Service has commissioned no research which has been specifically concerned to measure the psychological impact of imprisonment on women prisoners.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total cost to date of the three electronic monitoring pilot projects which commenced in July 1995; and what was the total number of orders made at the latest date available. [19460]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Because of considerations of commercial confidentiality, it would not be appropriate to publish details of the payments made to contractors which are the major part of the cost of the pilots.

However, we estimate that the average cost of a curfew order enforced by electronic monitoring would be around £1,900. If the scheme were available throughout England and Wales. On 1 December 1997, a total of 771 orders had been made since the pilots commenced in July 1995.

Probation Service

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned on the effectiveness of the Probation Service. [19461]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Since 1 May, the Home Office has published two research studies which are relevant to the effectiveness of the probation service: Home Office Research Studies 169 (which examined how the service deals with offenders' literacy problems) and 171 (which examined the effectiveness of supervision programmes directed towards changing offenders' behaviour).

The following pieces of research are in progress or being prepared for publication: a study of the impact, in terms of rate of reconviction, of different kinds of programme aimed specifically at young offenders convicted of motoring-related offences; a study of new approaches in the Inner London and Surrey probation areas to improving offenders' employability; an evaluation of the community sentence demonstration projects in Teesside and Shropshire; and a study of the effectiveness of supervision programmes involving physically demanding activities. A review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation of supervision programmes against the critical success factors identified through research is also to be published early next year.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage change in *(a)* probation staff, *(b)* probation administrative staff and *(c)* probation staff working in prisons since June 1994; and if he will make a statement. [18646]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* Between June 1994 and June 1997, there was a 10 per cent. reduction in probation staff as a whole, a 16 per cent. reduction in administrative clerical and secretarial staff and a per cent. reduction in probation staff working in Prison Service establishments.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints were made against *(a)* the Metropolitan Police and *(b)* the police in England and Wales; what is the ratio of the number of complaints to (i) the population of the jurisdiction, (ii) the number of police officers and (iii) the number investigated; how many of these complaints were investigated; how many investigations led to the instigation of disciplinary proceedings against officers; what is the ratio of proceedings instigated to complaints made; how many disciplinary proceedings led to disciplinary action; and what is the ratio between disciplinary action to complaints made for the last year for which figures are available. [19494]

Mr. Michael: The readily available information is given in the following table. This includes details of the number of complaints recorded and completed. Information is not available on the number of complaints where disciplinary proceedings led to disciplinary action. Instead, information has been provided for the number of officers for whom disciplinary proceedings led to disciplinary action together with ratios of officers proceeded against and disciplined to completed complaints.

Police complaints and discipline 1996–97

	Metropolitan Police	*England and Wales*
Total complaints recorded[1]	9,122	33,859
Total complaints completed[2]	9,919	36,731
(i) Ratio complaints recorded to the population	0.0012	0.0007
(ii) Ratio complaints recorded to police officers	0.3372	0.2708
(iii) Number of completed complaints investigated	2,667	10,820
Investigated complaints resulting in disciplinary charges	39	148
Officers charged with disciplinary offence as a result of a complaint	36	141
Officers receiving disciplinary action as a result of a complaint	20	102
Ratio of officers proceeded against to complaints completed	0.0036	0.0038
Ratio of officers disciplined to complaints completed	0.0020	0.0028

[1] Complaints recorded in a year are not necessarily completed in that year.

[2] Complaints completed in a year could have been recorded in previous years.

Manslaughter

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of cases passed to the CPS as being capable of sustaining a charge of manslaughter have been prosecuted in each of the last three years; [19247]

(2) what percentage of road deaths which the Police have considered might sustain a charge of *(a)* manslaughter, *(b)* causing death by (i) careless and (ii) reckless driving and *(c)* causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs have been prosecuted in each of the last three years; [19322]

(3) what percentage of cases passed to the CPS as being capable of sustaining a charge of causing death by (i) reckless driving and (ii) careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs have been prosecuted in each of the last three years. [19329]

Mr. Michael: The data collected centrally on court proceedings by the Home Office do not identify the charge under which a defendant is prosecuted.

Also, the data held centrally by the Crown Prosecution Service do not generally identify the category of offence. However, the numbers of defendants proceeded against in magistrates' courts and tried in the Crown Court for these offences in each of the last three years are as follows:

	1994	*1995*	*1996*
Defendants proceeded against in the Magistrates' court			
Manslaughter[1]	50	69	81
Causing death by:			
reckless driving[2]	235	247	260
careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs	30	31	39
Defendants tried in the Crown Court[3]			
Manslaughter[1]	267	269	285
Causing death by:			
reckless driving[2]	230	239	241
careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs	48	52	57

[1] Includes offences under sections 5, 9 and 10 of the Common Law and Offences against the Person Act 1861 and section 2 of the Homicide Act 1957.

[2] Includes the offence of causing death by careless driving.

[3] The data cover defendants either acquitted or found guilty of the offence. Hence they cover those who were prosecuted under a more serious offence but convicted of one of the above offences and do not cover those prosecuted for these offences but found guilty of a lesser offence.

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average sentence for a conviction for manslaughter, in each of the last three years. [19244]

Mr. Michael: The average custodial sentence length, based on all sentence lengths excluding life, for a person convicted of manslaughter under sections 5, 9 and 10 of the Common Law and Offences against the Person Act 1861, and section 2 of the Homicide Act 1957 in each of the last three years is as follows:

	Average sentence length (months)
1994	58.5
1995	58.3
1996	61.2

EU Conventions

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *690-91*, concerning draft conventions in respect of driver disqualification, if he will take steps to consult relevant organisations concerned with the consequences and operation of each convention. [19477]

Ms Quin: As I indicated in that answer, the Home Office regularly consults relevant Departments and agencies over both draft Conventions. In addition, both texts have been deposited with the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities. I understand that the Select Committee has already received evidence on the draft Mutual Legal Assistance Convention from at least two organisations.

Electro-shock Devices

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 20 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *307-08*, if he will list the licences which have been granted to companies under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968 to handle, distribute, store or manufacture electric shock devices since that date. [19454]

Mr. Michael: No. The position remains as set out in my reply to my hon. Friend of 20 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *307-08*. Since 1992, only one company has been granted authority to possess prohibited electro-shock devices, and that authority does not allow the company to sell or otherwise dispose of the devices in any way. When the time comes for the company to dispose of the weapons, they will have to apply for their authority to be varied so as to allow them to do so. That authority will be worded to ensure that the devices are disposed of safely with no risk of their falling into the wrong hands.

Meanwhile, it remains Government policy that no authority to possess, purchase or acquire, manufacture, sell or transfer electro-shock weapons will be granted unless there are wholly exceptional and compelling reasons for so doing.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which police forces witnessed the Air Taser electro-shock device being demonstrated; [19455]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the completed evaluation carried out by the Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch into the Taser electro-shock device. [19456]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch has not evaluated the Taser electro-shock device and has no plans to do so. I am not aware of any demonstration of the device in this country.

Altcourse Prison

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the employment of social workers by Group 4 at HMP Altcourse indicating *(a)* the number to be employed and *(b)* the duties involved; [16556]

(2) what probation provision there will be at HMP Altcourse; what discussions have taken place with his Department concerning the level of that provision; and if he will make a statement. [16557]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 20 November 1997]:* The contract for Her Majesty's Prison Altcourse requires the contractor, Group 4, with the Chief Probation Officer for Merseyside, to carry out negotiations under the terms of the Framework Document published by the Prison Service under cover of Instruction to Governors 30/93 and entitled National Framework for the Throughcare of Offenders in Custody for the Completion of Supervision in the Community. In the light of these negotiations, the contractor may decide whether or not to employ seconded

probation officers in order to undertake his contractual obligations to provide welfare assistance, discharge reports and plans for individual prisoners that are fully compatible with the Prison Service's Sentence Planning Manual. Group 4 have decided not to do so. Instead, the contractor will employ its own staff.

As in many prisons, responsibility for this work will be shared. At Her Majesty's Prison Altcourse, it will be undertaken by staff, including prisoner custody officers, based on houseblocks, a specialist counselling team who will work closely with a clinical psychologist and a throughcare team. The latter will include four social workers required to hold one of the recognised qualifications for appointment as a probation officer, that is the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work or the Diploma in Social Work. Their duties include risk and needs assessments, plans for supporting individual prisoners, prisoner programmes, in-care and resettlement, reports for conditional release and external liaison with community supervision agencies.

Prison Service staff responsible for the administration of the contract have discussed these arrangements with Group 4 while reviewing preparations to open Her Majesty's Prison Altcourse on 1 December. Their effectiveness will be monitored as part of the general oversight of the contract undertaken by prison staff on site when the prison is operational. These arrangements do not reflect a change in Government attitude towards the issue of throughcare. Subsequent design, construct, manage and finance contracts reflect different principles which have been agreed in discussions between the Prison Service and the Association of Chief Probation Officers.

Prison Population

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what shortfalls in prison accommodation have been identified from the prison population projections over the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [16558]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 20 November 1997]:* The Prison Service was allocated an additional £43 million in July this year to increase prison capacities to avoid a shortage of accommodation during this financial year and next. However, the short-term population projection prepared by the Research and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office in October 1997 indicates that a shortage of accommodation may emerge in early 1999.

The projection was based on the surmise that recent trends in sentencing would continue. Measures have already been put in place which will reduce the prison population, including plea before venue, which is expected to save between 1,100 and 2,600 places. The recently announced home detention curfews are also expected to free up between 3,000 to 4,000 prison places a year.

The next prison population projection is scheduled for publication in January 1998.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her Department's estimates of the percentage of businesses that are *(a)* currently aware of the year 2000 problem relating to computer systems and *(b)* taking action at shop level; and what estimate she has made of the subsequent loss of gross domestic product based on these figures. [14553]

Mrs. Roche: The Department has not made a formal assessment of levels of awareness or actions under way. However, in October DTI supported Sage Software in announcing the results of their survey. One of their key findings is that awareness of the problem is high (at 95 per cent.) but that the number of those that have completed an audit is lower (at 55 per cent.), while the number for those planning to allocate budget in 1997–98 to resolve the problem is only 43 per cent.

Nor has the Department been able to make any formal assessment of potential loss of GDP. The impact on GDP will depend on the action taken from now on and I am urging businesses to act without delay.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her Department's assessment of the level of preparedness of UK business in relation to year 2000 computer compliance. [13228]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* The Department has not made a formal assessment. However, in October DTI supported Sage Software in announcing the results of their survey which, as I said at the time, are clearly a cause for concern. One of the key findings is that awareness of the problem is high (at 95 per cent.) but that the number of these that have completed an audit is lower (at 55 per cent.), while the number for those planning to allocate budget in 1997–98 to resolve the problem is only 43 per cent.

This justifies DTI's new initiative—"Action 2000" which will help provide businesses with what they need to tackle the problem.

Offset Exhibition

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance her Department gave to the organisers of the Offset exhibition at the north Wales Centre, Aberconwy; and what was the cost to public funds. [15291]

Mr. Battle: The involvement of my department was limited to officials discussing this exhibition with its organisers in advance. No cost was borne by my department.

European Coal and Steel Community

Mr. Gill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the redirection of moneys

and continuation of projects covered by the European Coal and Steel Community after expiry of that Treaty. [18834]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The Commission has put to the Council a proposal that income from the reserves of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) should, after the expiry of the Treaty, be used to fund research and development projects in sectors related to the coal and steel industries. The Council has welcomed this in principal and is now considering the detail of the proposal. Research projects currently funded by the ECSC will continue to be funded in accordance with the terms of the individual offers of support made by the ECSC.

Correspondence

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to reply to the letter of 20 November from the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham. [19986]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* I replied to the hon. Member on 9 December.

Enemy Property Report

Mr. Ivan Lewis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects the repot on British policy towards enemy property during and after World War II will be published. [19596]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* As I announced in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member from Leyton and Wanstead, on 31 July 1997, *Official Report,* column *641*, the Government has set in train a research project to examine papers relevant to the Trading with the Enemy legislation under which the property of enemy countries was confiscated during the Second World War. The project, which has been co-ordinated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in close partnership with the DTI, is now nearly complete. A report of the findings will be published early in the New Year.

Port Development (India)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received regarding the proposed port development by P and O at Vadharan in Dahanu Taluka, India. [19917]

Mrs. Roche: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has received one letter from the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Brake: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the guidance contained in PPG Note 22 is used to determine applications for renewable energy development which are dealt with by her Department under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. [19565]

Mr. Battle: Yes.

Export Initiative

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives her Department will undertake in response to the report by the joint DTI/FCO Export Forum, Towards an Export Initiative; and what part the Business Links will have in this initiative. [19582]

Mrs. Roche: The Government has welcomed the thrust of the Export Forum's report and will be looking to take action in a number of areas identified by the report. Our response to some Forum recommendations will need to await the completion of the DTI and FCO Comprehensive Spending Reviews. Consistent with the Government's vision statement on Business Links, we will be taking forward the Forum's recommendations to raise quality and standards across the Business Link network, to encourage the spread of best practice and to improve communications between the Overseas Trade Services and Business Links.

Export Licences

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of applications for export licences are currently being processed by her Department's export licensing unit within 20 days; and what was the equivalent percentage on *(a)* 1 December 1996 and *(b)* 1 May 1997. [19360]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 5 December 1997]:* The Export Control Organisation (ECO) of DTI measures its performance against two aims:

- to provide a substantive response to an application within 20 working days of receipt for applications that need to be circulated to other Government Departments according to their policy requirements ("circulated" cases);
- to provide such a response within 10 working days of receipt for applications that are dealt with by DTI itself ("non circulated" cases).

In each case full documentation in support of the application must be provided by the applicant at the outset, for these targets to apply.

ECO management data on the processing of licence application is compiled on the basis of four-week periods. The figures to the nearest percentage point for the periods ending nearest to the dates specified are as follow:

Per cent.

Four-weeks periods	*13 December 1996*	*2 May 1997*	*14 November 1997*
Circulated applications completed in 20 days	72	69	47
Non circulated applications completed in 10 days	93	97	66

Intellectual Property Treaties

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans she has to ratify the treaties adopted at the WIPO conference in Geneva in December 1996 intended to enable British music companies to make their recordings available to consumers world-wide via digital networks; [19959]

(2) what plans she has to raise the issue of copyright protection of recordings on digital networks within the European Union; [19960]

(3) what action she plans to take to encourage other member states of the European Union to ratify the WIPO treaties; [19961]

(4) what plans she has to discuss the European Copyright Directive at meetings of the Council of Ministers; [19962]

(5) what plans she has to ratify the treaties adopted at the WIPO Conference in Geneva in December 1996. [19963]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government fully appreciates the fundamental significance of the new treaties to the UK music industry, which was one of the principal reasons why officials from my Department were at the forefront in securing the successful conclusion of the treaties last December. It follows therefore that we wish to ensure that the UK is in a position to ratify the treaties at the earliest possible time. We also intend to take every opportunity during the forthcoming UK Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers to impress the urgency of the task upon our European partners. In doing so, we will stress the particular relevance of the treaties to the protection of sound recordings in digital networks.

A number of changes to UK law are however needed to enable us to ratify the treaties. Several of these are in areas which the European Commission's planned Directive on copyright and related rights is expected to cover. We will need, therefore, to know the likely form of future EC law in these areas with reasonable certainty before we can reach conclusions on legislation to implement the treaties in the UK, in order to avoid inconsistencies between the two. We do not expect to be in such a position for some months at least, since the draft Directive has yet to be submitted to the Council of Ministers. Although we would hope to be able to proceed with treaty implementing legislation as soon as the situation regarding EC law becomes clear, it will not be possible for legal and other reasons for the UK to ratify the treaties until the Community as a whole and all of its Member States are in a position to do so.

Once the draft Directive is submitted, which we anticipate will be early in 1998, discussions on it will start at Council Working Group level, and we hope to make as much progress as possible during our Presidency. However, before the Council can reach a common position on the draft Directive, the European Parliament will have to give its opinion and we believe that this is unlikely to occur during the UK Presidency.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, with dates, for each of his ministers, from 2 May to date, *(a)* which organisations he has met, *(b)* which organisations and companies he has visited and where they are located, *(c)* what regional visits have been made and whom he saw and *(d)* which Council of Ministers meetings were attended; and which individuals have had meetings with ministers and officials. [16346]

Dr. John Cunningham: The information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Common Agricultural Policy

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which Minister in his Department is responsible for liaising with the Department for International Development on matters relating to the future of the Common Agricultural Policy. [18945]

Dr. John Cunningham: My Noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary (Lord Donoughue) has specific responsibility for policy matters relating to the Common Agricultural Policy.

Land

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many transfers of IACS eligibility arising from the alteration of status with an equivalent area of ineligible land have been allowed by his Department during the last year. [19010]

Mr. Rooker: During the period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997 ninety two such transfers were approved in England. This involved 745.23 hectares of land made ineligible to receive payments under the Arable Area Payments Scheme and 721.59 hectares of previously ineligible land made eligible.

Water Safety

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water will include a requirement not to spread waste from rendering plants on agricultural land. [19930]

Mr. Morley: The spreading of waste on land for the benefit of agriculture is subject to the requirements of the waste management licensing system under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Environment Agency is responsible for enforcement of the system.

The text of the revised version of the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water has not yet been finalised. However, it is likely to state that any processed animal waste, in solid form, from rendering plants must not be spread on agricultural land and that the Environment Agency should first be consulted before the spreading liquid waste.

The aim is to publish the revised Code in 1998.

HEALTH

Gene Therapy Advisory Committee

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the work of the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee. [20452]

Ms Jowell: The Gene Therapy Advisory Committee has performed extremely successfully since its establishment in 1993. As is usual with all advisory bodies, which have operated for a number of years, I have asked a small team to undertake a review of GTAC's role and functions. I expect the review team to present its recommendations early in the new year.

The members are Mrs. Marcia Fry (Department of Health) Chair, Professor Kay Davies—Professor of Genetics, Oxford University, Dr. Brian Davis—Medicines Control Agency, Professor Jim McEwen—Multicentre Research Ethics Committee Chairman, Scotland, Dr. Peter Rigby—National Institute for Medical Research, Mr. Indarjit Singh—Member of British Medical Association Ethics Committee and Dr. Richard Tiner—Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry.

Medical and Dental Students

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support will be provided to medical students covering an additional, intercalated year in order to achieve a science degree. [19855]

Mr. Milburn: Where medical and dental students take an intercalated degree, it will be counted as part of their overall course. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 September, the Department will pay the students' contribution towards tuition fees and provide means-tested National Health Service bursaries for those students who are eligible from year five of their course onwards.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support will be made available by his Department to students who take *(a)* medicine and *(b)* dentistry as a second degree. [19856]

Mr. Milburn: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 September, the Department will pay the students' contribution towards tuition fees and provide means-tested National Health Service bursaries for those students who are eligible from year five of their medicine or dentistry course onwards. No public support is available for second degree in any discipline.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much *(a)* lone parents, *(b)* the elderly, *(c)* the disabled and *(d)* couples with children, who are claiming council tax benefit and living in properties in bands F, G, and H will have to find on average to meet the shortfall resulting from the restriction of council tax benefit to the band E level; and what will be the average shortfall for all such claimants. [19572]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set our in the table.

Type of recipient	*Average weekly shortfall (£)*
Elderly	3.90
Disabled	4.00
Lone parent	3.60
Couple with children	4.00
All of the above recipients	3.90

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten pence and quoted at 1998–99 levels.
2. Final figures exclude those recipients who do not fall into any of the categories given in the table, and are not therefore the same as the losses for all recipients.

Lone Parents

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the numbers of lone parents who are *(a)* working and *(b)* not working in each region and nation of Britain. [18084]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

	Number of lone parents	
Region	*Working*	*Not working*
North	35,000	55,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	60,000	70,000
North West	80,000	150,000
East Midlands	40,000	65,000
West Midlands	55,000	100,000
East Anglia	25,000	30,000
Greater London	85,000	190,000
South East (excluding London)	90,000	125,000
South West	55,000	75,000
Wales	35,000	55,000
Scotland	60,000	110,000
Total	620,000	1,025,000

Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000.
2. Working is defined as all those who are (i) employees (ii) self-employed (iii) employees temporarily not at work or (iv) those in work related government training. Not working is defined as those who are (i) unemployed or (ii) inactive. These are based on the International Labour Organisation categorisations.
3. The figures should be treated as broad estimates since they are drawn from Family Resource Survey data which is subject to sampling error and to possible variations in response rates between regions and between working and non-working lone parents. Figures for the regions with smaller lone parent populations should be treated with particular caution.

Source:
1995–96 Family Resources Survey which covers Great Britain.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average age of lone parents on income support. [18875]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As at February 1997, the average age of lone parents on Income Support was 32 years.

Notes:
1. Sample size 5 per cent.
2. Lone parents are defined as those claimants receiving the lone parent premium.

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 1997.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what information services are used in the New Deal for Lone Parent pilot areas; and who provides them; [16462]

(2) what resources she will make available for local partnerships as a result of the New Deal for Lone Parents pilots. [16442]

Mr. Keith Bradley: New Deal for Lone Parents will fulfil the Government's commitment to provide practical help and advice for lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child is at school and who want to work. The programme is already available in eight areas and will be rolled out nationally from October next year, at a cost of £150 million over the course of this Parliament, raised from the Windfall Levy.

Results from the first eight areas are encouraging. Many lone parents with pre-school children are asking if they can participate in the New Deal. An additional £25 million has therefore been made available from October next year to offer the service to lone parents with a child under five who want to work. In addition, the New Deal for Lone Parents will be available to all lone parents who make a new claim for Income Support from April 1998.

New Deal Advisers are able to provide a range of information to participating lone parents. A key feature of the New Deal service is the provision of advice on how in-work benefits can help lone parents to be better off in-work. Advisers obtain estimates of likely entitlements to in-work benefits such as Family Credit from the Integrated Benefit Information System (IBIS) developed by the Benefits Agency.

Information on job vacancies is available via the Employment Service Labour Market System (LMS). Advisers based in Employment Service Jobcentres can access this information direct, whilst those based in Benefits Agency offices can receive information on LMS vacancies from the Vacancy Manager at their local Jobcentre. This information helps Advisers to match job vacancies to the needs of lone parents.

The lone parents who move into work as a result of the New Deal may need help to find suitable childcare. Advisers in all of the first eight areas of the New Deal for Lone Parents have access to a database of local childcare facilities which has been prepared by a consultancy following a competitive tender. In some areas, Advisers are making use of other childcare information services where these offer a better service. Advisers in Cardiff are using the Chwarae Teg database of childcare facilities in Wales, whilst those in Cambridgeshire have direct access, via the internet, to the Opportunity Links system.

Although there are no formal local partnerships in place in the eight first phase areas, New Deal Advisers have been encouraged to form close links with local employers, Training and Enterprise Councils, Local Authorities and voluntary organisations. As part of the process of planning for national implementation of the New Deal for Lone Parents, the Government is consulting with employers, Local Authorities, the TEC National Council and voluntary sector organisations. Any partnerships resulting from these negotiations will be financed from the funds already allocated to deliver the New Deal over the course of this Parliament.

Family Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the growth in take up of the child care disregard in family credit in the most recent year for which figures are available. [18082]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. The take up estimates produced for the income-related benefits do not provide estimates of component elements such as the childcare disregard.

The number of Family Credit claimants with an allowed claim for help with childcare charges over the last 12 months has increased from 25,000 (May 1996) to 30,000 (May 1997), an increase of 20 per cent.

Women's National Commission

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on her plans for the Women's National Commission. [19145]

Ms Ruddock: As part of our strategy to achieve our priority of improving dialogue with women, we are looking at communications with women's organisations. The Government are reviewing the role and status of the Women's National Commission (WNC). The terms of reference of the review are:

> to examine the objectives, membership and the funding of the WNC in the light of the Government's need to ensure that there is an effective, efficient independent channel of communication between women's organisations and Government for the 21st Century; to assess costs and benefits; and to develop, if appropriate, options for change.

The WNC has also decided to review its own structure and organisation. We have therefore agreed with them that, rather than have two consultation exercises, the WNC should obtain the views of its members and these will form part of the evidence for our review.

During the past six months, I have met with many women's organisations in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. As part of my wider dialogue with them I have sought their views on the WNC, of which some, but not all, were members.

Local Employment Trading Schemes

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals there are to exempt local employment trading schemes from benefit calculations. [18931]

Mr. Denham: The Government believes that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Our Welfare to Work objectives are to provide work incentives, to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to strike a new balance between responsibilities and rights. A programme of monitoring and evaluation is under way to enable us to ensure that Jobseeker's Allowance contributes to achieving our objectives.

In addition to this major evaluation exercise, we shall also keep the individual benefit rules, including the treatment of LETS, under active consideration as we develop our plans.

Pensioners' Age Addition

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect of *(a)* an increase in the pension age addition for the over-80s from 25 pence to £5, *(b)* the introduction of a new pension age addition of £3 for those aged 75 to 79 and *(c)* both *(a)* and *(b)* together on (i) gross pension expenditure, (ii) income tax revenues and (iii) expenditure on means-tested benefits; and what would be the overall effect on the Exchequer in each case. [18370]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Age additions in 1997–98

£ million

	(a) Age addition for over 80s of £5	*(b) Age addition for 75–79s of £3*	*Both (a) and (b)*
Gross costs	600	310	910
Income-related benefit offset	–250	–90	–330
Income tax offset	–40	–20	–60
Net Exchequer cost	310	210	520

Source:
Gross costs provided by Government Actuary's Department. Net costs taking account of income related benefit offsets have been calculated by the Department of Social Security Analytical Services Division. The income tax offset has been provided by Inland Revenue.
Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Pension Funds

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the total funds invested in order to meet private pension and annuity liabilities in the United Kingdom. [19008]

Mr. Denham: The Government is committed to supporting and strengthening the framework of occupational pensions, and to create a new framework of secure, flexible and value for money second pensions for those who do not have the opportunity of contributing to a second pension, either because they lack the resources or because they do not have access to a decent second pension.

In 1995, the total amount of money invested in private pension funds in the United Kingdom was estimated to be £750 billion. This includes financial assets in all funded occupational pension schemes and personal pensions, including retirement annuity contracts.

Child Benefit

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals she has to extend child benefit to those who become 19 years old in their last year of full-time education at school or college. [16929]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have no plans to extend child benefit to those who become 19 years old in their last year of full-time education at school or college.

Industrial Disability Claims

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people had good cause to make a late claim and were made an award for industrial disease in 1996; [16472]

(2) how many people had good cause to make a late claim and were made an award for industrial injury in 1997. [16473]

Mr. Denham: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the names of the officials appointed to appraise policy on gender equality grounds in each government department. [17271]

Ms Ruddock: One of the key areas for the Ministers for Women is to ensure that all Government Departments consider the views and needs of women when developing policy. The issue of policy appraisal on gender equality grounds is currently under review.

We do not normally name officials appointed for specific tasks.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what involvement the Minister for Women had in the decision by the Secretary of State for Defence to allow women to fight on the front line. [17270]

Ms Ruddock: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, responded to the need to ensure equality of treatment for women in the armed forces. I fully support his decision. One of my key priority areas is to ensure that all Government Departments consider the views and needs of women when developing policy.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment has been made of the number of *(a)* owner occupiers, *(b)* private tenants and *(c)* social housing tenants in each local authority area, who will be affected by the restriction in council tax benefit to the band E level. [19344]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Estimated number of council tax benefit recipients affected by the restrictions to band E

Tenure group	*Number of recipients*
Owner occupiers	25,000
Social housing tenants	5,000
Private tenants	15,000
Not identified[1]	15,000
Total	65,000

Notes:
[1] Not identified. However, it is likely that the majority of these cases will be owner occupiers.
1. Numbers of recipients have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 cases. Figures do not sum due to rounding.
Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information Statistics.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated savings in each of the first three years, from the restrictions of council tax benefit to the band E level from April 1998. [19343]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated savings in each of the first three years from restrictions of council tax benefit to band E

£ million

Year	*Estimated savings*
1998–1999	15
1999–2000	15
2000–2001	15

1. Savings have been rounded to the nearest £5 million.
2. Figures are modelled using the May 1995 Housing Benefit (Management Information System) uprated to each of the above years in line with March 1997 Departmental Report forecasts of caseloads and expenditure.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment has been made of the *(a)* additional council tax arrears and *(b)* costs to local authorities and magistrates courts of additional enforcement action, which will result from the restriction of council tax benefit to the band E level. [19346]

Mr. Keith Bradley: This measure will affect only those people living in the most expensive properties, and the numbers are small: less than 2 per cent. of Council Tax Benefit recipients will be affected, the majority of whom will lose less than £3.00 per week. It will be for individual Local Authorities to determine what action to take in respect of individuals who do not meet their liability.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates have been made of *(a)* the average and *(b)* the maximum annual shortfall council tax benefit claimants will have to meet in respect of those living in properties in bands F, G and H as a result of the restriction of council tax benefit to the band E level. [19345]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated average and maximum annual shortfalls to be met by council tax benefit recipients in bands F, G and H

Band	*Average annual shortfall (£)*	*Maximum annual shortfall (£)*
F	150	247
G	290	494
H	243	864

1. The average annual shortfall is based on projections for 1998–99.
2. The available data cannot predict the maximum annual shortfall Council Tax Benefit recipients will have to meet. Therefore, the maximum annual figures are hypothetical based on the 1997 council tax in Liverpool.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which 20 local authority areas he estimates will yield the greatest savings from restricting council tax benefit to band E from April 1998. [19347]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A reliable estimate on an individual Local Authority basis is not available.

Note:

The effects of this policy are modelled using Housing Benefit Management Information Statistics. This is sample data encompassing 1 per cent. of Council Tax Benefit recipients. This data provides an accurate picture of the characteristics of the Council Tax Benefit recipient population as a whole.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to amend the nominal rate for interest received on savings, used in the calculation of council tax benefit. [19349]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Wales (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 2 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *205–06*.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the inclusion of widows pension in the list of benefits treated as overlapping benefits for the purposes of paying invalid care allowance. [18859]

Mr. Denham: The Social Security system, including the relationships between the different benefits, is under consideration in the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review.

Child Support Agency

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the recent performance of the Child Support Agency. [18730]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Although there are some signs that the Child Support Agency's performance may have improved since its early days, there is still a long way to go before public confidence in it reaches an acceptable level. We are therefore looking closely at all aspects of the Agency's work to ensure that it provides a consistent, fair and efficient service to all its clients. We aim to bring forward proposals in the first half of next year.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she plans to visit the CSA in Belfast. [14224]

Mr. Keith Bradley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, regularly visits the operational units of the Department. She has no immediate plans to visit the Child Support Agency in Belfast which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Incapacity Benefit

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of people on incapacity benefit were called back for medical re-assessment; what percentage of them were then disallowed benefit; what percentage appealed to tribunal; and what percentage won at the tribunal in the last year for which figures are available. [18825]

Mr. Denham: The information is not currently available. A study is in hand which will provide some measure of the issues raised.

VAT on Fuel

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the average value of the reduction in VAT on fuel to a pensioner on income support; and if she will make a statement. [14991]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Everyone will see the benefit of the reduction in the rate of VAT on fuel in their winter fuel bills. In addition, this winter and next pensioner households in receipt of income support will receive an additional payment of £50 to help with fuel costs, and other pensioner households will receive £20.

The current average value of the reduction in VAT on fuel to a pensioner in receipt of income support including the higher pensioner premium is 25 pence per week.

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the saving on industrial injuries benefit from a 10 per cent. reduction in industrial accidents. [18808]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* Less than 10 per cent. of all industrial injuries disablement benefit accident assessments payable per year are in respect of new claims. Based on the most recently available figures for 1995–96, the estimated savings from a 10 per cent. reduction in new industrial accident claims would be up to £5 million in the first year, rising eventually to £25 million in the very long term.

Child Care

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money will be made available in Scotland for out-of-school care as part of the National Childcare Strategy; to whom it will be made available; and if existing out-of-school clubs will be able to apply for it. [19577]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

I announced on 26 November our plans for £28 million to be made available over the next few years for out of school care as part of the National Childcare Strategy for Scotland. We propose that £3 million of this will come from windfall tax receipts and £25 million from the New Opportunities Fund, the new National Lottery distributing body provided for in the National Lottery Bill which is now before Parliament. We are working up proposals for the use of the funding and method of disbursement.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what contingency arrangements he has formulated to ensure the Dome is completed and fitted out before the Millennium. [18652]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company's overall cash budget of £758 million includes prudent provision for cost contingency. Construction at Greenwich is currently on time and to budget. I am confident that it will remain so and that the Dome will be ready to open to the public in time for the Millennium.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what estimate he has made of the operating costs of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. [18731]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company's overall cash budget for the Experience at Greenwich and the associated National Programme is £758 million. Income to cover these costs comes from a £399 million (net) grant from the Millennium Commission and forecast £359 million from sponsorship, commercial activities, visitor revenues and disposal proceeds. The Company currently estimates that the operating costs of the Experience at Greenwich will be in the region of £100 million which includes the costs of the staff who will be recruited for the operational period and servicing of the site.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Population Issues

12. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received on the population issues raised by the Commonwealth Heads of Government final declaration. [18432]

Mr. Foulkes: The outcome of the deliberations of the CHOGM meeting of All Party Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health were reflected in the (final) Declaration. Department for International Development's Health and Population division also made a summary report of the proceedings of the meeting which was widely distributed.

Bangladesh

13. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her priorities for assistance in education and training to Bangladesh. [18433]

Clare Short: Our priorities for education and training activities in Bangladesh are achieving primary education for all; enhancing the quality of primary education; and achieving equal access for girls and women benefit from education.

Current education and training projects in Bangladesh commit resources of nearly £40 million.

World Bank

14. **Mrs. Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom's contribution in 1996–97 to the World bank. [18434]

Mr. Foulkes: In 1996–97 the United Kingdom contributed a total of £174 million to the World Bank Group, of which £167 million was for the International Development Association (IDA)—the soft lending arm of the Bank which lends to the poorest countries.

16. **Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the World bank's world development report 1997: "The State in a Changing World". [18436]

Clare Short: I very much welcome this report. It contains some key messages about governance and poverty elimination. It supports the view outlined in our White Paper that a proper balance between efficient state institutions and well regulated markets creates the best conditions for sustainable development and economic growth that benefits the poor.

Aid Budget

15. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to set a timetable for reaching the UN target of aid as a percentage of gross domestic product. [18435]

Mr. Foulkes: While we are firmly committed to reversing the decline in the development assistance budget of the last 18 years and to moving towards the 0.7 per cent. UN target, usually expressed a percentage of GNP, rather than GDP, we will not set a timetable for doing so.

22. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received regarding the UN target for overseas aid as a percentage of gross domestic product. [18443]

Clare Short: Since 1 May, we have received numerous representations about this target, which is normally expressed as a percentage of GNP, from a wide range of Parliamentarians, NGOs and members of the public, most of whom have welcomed our firm commitment to reverse the decline in spending of the last 18 years and to move towards the 0.7 per cent. target.

26. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when United Kingdom official aid will exceed 0.35 per cent. of national income. [18448]

Clare Short: We are committed to reversing the decline in the development assistance budget and to the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP. But we have not set a timetable for achieving the target. We have undertaken to work within existing financial ceilings this year and next, while conducting a comprehensive expenditure review to ensure that all our resources are used as effectively as possible in support of the poverty eradication targets. Having done so, we can justify increasing the development assistance budget from 1999–2000.

EU Aid Contributions

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what are her Department's priorities for co-ordinating European contributions to international aid programmes during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Union; and if she will make a statement. [18437]

Clare Short: During the UK Presidency, we will continue to seek to improve the poverty focus and effectiveness of the European Community's aid programmes. Our top priorities will be to agree the EU negotiating mandate on the future of Lomé and secure the EC's commitment to the DAC's 21st century strategy and international development targets.

Know-how Fund

18. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the future of the know-how fund. [18438]

Clare Short: As the White Paper makes clear my Department will continue to support the countries in transition in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union through the Know How Fund. We shall seek particularly to ensure that the benefits of transition are sustainable and spread through all levels of society.

Climate Change

19. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the contribution which her Department has made to the global climate change discussions. [18439]

Clare Short: My Department works closely with the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions on UK policy on global climate change, as it relates to developing countries. DFID provides the UK contributions to the Global Environment Facility which is the financial mechanism for the Climate Change Convention. Through our bilateral development assistance we support programmes to increase energy efficiency.

Land Mines

20. **Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on progress on the elimination of land-mines. [18440]

Clare Short: One hundred and twenty countries have already signed the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Land-mines and on their Destruction. I was proud to sign on behalf of Britain on 3 December and to set out our plans for increased support to increase local capacity for demining. Britain will continue to play an active role in ensuring the momentum achieved at Ottawa is maintained.

Street Children

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what plans she has to support non-governmental organisations working with street children in South America. [18441]

Clare Short: We are co-funding five projects with NGOs in South America amounting to approximately £288,000 in 1997–98. A detailed table is attached.

Support for local NGOs working with street children has also been provided through some of the British Partnership Schemes administered by our Embassies across South America. In addition, we are contributing £25,700 this financial year to Consortium for Street Children UK for the production of two Resource Packs on Non-Formal Education and Empowerment of Street Girls and the Prevention of Migration. These packs will be used by NGOs in South America and elsewhere.

Street children projects funded through the Joint Funding Scheme

Agency	*Country*	*Project name*	*1997–98*
Childhope	Brazil	Judicial and Institutional Protection of Child and Adolescent	30,713
Childhope	Brazil	Projeto Ibeji for the Streetchildren	50,636
International Children's Trust	Ecuador	Street Children of Guayaquil	88,200
Jubilee Action	Brazil	Street Girls Education, Training Centre and Residence Home	88,287
Teesside Council for Voluntary Service	Peru	Care, Education, etc for Street Children	30,451
Total			288,287

Figures in respect of block grant agencies of the JFS for 1997–98 are not yet available.

Bananas

23. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what additional steps her Department proposes to take to support small banana farmers in the Caribbean. [18444]

Clare Short: My Department is concerned about the potential impact on Caribbean banana producers of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruling on the European banana regime. We accept that the Community's arrangements will need to be brought into conformity with WTO rules but Caribbean banana producers can be assured that we have their interests high on our agenda and will work with them to help support the necessary adjustments.

Aid and Development Co-operation (Japan)

24. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on co-operation with Japan in international aid and development. [18445]

Clare Short: The UK and Japan worked closely together with developing the OECD DAC strategy for halving the proposition of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. We are both firmly committed to the

agreed international development targets and to working closely together. We are co-operating on specific joint projects in key social sectors such as health, education and water in Africa and Asia, and on reconstruction projects in Bosnia.

Sustainable Development

25. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what targets her Department has set for sustainable development. [18447]

Clare Short: The Government have accepted the targets agreed by the international community at UNGASS and in the OECD which is that every country should have in place policies which contribute to the reduction of poverty, improvement in social development and environmental sustainability by 2015. These are set out in the White Paper. They are ambitious but achievable. We will measure the effectiveness of our efforts, alongside others, against these targets.

Debt

27. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she expects to be made by the year 2000 towards cancelling the unpayable debts of the poorest countries. [18449]

Clare Short: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer leads on debt policy. We want to see every country with an unsustainable debt burden at least to have started the process of securing a sustainable exit from their debt problems by the year 2000. And by then, decisions to grant debt relief to have been made for three quarters of the heavily indebted poor countries that need it.

These are achievable objectives, as set out in the "Mauritius Mandate" launched at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in September. We will continue to press other creditors to support these targets.

UNESCO

28. **Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State if she will make a statement on the cost of UNESCO membership in the last year for which figures are available. [18450]

Clare Short: The cost of UNESCO membership since rejoining the Organisation on 1 July 1997, until the end of the UNESCO financial year, 31 December 1997, is £5,001,775.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her Answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, colum *131–32*, on publicity and advertising, if she will provide a breakdown of *(a)* publicity expenditure by category for the last year for which information is available and *(b)* spending on recruitment advertising in 1997–98; for what reasons spending on recruitment advertising has risen since 1993–94; and if she will make a statement. [20058]

Clare Short: The total estimated expenditure on publicity for 1997–98 is £1.3 million, broken down as follows:

	£
Publications	220,000
British Overseas Development Newspaper	182,000
Exhibitions and Events	161,000
Video News Release	6,000
Development Education Grants	724,000

The Development Education Grants are to non-government organisations producing work which increases the public's awareness of development issues.

The current total expenditure on recruitment advertising in 1997–98 is £863,682.77.

The increase in the cost of advertising is principally due to a higher number of posts now being advertised as a result of the enhanced role and remit of the department. The cost of advertising has also increased by about 5 per cent. per annum. It is our practice to hold open competitions and to advertise for all posts where possible, unless there are compelling circumstances to justify a nominated candidate.

The number of recruitment advertisements placed in the last three years was:

1995: 167

1996: 190

1997: 247 (to date).

We have also spent £2,746 in 1997–98 as the Department of International Development's contribution to the advertising of fast stream administrative posts by the Recruitment and Assessment Services.

Optical Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development of she will assess the benefits of self-correcting spectacles in countries with limited optical services; and if she will make a statement. [20255]

Clare Short: My Department supported the first trials of these spectacles in Ghana. We concluded that spectacles with adaptable focal length could improve the eyesight and productivity of million of poor people. We has recently supported further development of technology. We continue discussions with the inventor on means to make the spectacles available to people in poor countries.

Water Filtration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the applicability in development work of nanofiltration techniques developed by Strathclyde Water Services in co-operation with Thames Water. [20250]

Clare Short: Department for International Development (DFID) supports research into a range of water filtration techniques suitable for application in development work, and in this context has considered nanofiltration. The process is sensitive to the quality of the raw water and the technology places significant demands on operators, DRID therefore favours more robust and simple processes such as

slow sand filtration to meet the needs of poor communications. Our research programmes will review the potential of the process for DFID as UK water industry research and practical experience evolves.

Child Labour

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she takes to ensure that contracts funded by her Department are not given to companies which use child labour; and what monitoring is undertaken of this issue. [20050]

Clare Short: My Department is reviewing the procedures it follows in order to ensure there is no exploitation of child labour in the contracts we finance.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish the names of all those people she has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and whether they receive remuneration. [19984]

Clare Short: Professor D. Luscombe was reappointed to the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission for a period of three years from 1 August 1997. The appointment is unremunerated.

Indonesia

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance has been given to Indonesia since 1 May for police training; and what plans she has for future assistance. [20057]

Clare Short: My Department has provided no new assistance, nor do I have any plans to do so. We did, however, meet the residual training costs of one Indonesian Police Officer whose training had started under the previous Government and has now ended.

Sanctions

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her oral statement of 5 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 328, what progress she is making in refining the sanctions instrument so that it affects elites more than poor people. [18647]

Clare Short: My Department is reviewing the impact of sanctions regimes on poor people. Work is progressing on these highly complex issues. We are also continuing our efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance is tightly controlled and monitored, so that it reaches only the people for whom it is intended.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Firearms

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to introduce legislation to ban the use of handguns in Northern Ireland. [12462]

Mr. Ingram: The Northern Ireland Office has concluded a fundamental review of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, which included an assessment of the existing controls on handguns. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to publish her proposals for legislative reform as a consultation paper early in the new year and the Government's intentions with regard to handguns will be announced at the same time.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the conclusions of the review of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981; and if she will make a statement. [13070]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 November 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has concluded her review of the Firearms (NI) Order 1981, and will publish her legislative proposals as a consultation early in the new year.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on official hospitality for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997. [15250]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* For the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, the available information is as follows:[1, 2]

£000s

	(a)	(b)
1990–91	418	7
1991–92	476	28
1992–93	498	[3]37
1993–94	513	[3]60
1994–95	527	[3]37
1995–96	627	[3]59
1996–97	632	[3, 4]165
September 1997	216	[3]81

[1] Information of NDPBs could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

[2] Information for 1980–81 and 1987–88 are not available.

[3] Costs for the year 1992–93 to September 1997 include figures for the Paid Order Unit, Lisahally and the Belfast Benefit Centre which could not be separated for this question. These offices carry out "back-office work" for the GB Benefits Agency.

[4] On 1 April 1996 a number of agencies came into existence leading to an increase in expenditure.

The information given above has been revised from that provided in answers to previous parliamentary questions on this subject.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of the total expenditure on all forms of publicity and advertising by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies for (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95, (iii) 1995–96, (iv) 1996–97, (iv) the 1997–98, year to date, (vi) the 1997–98, full year estimate and (vii) the 1998–99 planned expenditure. [15253]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* For the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, the available information is as follows:[1]

£000

	(a)	*(b)*
1993–94	7,408	697
1994–95	7,494	825
1995–96	10,064	934
1996–97	6,467	1,642
1997–98 to date	2,478	873
1997–98 estimated full year	6,224	1,651
1998–99 planned[2]	2,853	964

[1] Information on NDPBs could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

[2] The Department of Economic Development could not provide figures due to the budgets not being disaggregated to the level required.

The information given has been revised from that provided in answers to previous parliamentary questions on this subject.

SCOTLAND

Health Board and NHS Trust Employees

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it obligatory for employees of health boards and NHS trusts to register any interests which they may have in private nursing homes. [18614]

Mr. Galbraith: All Nursing Homes in Scotland must be registered with the local Health Board.

In terms of the recently published Nursing Homes Scotland Core Standards for registration and inspection of nursing homes, each individual connected with an application for registration of a Nursing Home must provide a declaration that there is no potential conflict of interest. This provision extends in all respects to those nominated by the Home owners to be in daily charge of the Home. Health Boards are instructed to follow up all references.

Nursing Research

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to appoint a professor of nursing research at the Scottish Office Department of Health; and if he will make a statement. [18817]

Mr. Galbraith: I have no plans to appoint a professor of nursing research at the Scottish Office Department of Health.

My Chief Scientist's office sponsor the Nursing Research Initiative in Scotland which is progressing nursing research in Scotland admirably. It is headed by Professor Jennifer Hunt.

I do not believe that the appointment of a professor of nursing at The Scottish Office would contribute further to nursing research in Scotland at this time.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the total expenditure by his Department on *(a)* research and *(b)* nursing research within the NHS in Scotland for each year since 1990 broken down by health board. [18663]

Mr. Galbraith: The Chief Scientist Office (CSO) of the Management Executive of the NHS in Scotland has responsibility for managing funds which support research activity to further the development of health care in Scotland. Details of CSO expenditure for each year since 1990 are given in the attached table 1a.

Since 1994–95, the CSO has funded the Nursing Research Initiative for Scotland (NRIS) in Glasgow and, before that, the Nursing Research Unit (NRU) in Edinburgh specifically for nursing research. In addition, other CSO-funded research includes nursing research. It is possible only to distinguish nursing research funding in recent years, as shown in Table 1b. (It should be noted that nursing grants awarded in-year can be spent over a number of years).

It is not possible to break down the expenditure in Tables 1a and b by health board. NRIS is a national body (as was NRU before it), and other research funding frequently crosses health board boundaries and is collaborative.

Information regarding expenditure by health boards and NHS Trusts to support research infrastructural costs is not readily available prior to 1995–96. From that year, NHS Trusts in Scotland were asked to declare their expenditure to support research. As a result, the declared amount of £27,743 thousand for each of the years 1995–96 and 1996–97 was allocated to Trusts. Details of allocation by health board area are given in the attached Table 2. Costs specific to nursing cannot readily be broken down by health board area but totalled £0.7 million in the Declaration.

Table 1a: CSO research expenditure

£000

Year	*NRU/NRIS*	*Other research*	*CSO expenditure*
1990–91	190.9	5,366.1	5,557
1991–92	195.7	6,368.3	6,564
1992–93	248.1	8,401.9	8,650
1993–94	122.4	9,615.6	9,738
1994–95	15.9	10,046.1	10,062
1995–96	166.4	10,067.6	10,234
1996–97	100.9	10,416.1	10,517
Totals	1,040.3	60,281.7	61,322

Table 1b: Funds committed to nursing research in recent years

£000

Year	*Grant*
1993–94	690
1994–95	190
1995–96	512
1996–97	434
Total	1,826

Table 2: CSO support fund allocation

Health Board	*1995–96 £000*	*1996–97 £000*
Argyll and Bute	12.4	12.4
Ayrshire and Arran	246	246
Fife	28	28
Forth Valley	41	41
Grampian	5,643	5,643
Greater Glasgow	10,956	10,956
Highland	13	13
Lanarkshire	55	55
Lothian	7,124	7,124
Tayside	3,626	3,626
Total	27,743	27,743

Criminal Justice System

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his priorities for the Scottish criminal justice system. [18797]

Mr. McLeish: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 4 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 95–96.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ministerial announcements have not been made in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18897]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 3 December 1997]:* Since 1 May, the number of ministerial announcements which were not made in the first instance to the House are as follows:

Speeches to

outside bodies: 20

press releases: 95

press briefings: 8

other means: 2.

These figures include the period covered by the summer recess. A large number of these announcements were minor, routine or advisory.

My Department will continue to follow the normal conventions, as set out in the Ministerial Code, in making ministerial announcements.

Highlands and Islands University

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress towards the creation of the University of the Highlands and Islands; and what recent representations he has received in respect of the proposed establishment. [19210]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* The Government remain fully committed to encouraging the development of the proposed University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). Planned provision for the UHI Project in 1997–98 remains at £5 million. I have not received any recent representations in respect of the proposed establishment since visiting the UHI Project Executive Office in September.

Mental Illness Specific Grant

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the mental illness specific grant. [19713]

Mr. Galbraith: In September 1997 The Scottish Office published a report on an independent evaluation of the mental illness specific grant entitled "Dedicated Resources: Dedicated Responses." It confirmed the positive impact the grant has made on the quality of life and independence of people with mental health problems. At the time of publication we confirmed our view that the grant should continue to provide ring-fenced resources for the development of community-based mental health services for the foreseeable future.

Dental Services

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dental graduates have entered community dental service training schemes in Scotland in each of the last three years. [18704]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:*

The information requested is as follows:

Numbers of dental graduates undertaking vocational training in the community dental service in Scotland 1994–95 to 1997–98:

1994–95: 3

1995–96: 5

1996–97: 1

1997–98: 0.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vocational training posts for dental graduates were available in Scotland in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997. [18706]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:*

The information requested is as follows:

Vocational training posts in the general dental service in Scotland 1994–95 to 1997–98:

1994–95: 88

1995–96: 78

1996–97: 83

1997–98: 87.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the range of social and economic statistical information currently provided in respect of the United Kingdom will be provided in respect of Scotland in time for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [19153]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* In almost all cases, social statistical information published by the Government about the UK is also available about Scotland. Members of the Government Statistical Service working in the Scottish Office are working with colleagues in other Departments to ensure this can

continue after the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. My officials are also working with staff in local authorities, the Scottish Health Service and other organisations to develop and improve the range and quality of social statistics available about Scotland.

An extensive range of Scottish economic and labour market statistics is already available for Scotland. Scottish Office economists and statisticians are currently consulting with the Office for National Statistics and with academics, consultants and overseas statistical offices to identify and consider how to meet the likely additional needs of a Scottish Parliament for economic and labour market statistics, both in terms of new information and in providing more detailed, timely and robust estimates of current figures.

These developments are designed to anticipate and meet the information needs of a Scottish Parliament. It will, of course, be for the Parliament itself to determine its own priorities.

Medical and Dental Students

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department will fund the cost of the special support beyond year four for Scottish medical and dental students studying in England, Wales or Northern Ireland; and if he will make an estimate of the cost. [19587]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* It is the Government's intention that all eligible UK medical and dental students should benefit from the special provisions announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 23 September. The arrangements and costs will be the subject of further discussion between the Departments concerned.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the cost to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the National Health Service in Scotland and *(c)* local authorities in Scotland of the steps required to deal with the millennium date problem for computers; and if he will make a statement. [18707]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* My Department and the National Health Service in Scotland are continuing to assess in detail the likely costs of dealing with the millennium date problem. Appropriate programmes of action are underway. My Department is submitting regular progress reports to the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA). It is expected that the cost of Year 2000 preventive and remedial action will be met within existing planned financial provisions. Action by local authorities is a matter for themselves as independent corporate bodies. However, my Department has taken action to ensure that local authorities are aware of action needed to address the problem, including the commissioning and distribution in May 1997 of a consultancy report containing a suggested action plan.

Female Prisoners

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of *(a)* female prisoners held, *(b)* female deaths in prison and *(c)* female suicides in prison in Scotland for each of the last 10 years. [19831]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year April to March	*Average daily number of female prisoners (including young offenders)*	*Number of deaths*	*Number of suicides or apparent suicides*
1988–89	171	—	—
1989–90	137	—	—
1990–91	141	—	—
1991–92	145	—	—
1992–93	163	—	—
1993–94	172	—	—
1994–95	181	—	—
1995–96	174	3	3
1996–97	189	3	3
1997–98	[1]182	1	[2]1

[1] At 5 December 1997.
[2] A fatal accident inquiry into this death is still to be held.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy on detaining female remand and convicted prisoners in the same prison. [19834]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Prison Service's policy is to keep female remand and convicted prisoners in the same prison in separate accommodation, so far as reasonably practicable.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned into the psychological effect of incarceration on female prisoners. [19833]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* A twelve month study, commencing December 1996, was commissioned to examine, among other things, the impact of incarceration on female offenders. The study was conducted by Dr. Nancy Loucks, an independent experienced criminological researcher, and will be published early in 1998.

Trans-sexual Prisoners

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current arrangements for the *(a)* police, *(b)* courts and *(c)* Prison Service in respect of trans-sexuals; what plans he has to review these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [19825]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]: (a)* There are no existing guidelines for police forces in Scotland in respect of transsexuals although the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland is considering the need for specific guidance; *(b)* The Scottish Courts Service has no special arrangements in respect of transsexuals. All court users are dealt with on an equal basis. There are no plans to review these arrangements; *(c)* To date, the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has not received any transsexual into its custody. SPS would confine the transsexual in whichever prison was most appropriate for the individual, taking account of the requirement to maintain good order and to care for all prisoners with humanity. Each case would be considered on an individual basis. There are no plans to review current arrangements.

Community Service Orders

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many actions were raised under section 240(1) and (3) of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 in relation to amendment or revocation of a community service order in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many cases legal aid was available; [19726]

(2) how many actions were raised under paragraph 5(1) and (3) of schedule 7 to the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 in relation to amendment or revocation of a supervised attendance order in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many cases legal aid was available; [19728]

(3) how many actions were raised under (i) section 42 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 for the removal of a disqualification, (ii) section 232 of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 in relation to failure to comply with the requirements of a probation order and (iii) section 233 of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 in relation to the conviction of a probationer by a court in Great Britain of an offence committed during his probation period in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many of these cases in each category legal aid was available; [19735]

(4) how many actions were raised under paragraph 4 of schedule 7 to the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 in relation to failure to comply with the requirements of supervised attendance order in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many of these cases legal aid was available; [19727]

(5) how many actions were raised under section 239(4) to (6) of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 in relation to failure to comply with the requirements of a community service order in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many of these cases legal aid was available. [19725]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The information available on actions relates to breach of community service orders under Section 239(4) to (6) of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 of which there were 568 in 1994; no information is available centrally for actions under the other provisions.

As for legal aid, in 1996–97 Assistance by Way of Representation (ABWOR) was granted for 606 cases under Section 42 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988; 1,260 cases under Section 232 of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995; 597 cases under Sections 239(4) to (6) of the 1995 Act; and 84 cases under paragraph 4 of schedule 7 to the 1995 Act.

ABWOR is available for actions under Section 233 of the 1995 Act but no information on numbers is available. For the remaining provisions, criminal legal aid is available for actions but only if it was previously granted in relation to the original procedure which resulted in the orders.

Proceeds of Crime

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many actions were raised under *(a)* section 5(4) in relation to an appeal against a court decision under section 5(3) and *(b)* section 6(4) in relation to an appeal against a court decision under section 6(3) of the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995 in the last year for which figures are available; and in how many cases legal aid was available. [19729]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Although no central record is kept of applications brought under sections 5(3) or 6(3), or of appeals under sections 5(4) or 6(4) of the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995, I understand from the Lord Advocate that he is not aware of any applications or appeals having been made under section 5 of the Act, and that in relation to section 6, he is aware of only three applications and one appeal.

Information is not available on which of these cases received legal aid. However, where a third party was involved legal aid covering representation would not have been available to them. That anomaly is however being resolved through regulations which have recently been laid before the House.

Fishing

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the fishery closures in the Moray Firth; what assessment he has made of the cause and source of the Captain's Field oil spillage; and by what means local fishermen will be able to pursue damages for loss of fishing opportunity. [19568]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The imposition of the exclusion zone on 21 October under Part I of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 followed the discovery of hydrocarbon contamination and associated taint in samples of shellfish (Nephrops) together with elevated levels of hydrocarbons in sea-bed sediment. Further testing subsequently confirmed that round fish taken from the area were uncontaminated and free from taint and the restrictions on these species were lifted on 14 November. Restrictions will remain in place for flatfish and shellfish until results of analysis show that these species are unaffected or no longer affected.

Originally it was considered that the contamination may have been caused by the oil spill from the Captain Field in August. However it is now clear that this was not the case. The scope for fishermen to pursue compensation claims will be dependent on an exact source of the contamination being established. Meanwhile it is very much in the interst of the fishing industry that contaminated catches do not find their way on to the market.

The Department of Trade and Industry has undertaken an investigation into the circumstances of the Captain oil spill and a report has been submitted to the Procurator Fiscal. As the Procurator Fiscal's own investigation is currently underway no further information can be given at this stage.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the proposed Scottish Executive will be able to hold bilateral talks with *(a)* the Spanish Government, *(b)* the European Parliament, *(c)* the European Commission and *(d)* the Irish Government on fishing issues. [19567]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Relations with Europe are the responsibility of the United Kingdom Parliament and Government. However, the Government intend that Ministers and officials of the

Scottish Executive should be involved in negotiations with our EU partners. This will extend to bilateral talks on fishing issues, where the role of Scottish Ministers and officials will be to support and advance the single UK negotiating line which they have played a part in developing.

Prisons (Suicide Counselling)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the Scottish Prisons budget was allocated to suicide counselling in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [19829]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Counselling is not a separate cost centre within the Scottish Prison Service's suicide prevention and healthcare strategies and the figures sought are therefore not available.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what mechanisms he has in place to provide suicide counselling and monitoring for female prisoners in Scotland. [19832]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* On admission to Cornton Vale Prison, every prisoner is assessed by a nurse. Every prisoner is also seen within 24 hours by the Medical Officer for a full assessment including current and past mental health history and treatment. Each Prisoner is the subject of a weekly care meeting attended by a multi-disciplinary team of prison staff and professionals. If a problem is identified, the needs of the individual are established and progress monitored. Prisoners may be referred at any stage for counselling and have ready access to staff, psychologists, psychiatrists, nursing and medical support. Support is also available from a range of voluntary organisations and the prison's "Listener" scheme.

Cornton Vale Prison

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the funds allocated to Cornton Vale Prison for *(a)* each of the last five years and *(b)* the next two years. [19827]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Total net expenditure (excluding capital, Headquarters and other central costs) on Cornton Vale Prison is as shown. Budgets for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 have not yet been determined.

April to March	*£ million*
1993–94	5.9
1994–95	6.0
1995–96	5.7
1996–97	6.5
1997–98 (budget)	6.8

Scotch Whisky

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to *(a)* the Foreign Office, *(b)* the Treasury and *(c)* the European Commission on the importance of duty free sales in the EU for the Scotch whisky industry; and if he will make a statement. [19826]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* I am aware of the implications for the Scotch whisky industry of the proposed abolition of intra-EU duty free sales by the Scotch Whisky Association and others, and I am in regular contact with my colleagues on this and other matters relating to the Scotch whisky industry.

Prisons (Expenditure)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list per capita spending for *(a)* male prisoners, *(b)* female prisoners and (c) each prison in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available. [19828]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The budgeted average annual cost per prisoner in Scotland in the current financial year (April 1997 to March 1998) is *(a)* £20,790 for male prisoners, and *(b)* £36,728 for female prisoners at Cornton Vale, and *(c)* as listed for each establishment in Scotland.

Prison	*Cost per prisoner £*
Aberdeen	27,354
Barlinnie	15,032
Castle Huntly	19,742
Cornton Vale	36,728
Dumfries	32,628
Dungavel	21,033
Edinburgh	19,715
Friarton	23,935
Glenochil	21,927
Greenock	17,500
Inverness	24,974
Longriggend	27,090
Low Moss	13,195
Noranside	19,865
Penninghame	19,225
Perth	24,140
Peterhead	35,609
Peterhead Unit	84,402
Polmont	20,190
Shotts	23,943
Shotts Unit	99,394
Shotts National Induction Centre	24,186

The above costs have been calculated as total budgeted expenditure (excluding capital, Headquarters and other central costs) divided by the forecast daily average prisoner population for the year, at the time at which budgets were set.

National Sleep Laboratory

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he issues to health boards to assist them in determining the level of funding which they provide to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust in respect of the Scottish National Sleep Laboratory. [19553]

Mr. Galbraith: The level of funding for Sleep Laboratory Services at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary is primarily a matter for Health Boards.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints were made against the police in Scotland; what is the ratio of the number of complaints to *(a)* the population of the jurisdiction, *(b)* the number of police officers and *(c)* the number investigated; how many complaints were investigated; how many investigations led to the instigation of disciplinary proceedings against officers; what is the ratio of proceedings instigated to complaints made; how many disciplinary proceedings led to disciplinary action; and what is the ratio between disciplinary action to complaints made for the last year for which figures are available. [19495]

Mr. McLeish: Information on complaints against the police is not available in the form requested. In 1996–97, however, there were 1,333 complaint cases (which may involve more than one complaint) against the police in Scotland. The ratio of complaints cases to *(a)* the estimated population of Scotland is 1:3,847; *(b)* the number of serving police officers at 31 March 1997 is 1:11; and *(c)* the number investigated is 1:1 (because all complaint allegations against the police are investigated). Information held on disciplinary proceedings and disciplinary action against police officers does not, however, differentiate between those complaints cases raised during any specific year.

Laser Pens

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider legislation to ban the sale of laser pointers. [13191]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 30 October 1997]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) on 27 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *644–45*.

Cairn Gorm Funicular Railway

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the development of the proposed funicular railway on Cairn Gorm. [15654]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 12 November 1997]:* I have received 184 letters supporting and 2,873 opposing the proposed funicular railway development on Cairn Gorm.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 December 1997

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Bathing Waters

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many United Kingdom bathing waters pass the *(a)* mandatory standard and *(b)* the guideline standard of the European Union Bathing Waters Directive. [19241]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns 289–91, to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie).

Water Supply

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he will take to encourage water companies to ensure that the supply of water for domestic use satisfies the projected housebuilding programmes in Hampshire. [19472]

Angela Eagle: Water companies are subject to a statutory duty to develop and maintain efficient and economical systems of water supply within their areas. In respect of residential development, water companies have a duty to provide supplies of water sufficient for domestic purposes. This duty extends to all new premises. Current planning guidance advises local authorities to consult infrastructure providers such as water companies when drawing up their development plans, to ensure that the demands of new development do not exceed the capacities of existing or planned water supply systems.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in establishing an interdepartmental working group on fuel poverty; which individuals and Government departments will be represented on the working group; which non-governmental organisations will be invited to participate in the work of the group; and if he will make a statement. [19701]

Angela Eagle: At my request, officials from my Department have set up an informal group to examine the issue of fuel poverty. In particular, the group will look at the impact of current policies and programmes and consider whether existing expenditure could be made more effective. Other Departments represented are Social Security, Health, Trade and Industry and Treasury, together with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices. The group has met once so far. Non-governmental organisations may be invited in future to contribute to the work of the group as it progresses.

Leasehold Legislation

Jacqui Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about changes to leasehold legislation; and what plans he has in this area. [19514]

Mr. Raynsford: I have had a number of representations from organisations and individuals. We have a commitment to bring forward a package of reforms to assist leaseholders, and are currently considering the scope and practicability of possible measures. An announcement and public consultation are scheduled for the spring.

Water Pollution (Nitrates)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made towards implementing European Council Directive 91/676/EEC concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources; and if he will make a statement on the establishment of draft action programmes. [19667]

Angela Eagle: The Government have implemented all of the Directive's requirements, except the establishment of action programmes. We expect to issue draft action programme regulations for consultation before the end of 1997, with the aim of laying them before Parliament early in 1998.

The Government are currently finalising the detailed assessment of the monitoring data required by the first review of designations, which forms the next phase of the Directive's implementation. Any changes proposed as a result will be issued for public consultation.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish an analysis of work carried out since revisions to the home energy efficiency scheme showing the numbers of different measures installed, the average cost of individual measures and the average value of a home energy efficiency scheme grant; and if he will make a statement. [19699]

Angela Eagle: The latest data available cover the period from 1 July 1997, when the revisions to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme took effect, until 30 September 1997. Forty thousand and seven grants were paid for work under the revised scheme. Some work carried out during this period will not be included because the claims for payment will have been processed in the following quarter. An additional 52,308 grants were paid during this period in respect of work carried out under the preceding scheme, which contained a more limited range of energy efficiency measures.

The breakdown of these 40,007 grants, by the main measure installed, was:

Draught Proofing	*Loft Insulation*	*Cavity Wall Insulation*	*Heating Control Upgrade*
29,690	7,331	3,986	nil

Additionally, 34,773 grants were paid for low energy light bulbs, 30,104 for personal advice on energy efficiency and 9,954 for hot water tank insulation in conjunction with one of these main measures.

The mean value of all grants paid during the same period was £159. By the main measure installed, the mean grant values were as follows:

Draught proofing	*Loft insulation*	*Cavity wall insulation*	*Heating control upgrades*
£130	£236	£281	nil

I am very pleased to announce that this information, updated quarterly, will become publicly available from early 1998. Our managing agent, Eaga Ltd., will place detailed reports about the scheme on the Internet. The address will be www.eaga.co.uk.

I propose, in the near future, to review this scheme, which is intended to help people on low incomes keep their homes warmer and use less fuel, to find out if it is helping the right people in the most effective way.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what financial resources will be available to fund the cost of energy efficiency work carried out under the Environmental Task Force Programme; and if he will make a statement. [19697]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Task Force is one of four options available to the young unemployed under the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds, and will be funded from the windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities.

The level of funding available for projects carried out by the Environment Task Force, including energy efficiency work, will vary according to the administration and material costs of the placements, and will be subject to a competitive tender process, managed by the Employment Service.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the carbon savings that will occur each year as a result of the reduction in the level of VAT levied on activities undertaken under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; and what estimates he has made of the carbon savings that would have occurred each year, had the same reduction in the level of VAT been levied on all purchases and installations of such energy-saving items as are deemed eligible under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, but currently undertaken outwith that scheme. [18544]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

Customs' recent report on the scope of a reduced rate of VAT for energy-saving materials concluded that a reduced rate of VAT targeted through HEES and similar grant-funded schemes would help more of the less well-off keep warm. The report also suggests that the environmental benefits of such a limited reduced rate would be small, because the benefit to such households may be taken in warmer houses rather than reduced fuel consumption.

The Government have said that they will explore with our European partners the scope for a reduced VAT rate on a broader range of Energy Saving Materials because this would have a larger environmental effect.

Applying a reduced rate of VAT of 5 per cent. to all supplies to domestic consumers of the sort of energy saving measures that are available under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (including for DIY installation) might result in an initial annual saving of 3,000 tonnes of carbon, accumulating to 40,000 tonnes annually by 2010.

Sainsbury's (Richmond-upon-Thames)

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when the planning application for the proposed Sainsbury's development at Richmond-upon-Thames was *(a)* first considered by the Inspector and *(b)* approved by the Inspector; and if he will give the dates on which Ministers were notified of the Inspector's preliminary and final decisions; [19924]

(2) if he will list the dates on which the Inspector considering the planning application for the proposed Sainsbury's development at Richmond-upon-Thames contacted his Department; giving the reasons for the contacts and advice given. [19925]

Mr. Caborn: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those public relations companies who were involved in presentations to *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* officials and *(c)* Inspectors in connection with the planning application for the proposed Sainsbury's development at Richmond-upon-Thames. [19922]

Mr. Caborn: No representations were made either to Ministers or to officials, as the decision on the appeal was made by a planning inspector. I have asked the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member about the representations made to the inspector.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* architects and *(b)* planning consultants involved in presentations to (i) Ministers, (ii) officials and (iii) Inspectors in connection with the planning application for the proposed Sainsbury's development at Richmond-upon-Thames. [19923]

Mr. Caborn: No presentations were made either to Ministers or to officials. I have asked the Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member about the representations made to the Inspector who was appointed to decide the appeal.

Letter from Chris Shepley to Miss Julie Kirkbride, dated 11 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the planning appeal decisions concerning the proposed Sainsbury's development at Richmond-upon-Thames.

I enclose a copy of the Inspector's decision letter at the back of which you will find a list of all those who gave evidence during the inquiry. In addition, the Inspector also received written

representations objecting to the proposal from Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners, on behalf of Chelverton Properties, and Roger Tym and Partners, on behalf of Somerfield Stores.

As you will see from the decision letter, the Inspector started hearing the case in November 1996 but it overran the allotted time. The inquiry therefore had to be adjourned until March 1997. The Inspector issued his decision on 4 July 1997. Occasionally an Inspector may issue what is known as an Advanced Notice of Decision (AND) but these are usually limited to relatively simple cases. No AND was issued in this case and the decision letter of 4 July represents the Inspector's one and only decision on the appeal.

Inspectors issue thousands of decisions every year and Ministers are not routinely informed about the outcome of them all. Ministers were not notified about the outcome of this case.

To the best of my knowledge, the Inspector contacted us 3 times about the appeal: in December 1996 to confirm the dates for the re-opening of the inquiry; in April this year he asked us to circulate to the appellant and the local planning authority some late objections to the proposal; and in June, he asked us to write to the parties apologising for the delay in issuing his decision because he was still involved in a local plan inquiry.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representation he has received from hon. Members in connection with the proposed Sainsbury's development at Richmond-upon-Thames. [19921]

Mr. Caborn: Ministers received no representations prior to the issue of the Inspector's decision letter.

South Yorkshire Super Tram

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department has spent to date on its legal action against South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive over the funding of the South Yorkshire Super Tram. [19811]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has spent £9,792.57 to date in defending the legal action brought against it by South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority and others.

Vehicle Safety

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents of vehicles failing the vehicle inspectors' roadside test there have been in the last six months. [19690]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate, Mr. Ron Oliver, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. David Drew, dated 11 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of incidents of vehicles failing roadside tests in the last six months.

The Inspectorate's Vehicle Examiners carry out roadworthiness spot checks at the roadside, at ports, and at other locations where vehicles are parked or at operators' premises. Vehicles are examined to determine their compliance with safety and environmental standards through checks on their mechanical condition and their exhaust emissions.

Vehicles failing to meet the required standard are issued with a prohibition notice which, depending on the seriousness of the defect, can prevent the vehicle from continuing on its journey until the defect has been rectified. In any event a vehicle issued with a prohibition notice must be inspected by Inspectorate staff for clearance of the prohibition once the fault has been rectified.

Details of vehicles failing to meet required roadworthiness and exhaust emission standards during roadside spot and fleet checks during the period 1 April to 30 September 1997 are as follows:

Vehicle	*Roadworthiness Checks*		*Emission Checks*	
	Examined	*Prohibited*	*Examined*	*Prohibited*
Heavy Goods Vehicles (including trailers)	86,915	13,267	6,650	220
Passenger Service Vehicles	15,566	1,906	4,202	121
Light Goods Vehicles	9,571	2,345	7,340	3,800
Cars	787	374	45,251	807
Taxis and private hire cars	1,685	420	1,979	382
Non-testable vehicles[1]	1,015	407	n/a	n/a
Total	115,539	18,719	65,422	5,330

n/a = not available.

[1] Includes mobile cranes, diggers and non-HGV trailers.

In addition to the above checks, the Inspectorate's Traffic Examiners also carry out roadside examinations of vehicles to check for potential traffic offences including overloading, unauthorised use of vehicles, driver licensing, and tachograph misuse.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the total non-domestic grant allocated to each local authority in the current financial year. [20129]

Mr. Raynsford: I have placed this information in the Library.

Highways Agency

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire to receive a reply to his letter of 11 September to the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency. [20273]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Highways Agency replied to the right hon. Member's letter on 3 December.

Planning Decision (Cockermouth)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *405*, when he expects to announce a decision in relation to supermarket planning matters in Cockermouth. [20262]

Mr. Raynsford: I expect to announce a decision shortly.

Businesses (Rents and Rates)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what powers exist to reduce *(a)* business rents and *(b)* business rates; and if he will make a statement. [19861]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no powers to intervene in the setting of business rents.

I take it that in referring to powers to reduce business rates, the hon. Member refers to powers to vary the rates payable by individual ratepayers or groups of ratepayers

rather than to the national systems for determining the National Non-Domestic Rate and for giving transitional relief. Local authorities have powers to reduce the bills of certain ratepayers; relief may be granted to charities, non-profit making bodies and ratepayers suffering hardship provided that the relevant criteria are met. Charities have their rates bills reduced by statute provided that certain conditions are met; as do those liable for rates in respect of empty property. From 1 April 1998 relief will also become available to certain village shops.

Central Line

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will instigate a report into the current signalling problems on the Central Line. [20153]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Managing investment projects is a matter for London Underground Ltd. I am aware of the problems and know that London Underground is making every effort to minimise the disruption to its customers during the current programme of Central Line modernisation works and to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

Pollution Control Directive

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the implementation of Directive 96/61/EC on integrated pollution prevention and control; and if he will make a statement. [20735]

Mr. Meacher: The Government issued a consultation paper on 15 July seeking views on implementation of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive. To date 209 responses have been received from a range of industry and regulatory bodies, and from environmental groups and the public. I am today placing a list of those responses in the Libraries of both Houses, and making arrangements for individual responses to be available to those who wish to see them.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Library Service

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consideration he has given to the Audit Commission's recent report on the Public Library Service, "Due for Renewal". [20736]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government welcome the publication of "Due for Renewal". We recognise the importance of the public library sector, and are committed to its future. However, we also recognise that there are a number of challenges that public libraries are having to face as they approach the Millennium. "Due for Renewal" usefully identifies some of the main issues, and provides valuable advice about service planning and the scope for achieving further efficiency savings. This work complements the Government's requirement for library authorities in England to produce Annual Library Plans from 1998. I hope that library authorities will respond positively to the report's recommendations in considering their own services.

Television Licence Fee

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has in respect of the level of next year's television licence fee; what account this level takes of the five year formula announced by the previous government; and if he will make a statement about future licence fee levels. [20737]

Mr. Chris Smith: In December 1996, following a report by independent consultants, Braxton Associates, on the BBC's expenditure needs, the previous Government announced a television licence fee formula for the five years from April 1997. Under this formula, licence fee increases for the period as a whole were set just below inflation as measured by the Retail Prices Index (RPI). However, the increases from 1 April 1998 were set at RPI plus 3 per cent., reflecting primarily the additional costs faced by the BBC in launching its new digital services.

The Government have carefully considered the five year formula and have concluded that it remains appropriate. It allows the BBC to plan its business properly for the period as a whole and is based on an independent assessment of its financial needs. The real-terms increase this year is paying for new digital services for licence fee payers. The 1999–2000 increase under the formula will also be marginally above inflation, at RPI plus 0.5 per cent. However, the formula specifies changes in the licence fee in 2000–01 and 2001–02 at RPI minus 1 per cent. and RPI minus 2.5 per cent. respectively. Application of the RPI figure of 3.6 per cent. for the year to September 1997, plus 3 per cent., to the current unrounded licence fees produces new rounded totals of £97.50 for a colour licence and £32.50 for a black and white licence. The necessary regulations to bring these fees into force will be laid before the House in due course.

The Government's existing Agreement with the BBC guarantees the licence fee until the end of the five-year period (i.e. until the end of March 2002). The Government intend to conduct well before then a wide-ranging review of the future level of the licence fee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankans have sought political asylum in the United Kingdom during the current year. [19558]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: During the period from 1 January to 31 October 1997, a total of 1,405 applications for asylum, excluding dependants, were lodged in the United Kingdom by Sri Lankan nationals.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis concerning allegations of corruption in the Metropolitan Police; and if he will make a statement. [19696]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet the Commissioner to discuss issues concerning the policing of London. We are extremely concerned that there should be adequate means for dealing with corrupt officers. We look forward to the report from the Home Affairs Committee and intend to consult with interested bodies before deciding on a way forward.

Sex Shops

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions of unlicensed sex shops under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 have occurred in the last five years; and what proportion was successful. [19562]

Mr. Michael: In 1989, there was one prosecution under schedule 3 of the Act. This resulted in a conviction.

Information collected since then has not identified individual offences committed under this specific Act.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the effectiveness of the significant degree rule for the regulation of shops selling sex articles. [19561]

Mr. Michael: We keep the operation of section 2 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, including the "significant degree" rule, under general review. The City of Westminster Act 1996 contains measures to improve the enforcement of the 1982 Act provisions and we will be considering whether experience of its operation suggests the need for more general changes.

Rustling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has made of the extent of cattle and sheep rustling in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* England. [19695]

Mr. Michael: No estimates are available centrally. Such offences would be recorded under the "Other theft or unauthorised taking" offence classification and not separately identifiable. Prior to the introduction of the Theft Act 1968, offences of "Larceny of horses and cattle" were published annually in the "Criminal Statistics" command paper, copies of which are available in the Library.

Youth Justice Task Force

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the advice he received from the Youth Justice Task Force. [20296]

Mr. Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *102*.

Prisons (Illegal Drugs)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported cases of the use of illegal drugs in prisons there have been to date in 1997. [19779]

Ms Quin: From 1 January 1997 to 31 May 1997 (the latest month for which final figures are available), 9,353 prisoners tested positive in mandatory drug tests for the illegal use of drugs.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government classified Sierra Leone as a country in upheaval. [18286]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 28 November 1997]:* In view of the situation in Sierra Leone, following the overthrow of the democratically elected government by rebel soldiers, we decided to declare that the country had undergone such a fundamental change in circumstances that we would not normally order the return of a person to that country for the time being. The declaration was made on 1 July 1997.

The situation in Sierra Leone remains uncertain and it is being monitored closely in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Although the positive developments following the Conakry Accord are encouraging and we are looking forward to further improvements, no-one will be returned to Sierra Leone unless we are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

The effect of making such a declaration is that a Sierra Leone national who was stranded in the United Kingdom and applied for asylum within three months of the declaration being made also became eligible to make a claim for social security benefits while his application was being considered by the Home Office, providing that claim for benefits was lodged within the three-month timescale.

All applicants who claim asylum at the port or airport of arrival are eligible to claim social security benefits in a similar way.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were classified as category A prisoners were being held in prisons on 1 November. [19780]

Ms Quin: On 1 November 1997, 870 men and four women were classified as Category A prisoners.

Hand Guns (Compensation)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints his Department has received about delays in paying compensation to gun owners who handed in firearms. [19808]

Mr. Michael: Around 500 complaints have been received about the timescale for compensation payments, and the need to respond to these complaints, proving a substantial distraction from the main work of the Firearms Compensation Section. The section is endeavouring to process claims as quickly as possible but complaints and other specific inquiries are factors slowing the rate of payments.

I appreciate that the time taken to settle compensation claims is irritating to those who are opposed to the legislation and that all individuals who have handed in their weapons would like to be paid without delay. However, it was made clear at the outset that the number and difficulty of the claims received would make delays inevitable. All efforts are being made to complete the task as quickly as possible, and this would be achieved much sooner if there were fewer inquiries about the progress of individual claims.

DEFENCE

Eurofighter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the *(a)* first and *(b)* last deliveries of Eurofighter are expected; and what is the current yearly schedule. [20072]

Mr. George Robertson: The first Eurofighter is scheduled to be delivered to the Royal Air Force in June 2002 and the last in 2014 with the rate of delivery building up to 20 a year by 2005.

TREASURY

Pensions

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made by pensions firms in providing redress to the victims of mis-selling in the period up to the end of November. [20718]

Mrs. Liddell: In a statement to the House on 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 155–163, I set out the progress that had been made by firms in redressing victims of mis-selling up until the end of October. I have now received an update from the 41 firms whose progress I have been monitoring, and these are set out in the table. For those firms that fail to make sufficient progress, regulatory discipline is a real prospect. For most of these 41 firms, the regulators' deadline of 31 December, by which 90 per cent. of the most urgent cases must be resolved, is fast approaching. It is now up to each firm to make every effort to make rapid progress so that disciplinary action against them is not called for.

In general most firms have improved their performance over the month. Once again however, the figures show a wide divergence in performance, with some firms making good, if belated progress, and others that still have a disgracefully large task which remains to be tackled.

Of course many firms other than the 41 listed have cases to review. These, too, must be completed within deadlines set by the regulators. Of these firms, the vast majority are independent financial advisers (IFAs), ranging from large firms, employing hundreds, if not thousands, of people, to small sole traders. Few firms are innocent, and no firm will be let off the hook: the customer who has been disadvantaged by the mis-selling of a small IFA has as much right to speedy redress as the customer of the largest pension provider. All firms must complete their reviews without delay, and to the standards set out by the regulators.

	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*
Under 25 per cent. of cases resolved								
DBS	598	19	68	59	9	6	1	14
Burns Anderson	922	46	100	79	21	17	2	15
Gan	10,424	400	1,831	274	1,557	1,030	10	16
Lincoln National	12,938	1,026	2,284	735	1,549	1,118	9	22
Countrywide	2,692	455	214	208	6	8	0	25
25–50 per cent. of cases resolved								
Windsor Life	8,325	1,508	895	95	800	572	7	26
Financial Options	295	72	11	7	4	3	1	28
Canada Life	5,454	196	1,834	402	1,432	1,126	21	32
Friends Provident	6,675	825	1,927	325	1,602	1,222	18	36
London and Manchester	7,935	662	2,809	389	2,420	1,907	24	37
Royal and Sun Alliance	15,342	1,704	5,406	736	4,670	3,643	24	40
Brittanic	18,290	3,414	4,522	1,906	2,616	1,960	11	40
CIS	43,285	2,724	16,260	11,294	4,966	3,392	8	40
United Assurance	12,326	742	4,894	1,565	3,329	2,843	23	42
Standard Life	6,672	449	2,517	952	1,565	1,405	21	42
Abbey Life	16,883	3,836	3,872	839	3,033	2,436	14	42
Hill Samuel	5,931	743	2,123	434	1,689	1,345	23	43
Sun Life of Canada	25,937	6,374	6,580	1,188	5,392	3,531	14	43
Colonial	8,048	1,879	2,193	297	1,929	1,385	17	44
Allied Dunbar	18,186	2,508	6,446	2,475	3,971	3,088	17	44
Godwins	1,358	47	648	287	361	291	21	46
Albany Life	2,844	503	1,330	95	1,235	721	25	46

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
NatWest	14,069	3,462	4,125	834	3,291	2,408	17	48
Lloyd's TSB	48,200	8,302	17,190	5,195	11,995	10,480	22	50
50–75 per cent. of cases resolved								
IFA Network	209	31	81	64	17	11	5	51
Guardian	8,732	860	4,321	733	3,588	2,847	33	51
Commercial Union	7,462	1,012	3,514	693	2,821	2,276	31	53
Pearl	42,505	2,370	26,272	4,833	21,439	15,799	37	54
Sedgwick	11,511	4,253	2,405	951	1,454	1,059	9	54
Prudential	71,358	16,559	42,542	3,294	39,248	19,119	27	55
Royal London	11,432	959	6,684	1,248	5,436	4,120	36	55
Midland	4,787	339	2,856	448	2,408	1,923	40	57
Norwich Union	7,166	2,061	2,452	562	1,890	1,589	22	59
Wesleyan	4,132	222	2,488	732	1,756	1,478	36	59
Legal and General	35,354	13,504	11,921	1,367	10,554	7,803	22	64
Berkeley Independent	86	47	8	8	1	1	1	65
Hogg Robinson	1,922	734	730	248	482	329	17	68
M and E Network	273	151	43	14	29	25	9	70
Equitable Life	11,100	5,575	2,745	1,242	1,503	1,207	11	72
Over 75 per cent. of cases resolved								
Barclays	16,821	5,973	7,735	1,893	5,842	4,785	28	75
AXA Equity and Law	3,855	684	2,493	652	1,841	1,576	41	76

A: cases identified as requiring review.
B: of A, cases where investor was informed that information gained during assessment excluded cases from review.
C: number of assessments completed.
D: cases where the investor has been informed that no redress is due.
E: cases where redress has been offered.
F: cases where redress has been accepted.
G: cases where redress has been accepted as a percentage of cases identified for review ((F/A)x100).
H: cases completed, including exclusions, as a percentage of cases identified for review (((B+D+F)/A)x100).

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing to increase public service pensions from April 1998. [20719]

Mr. Darling: Legislation governing public service pensions requires public service pensions to be increased annually by the same percentage as State earnings related pensions (additional pensions). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *186* that additional pensions will be increased by 3.6 per cent., in line with the annual increase in the Retail Prices Index up to September 1997. Public service pensions will therefore be increased by 3.6 per cent., from 6 April 1998, except those which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro rata increase.

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the cost of answering a written parliamentary question and an oral parliamentary question. [20721]

Mrs. Liddell: As at April 1997, the average cost of answering a written parliamentary question and an oral parliamentary question was £112 and £260 respectively.

Euro

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of the European Commission information pack, "Infeuro," will be distributed to the United Kingdom; and to which groups. [20259]

Mrs. Liddell: "Infeuro" is a newsletter published by the European Commission, which is responsible for its distribution.

VAT (NHS Trusts)

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets have been set by his Department for the recovery of VAT from NHS trusts in each year since 1990. [19998]

Dawn Primarolo: None.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total VAT recovered from NHS trusts in each year since 1990. [19999]

Dawn Primarolo: None. NHS trusts regularly receive repayments from Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures are in place for consulting the National Health Service on the implementation of new procedures for the payment and recovery of VAT from NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement. [19997]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs and Excise has regular meetings with the VAT Committee of the Healthcare Financial Management Association to discuss issues of mutual concern and future development.

South-east Asia

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what terms he has attached to money lent or committed to South Korea as part of the IMF rescue package or otherwise. [19914]

Mrs. Liddell: IMF financing under Korea's Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) is conditioned on a strong programme of adjustment. This involves a tight macroeconomic framework; a comprehensive strategy to restructure the financial sector; further trade and capital account liberalisation; and improvements in corporate structure and governance. The Presidents of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank have also indicated that they are both ready to provide financial support to Korea, conditioned on strong programmes of reform. It is expected that these programmes will focus on financial sector restructuring and institutional reform.

Full implementation of these programmes will help restore market confidence and provide Korea with a solid foundation for more sustained growth. Programmes will be reviewed regularly and future disbursements of funds will be linked to successful completion of the reviews.

In addition, the UK—together with a number of other countries—has agreed to consider the provision of further financial support for Korea. This will be made available only if unanticipated circumstances create the need to supplement resources provided by the international financial institutions, while Korea remains in compliance with IMF arrangements.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the recent United Kingdom contribution to the rescue packages from *(a)* the IMF, *(b)* other institutions and *(c)* directly to (i) South Korea and (ii) other Asian countries. [19912]

Mrs. Liddell: Four Asian countries have recently agreed IMF programmes under the IMF's Emergency Financing Mechanism. They are the Philippines (July), Thailand (August), Indonesia (October) and Korea (November). The latter three countries have in addition agreed, or are negotiating, programmes with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (AsDB). The financing to be provided by international financial institutions (IFIs) is likely to amount to the following:

$ billion

	International Financial Institution Finance			*Total IFI financing*
	IMF	*World Bank*	*AsDB*	
Philippines	1	—	—	1
Thailand	4	1.5	1.2	6.7
Indonesia	10	4.5	3.5	18
South Korea	21	10	4	35

The UK is a major shareholder in the international financial institutions—the UK quota share at both the IMF and World Bank is approximately five per cent., and at the AsDB is two per cent.—and has strongly supported all these programmes of adjustment and the high levels of IFI financing involved. Programmes will be reviewed regularly and future disbursements of funds will be linked to successful completion of the reviews.

In the case of Korea, the UK, together with a number of other countries has in addition agreed to consider the provision of further financial support for Korea. This will be made available only if unanticipated circumstances create the need to supplement resources provided by the international financial institutions, while Korea remains in compliance with IMF arrangements. The UK is willing to consider a contribution of up to USD1.25 billion.

In the case of Thailand, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) issued a statement on behalf of the monetary authorities of the G10—including the Bank of England—and several other countries, explaining that they stand ready, if need be, to provide a short-term bridging loan to the Thai authorities. So far the need for such a loan has not arisen.

Subsidies to Industry

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the overall cost of subsidies to industry in the form of *(a)* tax allowances, *(b)* direct grants, *(c)* tied research and infrastructure programmes, *(d)* business rate exemptions and *(e)* export credit guarantee payments for the last year for which figures are available. [19817]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations have been made to Treasury Ministers on the subject of insurance premium tax for the travel industry since the last General Election. [19666]

Dawn Primarolo: Treasury Ministers have received a number of representations on this issue, including six Parliamentary Questions excluding this and the other recent questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) and about 200 letters from Members of this House.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the inability to value-shift on non-EU holidays sold by tour operators or travel agents. [19662]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received a number of representations on this issue. Value-shifting by travel agents and tour operators does take place on non-EU holidays but since such holidays are not subject to VAT there has never been any question of a VAT motive or a VAT effect in this area. On grounds of simplicity, efficiency and effectiveness it was nevertheless considered right that insurance sold with all holidays should be made subject to the higher rate of insurance premium tax.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's current position and timetable on their review of the differential between the rate of insurance premium tax currently levied for policies sold by tour operators and travel agents and for similar travel insurance policies sold through building societies, BUPA and other retailers. [19660]

Dawn Primarolo: I have asked officials in Customs and Excise to monitor the effect of the introduction of the higher rate of insurance premium tax. It is too early yet to draw any conclusions from this monitoring process.

Aviation Fuel Tax

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on European Union negotiations on taxation on aviation fuel. [19758]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no Commission proposals before the Council at present to end the current exemption of aviation fuel used in international commercial traffic. The Commission has been asked by the ECOFIN Council, on 9 June 1997, to study the environmental and economic effects in Europe of ending the current exemption of aviation fuel. The study is not likely to be completed before May 1998.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what taxes are levied on aviation fuel in the United Kingdom. [19743]

Dawn Primarolo: Aviation turbine fuels for aircraft use are not subject to excise duty. Aviation gasoline is charged at the rate of £0.2255 per litre (£1.025) per gallon). Supplies of both types of fuel for commercial flights within the United Kingdom and for all private flights are liable at the standard rate of Value Added Tax.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be raised if aircraft fuel was taxed at the same rate as commercial fuel for road transport assuming no alteration in demand. [19744]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate requested by the hon. Member on taxing aviation fuel at the same rate as diesel would raise approximately £4 billion, assuming no alteration in demand.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team since 2 May, specifying in each case *(a)* the participating Minister or Ministers, *(b)* the destination of the trip, *(c)* the purpose of the trip and *(d)* the cost of the trip; and if he will make a statement. [15240]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* The available data for the official overseas trips taken by myself and my Ministerial team (along with officials in support) since 2 May are as follows:

Date	Destination	Cost[1]	Number in party	Purpose
Chancellor				
11–12 May	Brussels	£2,324	7	ECOFIN
8–9 June	Luxembourg	£2,641	7	ECOFIN
15–17 June	Holland	£3,275	7	European Council
20–22 June	Denver	£10,967	5	G7 Summit
7 July	Brussels	£1,581	7	ECOFIN
9 July	Luxembourg	£2,149	4	Meeting with Prime Minister Juncker
12–23 September	Luxembourg		5	Informal ECOFIN
	Mauritius		6	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting
	Bangkok	£22,699	5	ASEM Finance Ministers
	Hong Kong		5	Annual Meetings of the World Bank/IMF
6 October	Paris		5	Meeting with Finance Minister Strauss-Kahn
13 October	Luxembourg	—	7	ECOFIN
5 November	Brussels	—	9	ECOFIN
17 November	Brussels	—	7	ECOFIN
1 December	Brussels	—	5	ECOFIN
4–5 December	New York	—	4	Speech to the British-American Chamber of Commerce
Chief Secretary				
None				
Paymaster General				
None				
Financial Secretary				
20 June	Brussels	£1,147	3	Monti Tax Policy Group
18 September	Brussels	£2,030	4	Monti Tax Policy Group
20 October	Brussels	£2,114	4	Monti Tax Policy Group
4 November	Bonn	£2,139	4	Meeting with State Secretary Hauser
6 November	Czech Republic	£1,819	3	To see UK Customs and Excise international assistance programme (anti-drugs activity)
1 December	Brussels	£706	2	ECOFIN
Economic Secretary				
8 June	Brussels	£987	3	EC Budget Council Members
24 July	Brussels	£1,169	3	EC Budget Council
26–28 September	Italy	—	1	Pontignano Conference
5 November	Brussels	—	2	ECOFIN
7 November	Stockholm	—	2	Meeting on European issues
17 November	Brussels	—	2	ECOFIN
27 November	Brussels	—	4	EC Budget Council
3 December	Luxembourg	—	4	Meeting member of the European Court of Auditors

[1] Costs are as billed and may not be complete or available.

[2] Some of the Annual Meeting costs are subject to reimbursement by World Bank/IMF.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Philippines (Bridges)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the development project for a network of bridges in the Philippines and for its applicability in other countries. [20252]

Clare Short: We are providing support from the Aid and Trade Provision for the construction of 218 road bridges in less developed and disaster-prone areas. When appraised in 1995, the programme was considered to be of high developmental value. A second proposal is now under appraisal. This involves support for construction or replacement of bridges located on national highways and our support will depend on whether such bridges bring significant benefits to poor people.

Higher Education Teachers

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the reservations expressed by Her Majesty's Government on the recommendation on the status of higher education personnel, passed by UNESCO General Conference in November. [19745]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 5 December 1997, *Official Report* column 392.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the names of all those people whom he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19971]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made or approved the following appointments since 1 May 1997:

British Council:

Dr. David Drewry,

Director General (wef 1/11998)

Remuneration: £92,480.

Commonwealth Institute:

David French,

Director General

Remuneration: £60,000.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy:

Menzies Cambell CBE, QC, MP,

Governor

Remuneration: Nil

Gary Streeter MP,

Governor

Remuneration: Nil

Mary Calder,

Governor

Remuneration: Nil

Richard Page MP

Governor

Remuneration: Nil.

The names, positions and remuneration of all the public appointments handled by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary are published on an annual basis in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Departmental Report in March. This information will also be available on the world wide Internet once the current update has been completed.

Iraq

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the type and number of weapons destroyed by the United Nations inspection team in Iraq since the ending of the Gulf war; and what types of nerve gas and related items the inspectors believe to be still held by the Iraqi regime. [19687]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* The UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) are able to account for 817 and 819 missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometres known to have been acquired by Iraq. Forty-eight of these have been destroyed by UNSCOM. In addition, UNSCOM have been responsible for the destruction of 30 warheads, 690 tonnes of chemical weapons, 38,537 filled and empty munitions and more than 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, as well as the main biological weapons production plant at Al Hakm, and large quantities of growth media. Further details can be found in the latest report by the Executive Chairman of UNSCOM, placed in the Library on 10 November 1997. UNSCOM have not published estimates of quantities of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which may still be held by Iraq. Iraq has worked on a large number of agents including VX, Sarin, Botulinum toxin, Aflatoxin, and Anthrax. UNSCOM remain seriously concerned that they have not been able fully to account for Iraq's known imports and production of material for chemical and biological weapons, and that Iraq retains the expertise and capability to re-commence its WMD programmes at very short notice.

Home Office Export Initiative

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Association of Chief Police Officers and *(b)* trade associations representing the policing and security sector concerning the continuation of the work undertaken under the Home Office Export Initiative. [20018]

Mr. Fatchett: Officials from this Department and the DTI are in discussion with the trade associations representing the policing and security sector. My noble Friend the Minister for Trade has also received representations from the Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers. I am not aware of any discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the additional cost to his Department of undertaking work previously administered by the Home Office Export Initiative; and from which budget it will be found. [20017]

Mr. Fatchett: There will be no additional cost to this Department.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what arrangements the work of the Export Initiative previously administered by the Home Office will be carried out by the overseas trade services section of his Department. [20019]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department and the Department of Trade and Industry, under the banner of Overseas Trade Services, will continue to give advice and assistance to all UK companies seeking to trade overseas, including those companies from the security industry. This includes access to help provided under the Export Promoter Initiative and Trade Fair and Overseas Seminar Support Scheme.

Schengen Agreement

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Presidency of the EU commissioned the report on the circumstances surrounding

the agreement leading to the final text of Article 4 of the Protocol to the Amsterdam Treaty integrating the Schengen Acquis into the framework of the European Union; when he received it; when he received a letter from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands on this matter; and if he will publish it. [19951]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The Presidency of the EU did not commission any such report. The Permanent Representative of the Netherlands wrote to the UK Permanent Representative on the matter on 16 July. It would not be appropriate to publish this piece of diplomatic correspondence sent by another government to HMG.

Child Labour

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking in support of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular reference to through-bonded child labour. [20008]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We strongly support the work of United Nations organisations such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to promote full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1998 negotiations will begin on a new ILO Convention on child labour. We will help to ensure that the new convention makes a vital contribution to eliminating the most abhorrent forms of child labour, including bonded labour.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government intend to ratify the treaty banning anti-personnel mines; and what steps he is taking to encourage other countries to ratify the treaty. [20152]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 398–99, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *300*.

EU General Affairs Council

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the General Affairs Council held on 8 December in Brussels. [20461]

Mr. Doug Henderson: At the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 8 December, the seven A points in document 13048/97 were approved, and the European Parliament Resolutions of 17–21 November in document 11493/97 were noted. The text of both documents will be placed in the Libraries of the House as soon as they become available.

Policy planning unit

1. The Council requested Coreper and the Political Committee to continue discussion on the design of the Policy Planning Unit.

OSCE: Copenhagen Ministerial

2. Denmark reported on prospects for the OSCE Ministerial meeting later this month, in particular the security charter and prospects for OSCE financial reform.

WTO: Financial services

3. The Council discussed prospects for reaching agreement on the financial services negotiations by the 12 December deadline.

Transatlantic relations

4. There were brief reports on the EU-US and EU-Canada Summits which took place in Washington and Ottawa on 5 and 4 December respectively.

Illegal immigration from Iraq

5. The Council discussed measures to counter the recent rise in illegal immigration from northern Iraq, which is presenting problems for a number of EU partners. The Political Committee will assess the situation in northern Iraq. Work on practical steps to stem the flow of illegal immigrants will be taken forward by the K4 Committee on 18 December.

Luxembourg European Council

6. The Presidency set out the agenda for the European Council on 12–13 December. There was a brief discussion.

Enlargement/agenda 2000

7. This formed the main part of the Council's discussions. Member States broadly endorsed the Presidency's report to the Luxembourg Council. However, differences remained concerning the screening process and the creation of a new 15 plus 11 process. The UK supported by Italy, France and the Netherlands spoke against both proposals. The Swedes and Danes supported screening. Germany continued to favour the 15 plus 11 process. The Presidency concluded that it would submit the report to the European Council on its own authority.

EU/Mexico: Signature of agreements

8. In the margins, the EU and Mexico signed two agreements which establish a framework for closer relations into the next century. The Foreign Secretary signed the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement—which covers areas of both Uk and EU competence—on behalf of the UK. The Mexican Foreign and Trade Ministers attended.

ASEM II

9. The GAC adopted the following conclusions: the Council discussed preparations for ASEM II to be held in London in April 1998 and invited the appropriate instances to take forward work in advance of the next ASEM Senior Officials Meeting in London in February.

Any other business: EU/Japan summit

10. As incoming Presidency, the UK informed Member States of plans for the EU/Japan Summit on 12 January 1998.

Tibet

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the Chinese authorities to allow a parliamentary delegation to visit Tibet during his proposed visit to China in January 1998. [20145]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned about the human rights situation in China, and welcome the possibility of a parliamentary visit to Tibet. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary looks forward to discussing a wide range of issues, including Tibet, during his planned visit to China.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Primary Schools (Class Sizes)

16. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of current average class sizes in primary schools. [18763]

Mr. Byers: In January 1997 the average class size for primary schools was 27.5

Education and Training Targets

17. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in achieving the national education and training targets. [18764]

Mr. Blunkett: There has been mixed progress towards achieving the current National Targets. It looks possible that we could get close nationally to achieving several of the Targets, but achievement of Foundation Target 2 and Lifetime Target 1 is more problematic.

Earlier this week we published a consultation document which sets out how we might take forward National Targets over the next few years.

Student Tuition Fees

18. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he plans to take in respect of those students who fail to meet their payments on tuition fees; and what provision he has made for this. [18765]

Dr. Howells: It will be for universities and colleges to decide what action to take if students fail to make the private contributions to undergraduate tuition fees, just as they have to for part-time, postgraduate and overseas students. The higher education funding plans for 1998–99 assumed that institutions in England would collect £130 million from private contributions to fees. This figure allowed for costs of some 5 per cent. for collection and any default.

30. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the proportion of students who will have their tuition fees waived. [18780]

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of the proportion of students who will have their tuition fees waived. [19187]

Dr. Howells: We have estimated that, under the new arrangements, about 30 per cent. of students, where parental income is taken into account, will make no contribution to the cost of their tuition.

Higher Education

19. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of changes in numbers of applicants for higher education places in 1998–99 against the previous year. [18766]

Dr. Howells: Applicant numbers are at present slightly down compared with last year; but we expect further applications to be submitted before and indeed beyond the closing date.

27. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of potential students qualifying for admission to higher education he estimates will be unable to attend under the terms of his proposed basis for student support owing to financial pressures. [18776]

Dr. Howells: The new funding arrangements are fair and progressive and will target support. I see no reason why they should prevent any student from attending higher education.

Young Unemployed

21. **Mr. Gorrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people aged between 18 and 24 years, unemployed for over six months, will benefit from the new deal in its first year. [18768]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is not possible to provide precise estimates of the total numbers of young people who will require help from the New Deal. In its first year, we will offer help to everyone who becomes eligible for the New Deal, and sufficient places will be available to meet this commitment.

22. **Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the response of employers in the tourism, leisure and hospitality industries has been to the new deal for young unemployed people. [18770]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright).

29. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if there will be the opportunity for young people entering the gateway phase of the new deal to gain some work experience without losing benefits entitlement. [18779]

Mr. Andrew Smith: People claiming the Jobseeker's Allowance are able to benefit from work experience as part of an employment or training programme without losing benefit entitlement. This includes young people on the Gateway phase of the New Deal.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how Rotherham and the Dearne will benefit from the Environmental Task Force and voluntary sector options of the New Deal for young unemployed people. [18772]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In Rotherham, plans are well advanced to offer placements on the Environmental Task Force and voluntary sector option. It is projected that around 480 young unemployed could take up this provision in the period to March 1999. In Dearne, which is not a Pathfinder area, invitations to tender are being issued with a view to offering contracts to run from April 1998. The precise number of places has yet to be decided.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people between

18 and 24 years old will benefit from the New Deal in the *(a)* constituency of Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East and *(b)* Teesside Region in the first year of operation. [19254]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Kevin White to Mr. Ashok Kumar, dated 11 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to respond to your question about the number of people aged between 18 and 24 who will benefit from the New Deal in the constituency of Middlesbrough and East Cleveland and also in Teeside region in the first year of operation.

The planning assumptions, based on the New Deal District plan, indicate that 1,400 clients who have been unemployed for six months or more will be eligible for the New Deal in the Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency. In Teeside, as a whole the number of clients eligible to benefit in the first year is estimated to be 5928.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the object of the New Deal policy in respect of increasing *(a)* employment and *(b)* employability; [19173]

(2) by what criteria the success of the New Deal will be measured. [19225]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The aim of the New Deal is to increase the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people by offering the opportunity to participate in a job, training or useful work experience. The Government believe that this has an important part to play in developing a more skilled workforce and efficient labour market which will assist sustainable job-generating, economic growth.

The success of the New Deal in achieving its aims will be evaluated through the analysis of data gained from a range of qualitative and quantitative surveys with New Deal participants, employers and organisations involved in the delivery of the New Deal. We are currently finalising the exact criteria that will form our evaluation strategy.

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the role of the Territorial Army in the delivery of the New Deal. [19475]

Dr. Reid: I have been asked to reply.

As I said in my written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 14 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *688*, my Department is keen to play a full part in the New Deal initiative. The contribution that the Territorial Army and other Reserve organisations might make is under consideration in MOD's assessment of its involvement in the initiative.

Education-Work Link

23. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve the range and quality of opportunities for young people to link their education to work. [18771]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has this week launched Investing in Young People, a major new strategy aimed at improving the range and quality of education and training available to all young people aged 16 to 19. The measures which make up this strategy are aimed at giving everyone the chance to gain recognised qualifications which will give them the best possible start in the workplace. They include measures to tackle underachievement among this age group, and bring back into education those who have dropped out.

"Excellence in schools"

24. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses he has received to the consultation document, "Excellence in schools". [18773]

Mr. Byers: We have received around 8,500 responses to the White Paper. Some 3,500 were responses to the full document and the remainder were responses to the summary version.

School Leavers

25. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of school leavers leave school with no qualifications. [18774]

Dr. Howells: The figure for those who leave education at 16 is not centrally collected. In 1997, 7.7 per cent. of young people completing their compulsory education had no qualifications. The White Paper, "Excellence in schools," outlines measures to reduce this figure.

Further Education Colleges

26. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the demand-led formula on the financing of further education colleges; and what proposals he has to address the current financial problems of further education colleges. [18775]

Dr. Howells: The demand-led element was withdrawn by the previous Government. The additional funding for further education next year, announced by my right hon. Friend on 12 November, provides for the resumption of growth on a financially sound basis. The funding provides for an additional 20,000 full-time equivalent students, with the efficiency squeeze on the sector restricted to the costs arising from inflation.

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial resources are being made available to further education colleges in England in advance of the New Deal. [20743]

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial resources are being made available to further education colleges in England in advance of the New Deal. [20878]

Mr. Blunkett: I am announcing today that we intend to provide £6.05 million of additional resources for Further Education colleges to be financed from Windfall Tax receipts. This will enable them to provide relevant courses from January to JSA claimants under the New Deal in advance of its implementation in April. The additional money will enable FE colleges to make better use of their capacity to tackle unemployment amongst young people.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the effect on further education college budgets of the proposed changes to EU Social Fund provision. [19139]

Dr. Howells: Colleges will have the opportunity in 1998 and 1999 to bid for some £140 million available from Objective 4 of the European Social Fund, to help prepare workers for industrial change.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the surplus or deficit of each further education college ordered by region. [19140]

Dr. Howells: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Further Education Funding Council to write to the hon. Member concerning this matter.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what proposals he has to address the current funding deficit in respect of further education colleges; [19228]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of ending the demand led formula in respect of funding further education colleges on the financial situation of such colleges; [19229]

(3) what plans he has to compensate further education colleges for the loss of the demand led element in Janaury; and if he will make a statement. [19135]

Dr. Howells: The demand-led element was withdrawn by the previous Government. The additional funding for further education next year, announced by my right hon. Friend on 12 November, provides for the resumption of growth on a financially sound basis. The funding provides for an additional 20,000 full-time equivalent students, with the efficiency squeeze on the sector restricted to the costs arising from inflation.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funds he will make available to assist colleges of further education in the Teesside region for the year 1998–99. [19255]

Dr. Howells: On 12 November, my right hon. Friend announced additional funding for the sector next year. The Further Education Funding Council will take decisions, in the light of guidance from my right hon. Friend, on the general principles to be applied to funding for the academic year 1998–99. Allocations of funding to sector colleges within given regions are the responsibility of the Council, which will make them early next year.

School Standards

28. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to raise standards in schools in disadvantaged areas. [18778]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave ealrier to my hon. Friends, the Members for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) and for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor).

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how he intends to means test parents and spouses of *(a)* United Kingdom students and *(b)* EU students for this payment of tuition fees. [18781]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) on 10 December 1997 *Official Report*, column *550*.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to compensate universities for the revenue consequences of a reduction in student numbers caused by the imposition of tuition fees; and if he will make a statement; [19193]

(2) what action he proposes to take in respect of the increased funding deficit for universities if his Department's advertising campaign fails to attract sufficient higher education students to meet the present targets. [19222]

Dr. Howells: We do not expect institutions generally to have difficulty filling their places.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of the additional money which will be available to higher education directly from the imposition of tuition fees in each year from 1998–99 to 2002–03; [19138]

(2) if money raised from the imposition of tuition fees will be additional to projected university budgets. [19194]

Dr. Howells: The higher education funding plans for 1998–99 assumed that institutions in England would collect £130 million from private contributions to fees, and allowed for an additional £165 million for the sector, including a £36 million package for access.

Decisions about funding for 1999–2000 and beyond will have to await the outcome of the Government's Expenditure Review. The Government will take account of the income that universities and colleges collect from the student contribution to tuition fees, the needs of the higher education sector and wider public expenditure considerations.

We have made clear that the savings from the introduction of tuition fees will be used to improve quality, standards and opportunity for all in further and higher education.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the level at which students will be exempt from paying tuition fees will be based on *(a)* gross, *(b)* disposable or *(c)* residual income level. [19156]

Dr. Howells: Contributions to tuition fees in 1998–99 will be calculated in the same way as in previous years, that is on the basis of residual income (gross income after certain allowable deductions). These arrangements will be reviewed for the academic year 1999–2000.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if the level of tuition fees charged to

students entering university in 1998 will remain constant for the remainder of their degree course; [19136]

(2) on what percentage of average course costs future charges to full-time undergraduates will be based; and what steps he will take to restrict universities in the increases they make to the charges upon which that percentage is based. [19137]

Dr. Howells: It is for universities themselves to determine the level of fees that they charge students. Our proposals assume that full-time undergraduates will contribute up to £1,000 towards tuition fees in 1998–99: this represents around 25 per cent. of the average course cost, which was the percentage the Dearing Inquiry recommended for private individual contributions. The Teaching and Higher Education Bill, currently before the other House, contains provisions requiring that the maximum financial support from Government for tuition fees, and hence by implication the maximum contribution from students, parents or spouses towards tuition fees, cannot increase by more than inflation without Parliamentary approval. Further provisions in the Bill gives the Secretary of State a reserve power to control top-up fees, if necessary.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of the announcement of the introduction of tuition fees on applications for university places in 1998. [19191]

Dr. Howells: None. It is too early to estimate the number of education applicants for 1998–99. Applicant numbers are at present slightly down compared with last year; but, by this stage last year, fewer than half of the final number of applications had been submitted.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students studying sandwich courses will be expected to pay tuition fees in their year out in industry. [19186]

Dr. Howells: The maximum tuition fees contribution, subject to assessment against family income, will be £500 in a year when a student spends the entire year of a course on a sandwich placement. This contribution is towards the cost incurred by the institution of administrative and pastoral arrangements relating to the placement.

Where sandwich or other elements form less than a full year away, the £1,000 fee will be payable, subject to the family income assessment.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students presently studying HNDs and due to finish in summer 1998 who go on to a one year top up degree as part of a profession pathway to degree status, will be expected to pay tuition fees on that year. [19188]

Dr. Howells: A student who is already on or begins an HND course in academic year 1997–98, and who goes on to a degree course immediately after completing the HND course, will be treated as an existing student and be eligible for support throughout the degree course under the 1997–98 arrangements. That means they will pay no tuition fees for the duration of the course.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what action he plans to take in respect of those students who fail to meet their payments on tuition fees and what provision he has made for this; [19183]

(2) if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the collection of tuition fees; by whom they will be collected; and how much he estimates this will cost; [19184]

(3) what funds he will make available to assist universities in collecting tuition fees. [19190]

Dr. Howells: Universities and colleges already have administrative arrangements in place to collect tuition fees from part-time students, overseas students, self-funding students, and many postgraduates. They will be able to build on these arrangements in collecting private contributions to tuition fees from full-time undergraduate students under the new funding arrangements for higher education and in deciding what action to take if students fail to make the private contributions.

The higher education funding plans for 1998–99 assumed that institutions in England will collect £130 million from private contributions to fees. This figure allowed for some 5 per cent. for collection and any default.

Teenage Mothers (Schooling)

31. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what support is available for teenage mothers who wish to continue their schooling. [18782]

Dr. Howells: If a teenage mother cannot attend school, the local education authority has a duty to provide suitable education if she is of compulsory school age, and may so provide if she is older.

Training

32. **Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that the United Kingdom has a highly skilled work force. [18783]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Much is already being done to address the needs for a skilled work force through the Government's current programme of work. We announced recently our plans to develop a national skills agenda and the setting up of a Skills Task Force and a Skills Unit to identify where skills gaps exist and how they should be best addressed. The New Deal for young unemployed people includes training to a certified standard in each of its options.

Literacy Standards

33. **Miss Melanie Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial resources he has allocated in respect of his strategy to raise standards in literacy. [18784]

Mr. Byers: More than £54 million is available in the new Standards Fund to support activities to raise the standards of literacy in primary schools. This includes £50 million to support the professional development of teachers through the National Literacy Strategy, £4 million for Summer Literacy Schools (with private sponsorship providing a further £1 million), and additional support for Family Literacy, details of which we expect to announce shortly.

Education Budget

34. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding the use of the extra money for education announced in the budget for 1998–99. [18785]

Mr. Byers: The Department's officials have discussed with representatives of the Churches and Local Government organisations the principles and criteria for the allocation of the first two phases of capital funding under the New Deal for Schools.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State has written to LEAs, emphasising that a £1,017 million increase in recurrent funding announced by the Chancellor in his Budget has been made available for the people's priority of raising standards in our schools.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to evaluate the operation of the employment and goods and services section of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [20281]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department has an ongoing, long-term research strategy to evaluate the operation of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This takes in employers, service providers and individual disabled people. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Disability Rights, announced the latest phase of this research in a speech to the Association of Disabled Professionals on 6 December. It will review in a systematic and collective way information on cases brought in the Courts and Industrial Tribunals and how they are resolved. The results will be available to the Task Force which I will chair which is to consider how best to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people.

Self-employment

Mrs. McKenna: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the New Deal for young people will help people into self-employment. [18769]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We are designing a comprehensive programme of help for young people who want to start their own business which will come on stream in June 1998. Advice will be available from day one of the Gateway. There will be specific help including advice, support and monitoring by providers with expertise in this area and the opportunity to carry out test-trading and to undertake relevant, high quality training.

Part-time Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the £36 million access package for higher education is designed to benefit part-time students; and under what arrangements this will be distributed. [19189]

Dr. Howells: The £36 million access package for higher education in 1998–99 includes some £2 million to enable universities and colleges in England to remit fees for part-time students in higher education who have lost their jobs. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) will distribute the funds: further information will be issued in due course.

The package also doubles the amount available for higher education Access Funds for next academic year. Part-time students will be eligible for assistance from the Funds for the first time. We will be discussing guidelines for the use of the Funds with the HEFCE, who allocate the Funds to institutions, and others shortly. We will inform the House of the decisions reached in the usual way.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to make *(a)* structural and *(b)* functional changes to training and enterprise councils. [19179]

Dr. Howells: We greatly value the important work TECs are doing at the local level to raise skill levels and foster enterprise. We recognise the benefit to local partnerships of a strong private sector contribution. There are therefore no plans to make fundamental changes to the structure and functions of TECs.

We do, however, see scope for TECs to improve their performance and a range of work is in hand to raise the performance of all TECs towards the level of the best. For example, the work being done jointly with the TEC National Council to encourage TECs to benchmark themselves against each other and other organisations, and to share good practice effectively.

Top-up Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his definition of top-up fees in the context of university charges; if he will list the areas which are within the remit of top-up fees; and if he will make a statement. [19141]

Dr. Howells: Top-up fees would be fees charged by publicly-funded universities to full-time undergraduate students for tuition or other provision necessary to complete their course which raised the total fees charged above the maximum level of financial support available from the Government to such students for fees.

Ministerial Announcements

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many ministerial announcements have not been made, in the first instance to the House; and of those how many were *(a)* speeches to outside

bodies, *(b)* press releases, *(c)* press briefings and *(d)* made by other means, since 1 May; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy in respect of making public ministerial announcements. [18895]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 December 1997]*: The information requested is not readily available. Major announcements are made, in the first instance, to the House. There are cases, for example when the House is not sitting, when announcements are made by other means, including press releases.

Undergraduates

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of undergraduates failed to complete their degree courses in each of the last three years; and if he will list the reasons given for failure to complete. [19172]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not yet available centrally. The latest available figures for drop-out among full-time and sandwich first-degree students are shown in the most recent DfEE Departmental Report (Cm 3610), a copy of which is in the Library.

Middle Schools

Jacqui Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research has been carried out by his Department into the performance of middle schools. [19515]

Mr. Byers: The Department has not itself undertaken particular research into the performance of middle schools. The OFSTED database covers middle schools and material from it is available on request.

Playing Fields

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will take steps to collate centrally the number of applications to sell off playing fields by schools by *(a)* location and *(b)* local education authority. [19818]

Mr. Byers: There is no requirement upon local education authorities to apply for permission before disposing of the assets which they own. Grant-maintained schools do need the prior consent of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before they may dispose of their assets. Information on the number of applications received from these schools to dispose of playing fields is already collated centrally.

English (Key Stage 3)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many complaints he has received about the standard of marking in key stage 3 testing of English. [19809]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department has received 87 letters about this issue.

Student Loans

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will amend the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1997 to ensure that students already on courses who do not meet the settled status requirement but were eligible for a student loan under previous regulations, will remain eligible for a loan for the duration of their current studies. [20742]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid the Education (Student Loans) (Amendment) Regulations 1997 before the House. The amendment Regulations introduce a transitional provision to protect students who do not have settled status but who have already demonstrated eligibility for a loan under previous Regulations. Such students will continue to be eligible for a student loan until they finish their present course (or a second course if they continue their studies without a break). The Department will be writing to all Higher Education Institutions before Christmas informing them of this amendment.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students whose maintenance grants are to be phased out in 1998–99 will be eligible for the increased student loans that those students in years 1999 and 2000 are eligible to receive. [19230]

Dr. Howells: New students entering higher education in the 1998–99 academic year will be eligible for increased loans in that year to offset the reduction in the level of maintenance grants. In 1999–2000, we propose to abolish maintenance grants. These students will be eligible for an income-related loan for their maintenance on the same basis as 1999–2000 entrants.

Further Education Funding

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much extra funding for further education will be raised from the increased contribution from employers to the cost of courses he announced on 12 November; and if these funds were part of the £83 million of funding announced that day. [18601]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend looks to the Further Education Funding Council to establish arrangements to secure in 1998–99 an additional £20 million from employers to the costs of employer-led provision, as part of the £83 million of new funding for further education.

Student Support Agency

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his policy in respect of the Dearing Report's Recommendation on the establishment of a unified student support agency; and what estimate he has made of the timetable for its implementation. [19174]

Dr. Howells: The Government are currently considering the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education's recommendation for a unified student support agency and expect to make an announcement shortly.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many public appointments he has

made since 1 May; and how many and what percentage of these *(a)* receive remuneration and *(b)* are of (i) Afro-Caribbean and (ii) Asian origin. [16779]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made a total of 77 public appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies and advisory bodies since 1 May.

The number and percentage receiving remuneration are as follows:

(i) 14 (18.2 per cent.) receive an honorarium;

(ii) 8 (10.4 per cent.) receive a daily fee for meetings;

(iii) 50 (64.9 per cent.) receive expenses only;

(iv) 5 (6.5 per cent.) receive an annual salary.

With regard to the number and percentage of those appointments which are (i) of Afro-Caribbean origin and (ii) of Asian origin, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 28 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *669*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases his Department forecast would be brought under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in its first year of operation. [20278]

Mr. Hoon: It is forecast that approximately 200 cases are expected per year, for the first three years, following commencement of the Act.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were brought under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 during its first year of operation; and how many of those cases were won by the appellant. [20279]

Mr. Hoon: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came into force on 2 December 1996. Statistics have been collected only since the beginning of February 1997. The number of cases issued between the beginning of February and the end of October 1997 was 36. Of these 13 cases were for damages only and 23 were for damages and/or an injunction or declaration. The information requested as to the number of cases won by the appellant is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the impact which his recent legal aid proposals will have on disabled people seeking to take legal action under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [20280]

Mr. Hoon: We will be consulting widely before any final decisions are made about changes to the scope of civil legal aid. During this process careful consideration will be given to whether there are proceedings for which public funding should continue to be available for money or damages claims. If the hon. Gentleman believes that disabled people seeking to take legal action under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 face particular problems, I would be grateful if he could let me know what they are so that consideration can be given to this during the consultation process.

Legal Aid

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was *(a)* the cost of legal aid before cost recovery and retention of contributions, *(b)* the amount of cost recovered, *(c)* the amount of contributions retained and *(d)* the net cost after deduction of costs recovered and contributions retained for (i) contract, (ii) Inheritance Act, (iii) landlord and tenant and (iv) housing and disrepair proceedings in each of the last four years. [19278]

Mr. Hoon: Legal aid gross expenditure, costs recovered, and contributions retained in (i) contract (ii) Inheritance Act and (iii) landlord and tenant proceedings for cases closed during the last four financial years are as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Gross payments				
Contract	40.2	44.1	56.0	60.3
Inheritance Act	2.9	3.1	4.2	4.4
Landlord and tenant	20.4	24.6	31.7	33.9
Gross recovered				
Contract	9.0	9.5	13.0	14.9
Inheritance Act	1.2	1.4	1.9	1.7
Landlord and tenant	5.2	7.9	11.1	14.1
Contributions retained				
Contract	0.76	0.83	1.02	1.13
Inheritance Act	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.15
Landlord and tenant	0.19	0.22	0.26	0.33
Net of costs (after deduction of costs recovered and contributions retained)				
Contract	28.4	31.9	39.8	41.3
Inheritance Act	1.2	1.1	1.6	1.7
Landlord and tenant	14.4	15.9	19.5	18.5

It is not possible to provide information separately in respect of housing and disrepair matters.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was *(a)* the cost of legal aid before cost recovery and retention of contributions, *(b)* the amount of cost recovered, *(c)* the amount of contributions retained and *(d)* the net cost after deduction of costs recovered and contributions retained for (i) civil litigation and (ii) professional and other negligence, excluding in each case personal injury and medical negligence in each of the last four years. [19277]

Mr. Hoon: A breakdown of legal aid expenditure and receipts in respect of civil litigation and professional and other negligence, excluding personal injury and medical negligence, for cases closed in the last four years was as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Civil litigation (including professional and other negligence)				
Gross Payments	436.6	474.9	566.1	622.4
Costs Received	55.2	60.6	71.5	80.7
Damages Retained	45.8	44.7	47.3	59.0
Contributions Retained	10.4	10.9	12.5	15.4
Net Costs	325.8	359.1	435.6	467.9
Professional and other negligence				
Gross Payments	40.2	48.2	45.0	49.2
Costs Received	20.9	24.7	25.9	27.9
Damages Retained	1.1	1.0	1.3	1.7
Contributions Retained	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.0
Net Costs	13.9	22.1	17.6	19.2

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was *(a)* the cost of legal aid for non-matrimonial proceedings, excluding Children Act proceedings, before cost recovery and retention of contributions, *(b)* the amount of cost recovered, *(c)* the amount of contributions retained and *(d)* the net cost after deduction of costs recovered and contributions retained in each of the last four years. [19279]

Mr. Hoon: A breakdown of the legal aid expenditure and receipts in respect of non-matrimonial cases, excluding Children Act proceedings, for cases closed in the last four years was as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Gross payments	317.0	375.8	454.8	509.7
Costs recovered	164.1	197.2	245.0	281.3
Contributions retained	3.1	4.0	4.6	5.3
Net costs (after deduction of costs recovered and contributions retained)	149.8	174.6	205.2	223.1

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the proportion of damages recovered in all legally aided *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* medical negligence cases closed in each of the last three years. [19280]

Mr. Hoon: The proportion of damages recovered by the Legal Aid Board in legally aided personal injury and medical negligence cases closed in each of the last three years were as follows:

	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Personal injury			
Gross costs	£151.5 million	£189.3 million	£219.8 million
Damages recovered	£2.2 million	£3.0 million	£3.5 million
Percentage of damages recovered	1.5	1.6	1.6

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was *(a)* the cost of legal aid for personal injury litigation before cost recovery and retention of contributions, *(b)* the amount of cost recovered, *(c)* the amount of contributions retained and *(d)* the net cost after deduction of costs recovered and contributions retained for (i) all personal injury litigation, (ii) medical negligence cases and (iii) personal injury cases excluding medical negligence in 1996–97. [19281]

Mr. Hoon: A breakdown of legal aid expenditure and receipts in respect of personal injury litigation and medical negligence cases for cases closed in 1996–97, was as follows:

£ million

	Gross payments	Costs received	Damages retained	Contributions retained	Net costs
All personal injury litigation	274.1	206.7	4.1	2.0	61.8
Medical negligence	54.3	25..8	0.6	0.7	27.2
Personal injury (excluding medical negligence)	219.8	180.9	3.5	1.3	34.6

	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Medical negligence			
Gross costs	£38.6 million	£50.2 million	£54.3 million
Damages recovered	£0.6 million	£0.7 million	£0.6 million
Percentage of damages recovered	1.6	1.4	1.1

Legal Expenses

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of fixed costs on existing legal expenses insurance premiums; and if he will make a statement. [19339]

Mr. Hoon: None. My Department is, however, in close contact with the insurance industry. A fixed costs system would necessarily make the task of matching the risk being insured to the appropriate level of premium easier. The level of premiums must be a matter for each company offering policies.

Personal Injury Actions

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he will take to ensure that lawyers will not seek to recover from their clients more than the fixed costs in privately funded personal injury actions valued at less than £15,000. [19321]

Mr. Hoon: The arrangements that clients make with their lawyers are essentially private contractual arrangements. I would wish to give effect to the proposal made by Lord Woolf, that the fixed recoverable costs should apply between the client and the solicitor unless there was a written business agreement to the contrary.

Woolf Reforms

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the Information technology needs of the court system

required by the introduction of the Woolf reforms; and if he will make a statement on the *(a)* extent of the changes and *(b)* timetable. [19327]

Mr. Hoon: The procedures are currently being developed which will achieve the Civil Justice reforms and work is underway to identify the IT support required. The IT solution will be developed by our private sector partner and we plan for them to be in place for 1 April 1999.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment has been made of the training needs of judges following the introduction of the Woolf reforms; what is the budget for judicial training; and if he will make a statement. [19332]

Mr. Hoon: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), which is a non-departmental governmental body. The JSB has assessed the training needs of judges in anticipation of the introduction of the Woolf reforms. During 1997 a series of seminars on the principles of the Woolf reforms were delivered to all full-time judges who hear civil matters. More detailed training will be given to all full-time judges who hear civil matters. More detailed training will be given to all full-time and part-time judges who hear civil matters once the new rules have been finalised. The financial allocations for the JSB for 1998–99 have not yet been finalised.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the training costs involved in using the new information technology systems required by the introduction of the Woolf reforms. [19326]

Mr. Hoon: No detailed estimates have yet been made. The scope of training cannot be established until the IT system to support the reforms has been specified and the systems design has commenced. This will not be until 1998, after final rule changes have been agreed. Once the specification has been agreed, the costs associated with the provision of training can be more accurately predicted.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19311]

Mr. Hoon: There are currently no special advisers employed in this Department. As announced on 9 December 1997, the Lord Chancellor has decided to appoint Mr. Garry Hart as a Special Adviser. Mr. Hart's appointment will not, however, take effect until 2 March 1998.

No-one from outside the Department is currently employed in a task force or review body. The total fees and benefits paid to review body members from outside the Department in the year to 1 May 1997 was approximately £37,500. Since 1 May 1997, such expenditure has totalled approximately £24,700. These figures include payments for travel and subsistence. It is not possible to distinguish the cost of ministers' and officials' time spent on task force and review-related work.

Conditional Fees

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his Department's estimate of the savings the Government will make from the introduction of fixed costs on conditional fees; what research his Department has commissioned on the impact of such costs; and what other recent research his Department has evaluated into legal costs. [19320]

Mr. Hoon: It is not clear why it is thought that "fixed costs on conditional fees" should result in savings to the Government. Nor is it clear on what the hon. Member thinks such cost would impact. As to research into legal costs, my Department is currently funding the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies research into the amount of work needed to take a case through the Fast Track.

Civil Justice and Legal Aid

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department pursuant to his oral statement of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 534, what additional staff he estimates will be needed to ensure the effective running of the *(a)* fast track, *(b)* multi-track and *(c)* judicial case management procedures. [19451]

Mr. Hoon: The policy and procedures which will achieve the civil justice reforms are still the subject of public consultation. Until these are finalised and the degree of IT support is known, it will not be possible to assess what, if any, additional staff will be needed.

CABINET OFFICE

Advisers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Minister without Portfolio how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19309]

Mr. Mandelson: I am not a Minister in charge of a Department.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is her estimate of the yield to the Exchequer in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 arising from the decision not to index fully for inflation the thresholds for employers' national insurance contributions; and if she will make a statement. [19865]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 5 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *383*.

No estimates are available for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 because no decision has been made about the level of the earnings brackets for employers' secondary Class 1 contributions in those years.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she expects to reply to the letter of 21 November from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam concerning the review of disability benefits. [20282]

Mr. Denham: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 9 December.

As published in the 1997–98 Departmental Report, the Department of Social Security is committed to answering all correspondence within 20 days.

Under-Secretary of State (Women's Issues)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if she will list the dates on which submissions were made to her concerning women by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock); [20146]

(2) if she will list the days on which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), has been absent from the Department since her appointment; [20147]

(3) for what reason the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) was not present to answer Oral Questions on 17 November. [20148]

Ms Ruddock: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 20 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *292–94*.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in England and Wales are receiving mobility allowance. [18966]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Mobility Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 10 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the number of people in England and Wales who are receiving mobility allowance.

The information is not available in the form requested. Mobility Allowance was replaced by Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in April 1992. DLA comprises of two components, care and mobility. The number of people in receipt of the mobility component of DLA are shown below.

England: 1,347,788

Wales: 143,896

Figures are subject to change.

Lone Parent Premium

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale are in receipt of lone parent premium. [18653]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 10 December 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many persons in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale are in receipt of the lone parent premium.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency (BA) collates statistics by BA District Offices which do not correspond to constituency boundaries or a specific geographical area. The BA's Greater Manchester Lancashire District includes the offices of Burnley, Rossendale, Blackburn and Accrington.

From April this year, the lone parent premium was replaced by a higher rate of family premium for lone parents.

The number of people in receipt of Income Support lone parent rate of family premium in the Greater Manchester Lancashire District was 9,758, at 31 August 1997. This figure is the latest available and may be subject to change. This figure does not include those lone parents who are over pensionable age or who are sick who would qualify for a higher rate premium, such as a pensioner or disability premium.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Economic and Social Research Council Grants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Economic and Social Research Council grants have been awarded to *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the last five years. [18762]

Mr. Battle: Data disaggregated by gender are readily available only for 1996–97, when the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) introduced an equal opportunities monitoring system. A number of ESRC Research Grants are awarded to groups, rather than individuals, which may be of mixed gender. The Statistics are based on returns of ESRC monitoring forms for Research Grant funding.

grants awarded: 181

Returned forms: 138 (76 per cent.)

All male: 80

All female: 309

Mixed: 26.

The following data show total awards made for the previous four years.

Year	*Awards*
1992–93	203
1993–94	217
1994–95	178
1995–96	225

The ESRC is committed to continuing monitoring of the gender of award recipients.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish her Department's memorandum on handling the problem of coal closures. [18045]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 1997]:* No.

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for arms export licences to Turkey *(a)* are currently pending with her Department, *(b)* have been approved since 1 May, listing type and amount of equipment and the companies involved, and *(c)* have been refused since 1 May, listing the type and amount of equipment and the companies involved. [14826]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated, and the following results were obtained.

Between 2 May and 5 November inclusive, decisions were taken on 73 applications for standard or open individual licences to export to Turkey goods controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (the so-called "Military List"); 71 standard individual export licences were granted, and one application for such a licence refused; and one open individual export licence was issued. At 5 November, 105 applications were awaiting a decision.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to her answer of 21 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *450*, what steps she is taking to ensure that equipment which should be classified under a specific Export of Goods (Control) Order category but may be exported as part of a larger export order that would be classified under a different Export of Goods (Control) Order category is recorded. [20033]

Mrs. Roche: As from 23 September this year all goods on new export licence applications have been assessed against the current legislation and the appropriate export control categories recorded, both on paper and on the computer databases. The Export Control Organisation is retrospectively carrying this out for all applications on which a decision has been taken since 2 May.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) pursuant to her answer of 15 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *134*, if she will provide details of the four open general export licences referred to in her reply; which goods are allowed for export under these licences; which destinations are covered by these licences; and which United Kingdom exporters have registered to use these licences; [20038]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 15 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *132*, on open general export licences, what export categories the 21 OGELs cover and for which countries of destination; and if she will list the companies registered for the 14 OGELs which require registration. [20053]

Mrs. Roche: Further to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Mr. Letwin) on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *124–26*, copies of all current Open General Export Licences are being placed in the libraries of the House today. The goods and country coverage are specified in each licence.

The inquiries that would be necessary as regards the release of the identity of the companies registered to use these licences could only be undertaken at disproportionate cost.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Comprehensive Spending Review within her Department will be complete; and when the results will be provided. [19584]

Mrs. Beckett: The Department's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) is still in progress. I expect the CSR to be completed next summer.

Late Payment

Maria Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she will publish a summary of the responses to the Green Paper, "Improving the Payment Culture: a Statutory Right to Claim Interest on Late Payment of Commercial Debt"; and if she will make a statement. [20585]

Mrs. Roche: I am publishing today a summary of the responses received to the Green Paper "Improving the Payment Culture: a Statutory Right to Claim Interest on Late Payment of Commercial Debt". The paper shows that there is strong support for the Government's proposals on the best way to legislate to give small businesses the right to charge interest on late payment of commercial debt. In time, the new right will be extended to all businesses and the public sector.

The Department distributed the Green Paper to businesses, business representative organisations, interested individuals and the public sector. More than 450 responses were received. I am very pleased that so many people have taken the time to contribute views. We have listened carefully to what they have had to say; in a technical area, the views of experts have been crucial in framing the proposed legislation.

The Green Paper listed Government proposals on which responses were requested. I am delighted that the proposals received the very firm endorsement of respondents.

It is clear that there is real support for a statutory right to claim interest. This bears out all that the Government had heard from small firms themselves. Late payment is a real problem for business. Firms are tired of having to carry the cost of their customers' late payment.

Copies of the summary will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is her current estimate of kilowatt hours electricity created by wind power in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement; [20301]

(2) what is her current estimate of kilowatt hours electricity created by hydro-electric power in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement. [20302]

Mr. Battle: Generation from wind in the United Kingdom as a whole during 1996 was 486 million kilowatt hours, 0.14 per cent. of the total UK generation of electricity. This represented a 24 per cent. increase on 1995 and over 14 times the generation in 1992. Wind

farms in England and Wales generated about 75 per cent. of the UK total in 1996, nearly all of which was supported under the non-fossil obligation orders.

Generation from hydro-electric sources in the United Kingdom as a whole during 1996 was 3,361 million kilowatt hours, 1 per cent. of the total UK generation of electricity. A further 1,556 million kilowatt hours was produced by pumped storage plant, but 2,430 million kilowatt hours was used in pumping. The highest annual level of generation from hydro sources was in 1992 at 5,431 million kilowatt hours, representing 1.7 per cent. of total UK generation in that year. Dry weather has restricted the availability of hydro power in the years since 1992. Hydro plant in England and Wales generated about 6 per cent. of the UK total in 1996. For hydro plant in England and Wales supported under the non-fossil fuel obligations orders, generation was 1 per cent. of the UK total.

Onshore wind energy and small scale hydro are proposed to be supported under a further non-fossil fuel obligation order, NFFO-5, the policy proposals for which I announced to the House on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *507–08*.

Enemy Property

Mr. Twigg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Government Departments are being consulted in preparation of the report on British policy towards enemy property during and after the Second World War. [19654]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My Department holds regular discussions with many other departments. On this issue, discussions have been mostly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, although the Cabinet Office, the Home Office, the Treasury and the Territorial Departments have also been consulted.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates have been made of the employment consequences for the gas industry of the moratorium on gas-fired power stations; [19989]

(2) what estimate she has made of the total investment which has been frozen by the moratorium on assents for gas-fired power stations. [19991]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* It is not possible to make such an estimate. Assessing the impact on those associated with gas fired generation must await the outcome of the Review.

Chambers of Commerce and TECs (Mergers)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications she has received for mergers between Chambers of Commerce and training and enterprise councils; and if she will list those she has *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected. [18994]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Between 1995 and April 1997 13 applications to merge from TECs and Chambers of Commerce were received by the former Government, all of which were approved. Since May 1997 one application, for the Norfolk and Waveney area, has been received and is currently under consideration. The approved applications were from:

Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire
Sussex
Oldham
Rotherham
Shropshire
Coventry and Warwickshire
Greater Peterborough
Northamptonshire
South Derbyshire
St. Helens
Wolverhampton
Hereford and Worcester
Wigan.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Crime Clear-up Rates

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the clear-up rates for each police district for *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 1996. [19860]

Mr. Ingram: The percentage clear-up rates for each police sub-division for the four years from 1993 to 1996 are shown in the table:

Percentage clearance rates for police sub-divisions in Northern Ireland 1993–1996

Sub-division	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Musgrave Street	45.2	43.5	45.7	52.1
Mountpottinger	27.5	29.5	32.4	28.5
Donegall Pass	27.7	22.6	19.9	22.4
Dunmurry	28.4	25.3	25.7	24.7
Grosvenor Road	31.0	29.5	30.4	26.3
Lisburn	40.7	35.0	30.9	27.0
Woodbourne	33.0	34.3	27.0	23.8
North Queen Street	32.8	31.5	31.7	30.3
Antrim Road	34.9	32.8	32.4	30.4
Antrim	35.3	28.4	32.1	28.8
Newtownabbey	32.8	32.6	35.8	32.8
Carrickfergus	38.7	37.8	37.9	35.1
Tennent Street	36.9	32.5	34.6	33.3
Bangor	29.6	29.6	32.9	30.8
Strandtown	29.7	30.8	35.1	30.3
Castlereagh	30.7	30.7	33.9	31.7
Newtownards	35.8	39.1	39.1	38.1
Downpatrick	41.3	38.1	35.9	34.6
Newcastle	28.8	26.6	26.7	27.4
Armagh	35.1	48.1	43.4	42.2
Newry	42.0	41.3	38.3	31.3
Portadown	40.4	39.4	40.0	32.1
Lurgan	44.1	41.1	38.4	27.2
Banbridge	44.6	37.2	39.3	32.6
Cookstown	38.6	57.8	38.8	42.7
Dungannon	42.8	44.7	43.4	41.9
Enniskillen	40.4	42.1	45.6	39.2
Lisnaskea	50.8	52.4	46.2	43.8
Omagh	46.8	51.7	40.1	39.4
Strand Road	42.6	46.7	46.3	39.2
Strabane	45.7	54.6	57.7	47.0
Waterside	41.5	44.1	42.4	35.1
Coleraine	38.3	33.7	37.2	38.5

Percentage clearance rates for police sub-divisions in Northern Ireland 1993–1996

Sub-division	1993	1994	1995	1996
Limavady	42.8	47.0	46.2	41.0
Magherafelt	42.8	48.8	51.4	43.5
Ballymena	32.4	31.2	36.1	42.4
Ballymoney	46.7	45.1	38.5	42.1
Larne	42.2	39.5	40.2	36.2
Northern Ireland	36.4	35.9	36.1	33.7

Central Community Relations Unit

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list all organisations in receipt of funding from the Central Community Relations Unit in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96. [19859]

Mr. Worthington: The Central Community Relations Unit provided funding totalling £4,642,941.54 in 1994–95 and £5,586,200.09 in 1995–96. Details of the organisations funded in those years, together with the amount of funding they received, are set out in the following tables. These do not include payments from the European Social Fund in respect of European Union Measures administered by the Central Community Relations Unit.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the number of live lambs *(a)* exported from and *(b)* imported into Northern Ireland, indicating their (i) destination and (ii) origin and the number to and from each country for each of the last two years and the current year to the latest available date. [19325]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is set out in the following tables. The figures include all sheep as the records do not show lambs separately.

Exports from Northern Ireland

Year	Destination				
	Great Britain	Netherlands	Belgium	Italy	Total
1995	109,341	3	364	0	109,708
1996	83,425	3	25	12	83,465
1997 (to w/e 22 November)	89,405	0	5	0	89,410

Imports to Northern Ireland

Year	Country of origin					
	Republic of Ireland	Great Britain	Netherlands	Belgium	France	Total
1995	108,520	9,974	5	8	1	118,508
1996	101,654	13,628	7	0	7	115,296
1997 (to w/e 22 November)	99,267	34,809	0	66	8	134,150

There is derogation from the inspection and certification requirements of Council Directive 91/68/EEC in respect of trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There are therefore no recorded figures for the number of sheep exported to the Republic. The figure shown for imports relates to sheep imported from the Republic for direct slaughter.

SCOTLAND

Breast Implants

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision there is in the National Health Service in Scotland for women who suffer from ruptured silicone breast implants, to have them removed. [19286]

Mr. Galbraith: Any decision to remove a silicone breast implant is a matter of clinical judgment in the context of the one-to-one relationship between doctor and patient, taking into account the individual circumstances of each patient. The National Health Service in Scotland would provide whatever treatment is judged necessary.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place a copy of the Confirmed Assignation Statement in respect of the Skye Bridge in the Library; and if he will make a statement on the Skye Bridge Company and the collection of tolls. [19920]

Mr. Dewar: As the hon. Member is aware, we have been working with Skye Bridge Ltd. to implement the significant package of toll reductions that I announced on 4 July. I am pleased to advise that the toll reductions will come into force on 1 January 1998. The revised Toll Order will be laid today. We are simultaneously laying Regulations that set the amounts Skye Bridge Ltd. will be able to charge should they have to remove vehicles from the crossing in the event of non-payment of tolls.

The hon. Member has previously recognised that the situation at Skye Bridge is not of our making. I trust he also appreciates that we have met out commitment to provide a fairer tolling regime for the people of the Highlands within current constraints.

I shall write shortly to the hon. Member about the Assignation Statement and the other points raised in his recent letter of 27 November. A copy of my reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Training

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the suitability of *(a)* existing training bodies with charitable status, *(b)* the local enterprise councils and *(c)* further education colleges (i) singly and (ii) in partnership, to carry out the management function for New Deal; and if he will make a statement. [17332]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 24 November 1997]:* My department wrote to interested organisations on the delivery of the New Deal on 23 October. I will place a copy of this letter in the Library.

Medical and Dental Students

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dental students graduated from Scottish universities in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997. [18705]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer Monday 8 December 1997]:* The number of dentistry students (full-time) who graduated from Scottish Higher Education Institutions in 1995 and 1996 is as follows:

Full-time dentistry graduates from Scottish Higher Education Institutions

	First Degree	*Postgraduate*
1995	105	7
1996	117	6

Data for 1997 graduates are not yet available.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the BMA concerning the issue of tuition fees for medical an dental students from parts of the United Kingdom other than Scotland attending degree courses at Scottish universities. [19586]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* In July, the Scottish Office invited the British Medical Association to comment on the Dearing and Garrick reports. On 18 September, the Scottish Office received a response from the British Medical Association in Scotland. it made no specific mention of the issue of tuition fees for medical and dental students from other parts of the UK studying in Scotland.

On 27 October I announced the Government's proposals for assistance to medical and dental students. These are identical in Scotland to those applying elsewhere in the UK. Since then, I have received no representations from the British Medical Association.

E-mail

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to the answer from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster of 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *441*, if he will list the e-mail addresses of *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* senior officials and *(c)* chief executives of agencies for which he is responsible. [15874]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 13 November 1997]:* E-mail contact addresses for appropriate Departmental officials (at head of division level) and agency chief executives are given in the "Who does What?" section of The Scottish Office's Internet website, the address for which is www.scoland.gov.uk. Ministerial e-mail addresses are not currently published. Procedures to allow the public to send e-mail messages to Scottish Office Ministers are currently under consideration.

Accounting Officers

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions written directions have been sought by permanent secretaries and other accounting officers in the past five years; in what circumstances; and on what dates. [19218]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 4 December 1997]:* None.

WALES

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19318]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Department employs two special advisers, John Adams and Huw Roberts. Their salaries are negotiated individually and this information is confidential.

Information about all public appointments for which I have responsibility is published in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales". This publication is updated quarterly and is available in the Library of the House.

A470 Roadworks

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if his Department has completed the necessary orders to advance the A470 Blaenau Ffestiniog to Betws-y-Coed roadworks to completion; [19519]

(2) what factors underlie the delay in advancing the roadworks on the A470 between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Betws-y-Coed; and if he will make a statement; [19518]

(3) what recent correspondence there has been between his Department and the National Trust regarding land to be acquired to advance the A470 Blaenau Ffestiniog to Betws-y-Coed roadworks to completion; and if he will make a statement. [19520]

Mr. Hain: The roadworks referred to are the A470 Dolwyddelan to Pont yr Afanc scheme which form Stage 2 of the Lledr Valley improvement. This scheme, and all others in the forward trunk road programme (with the exception of the A55 Anglesey dualling proposals) is subject to the review announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 3 July, details of which were included in the consultation document 1 published on 31 July.

The consultation period ended on 31 October and the responses are being assessed. The review process is at an early stage and it is not possible to say when we will be able to give any indications as to the size and composition of the forward trunk road programme.

Negotiations with the National Trust are continuing in parallel with the review process. These discussions will not prejudice the outcome of the review and are designed to ensure that valuable time is not lost if the scheme remains in the programme following the review. It would not, of course, be appropriate to reveal details of these negotiations.

Agenda 21

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of Agenda 21 in Wales. [19669]

Mr. Win Griffiths: At the UN "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 an Agenda for the 21st Century setting out how countries can work towards sustainable development was adopted by over 150 nations, including the UK.

This Government have already shown that they are fully committed to this principle. We have established a new Cabinet Committee on the Environment which will help us to deal with sustainable development issues in a co-ordinated way and which will aim to set clear goals for sustainable development. A new House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee has been established. We will soon publish a consultation paper on proposals for a revised UK sustainable development strategy and the Welsh Office plans to host a national sustainable development conference to explore in a Welsh context the issues raised in the consultation paper.

Two thirds of the actions in Agenda 21 require the active involvement of local authorities. At the UN Special Session in June my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that he wanted all local authorities in the UK to adopt Local Agenda 21 strategies by the year 2000. The Welsh Office is involved in various initiatives to encourage local authorities in Wales to make progress on this front. A guidance document for local authorities will be launched early next year. The Welsh Office is one of a number of organisations arranging a Local Agenda 21 seminar for Chief Executives and Leaders of local authorities and other key bodies in Wales.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the Welsh Assembly promotes sustainable development. On 8 December my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed on Second Reading of the Government of Wales Bill our intention to place a duty on the Assembly to have regard to the principle of sustainability.

Welsh Timber

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made towards increasing the use of Welsh timber; and if he will make a statement. [19673]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The source of the timber they use is a matter for the commercial judgment of manufacturers. However, grant has been awarded to Coed Cymru through the Rural Wales Objective 5b Programme 1994–99, to employ a marketing organiser to promote the Welsh hardwood sector.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Subsidised Offal Scheme

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the amount by weight of offal disposed of in the BSE subsidised offal scheme in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98, together with the weight of offal disposed during each of the financial years 1991 to 1995–96; [20267]

(2) if he will list by weight the amount of offal disposed of via the BSE subsidised offal scheme in 1996–97 and 1997–98, and the weight of offal disposed of during the financial years 1991–92 and 1995–96. [20272]

Mr. Rooker: Approximately 957,000 tonnes of clean offal (that is excluding Specified Bovine Material and Over Thirty Months Scheme material) was processed under the Rendering Industry Support Scheme 1996 in 1996–97. There is no equivalent figure for clean offal processed under the 1997–98 Scheme since this is based on outputs of meat and bone meal (MBM) and tallow. Some 227,000 tonnes of MBM and tallow has been processed to date under the Rendering Industry Support Scheme 1997.

Approximately 1.1 million tonnes of clean offals were processed by the rendering industry in 1995–96. We do not have figures for the tonnages processed in 1991–92.

Beef Products (Removal Charges)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the level of charges being imposed on family butchers and other small businesses for collection and removal of offal and related products. [20268]

Mr. Rooker: The Government recognise that the meat supply chain, including butchers and other small businesses, has suffered as a result of the BSE crisis. Substantial support has been provided since April 1996 to prevent the disorderly collapse of the chain. This is now being phased out to allow the industry to adjust to the changing economics. However, the Government cannot continue to shield the chain from the post-BSE economics of meat production in the United Kingdom.

Rendering and Slaughtering Industries

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the rendering and slaughtering industries. [20264]

Mr. Rooker: The rendering industry plays a vital part in ensuring that the essential elements of the meat chain continue to function. Support to the rendering industry in 1996–97 allowed them to maintain pre-crisis prices and charges to suppliers of animal waste. The Scheme provides for support to be phased out during 1997–98 to enable the meat chain, including the renderers, gradually to adjust to the changing economics.

In terms of the slaughterers, it is widely accepted that there is substantial over-capacity in the red meat slaughtering sector, particularly in respect of abattoirs slaughtering cattle and sheep. There is intense competition between slaughterhouses, both for throughput and for customers and profit margins are low. The UK needs a modern financially viable slaughterhouse sector and in this context rationalism is highly desirable. However, we believe it is for the industry itself and not Government to address this issue.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the amount of financial assistance claimed by the rendering industry in the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98, listing *(a)* those organisations or companies which claimed the assistance,

(b) the amounts they received in each of the two years and *(c)* the identity of the sites, at which the offal was disposed; [20274]

(2) what payments were made to rendering companies in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 for the rendering of clean animals. [20265]

Mr. Rooker: A figure of £97 million was paid to 22 companies under the Rendering Industry Support Scheme 1996 (TRISS 96). Of the £59 million available under the 1997 Scheme, £46 million has been paid to date to 19 companies.

The companies and the locations of the plants where the clean offals are rendered are:

Company	*Location*
A. Hughes and Son (Skellingthorpe) Ltd.[1]	Skellingthorpe
A. and W. Chambers Ltd.[1]	Huddersfield
Anglo Beef Processors Ltd.[1]	NewryShrewsbury
Canterbury Mills Ltd.	Canterbury
Chetwynd Animal By-Products[2]	Cardigan
Croda Colloids Ltd.[1]	Market Harborough
Duncrue Food Processors Ltd.	Belfast
Dundas Brothers Ltd.[1]	Inverurie
Dundas Chemical Company (Mosspark) Ltd.[1]	Dumfries
Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd.[1]	Lancaster
Foyle Meats Ltd.[1]	Londonderry
John Pointon and Sons Ltd.[1]	Cheddleton
Lisburn Proteins Ltd.	Lisburn
Lloyd Maunder Ltd.[1]	Cullompton
McIntosh Donald Ltd.[1]	Aberdeen
Mid Ulster Proteins Ltd.[1]	Craigavon
Omagh Meats Ltd.[1]	Omagh
P. Waddington and Company Ltd.	Bradford
	Doncaster
	Exeter
	Nuneaton
	Silvertown
Prosper de Mulder Ltd.[1]	Widnes
Peninsular Proteins Ltd.	Torrington
Smith Brothers (Hyde) Ltd.[1]	Hyde
Ulster Farm By-Products Ltd.[1]	Crumlin
William Forrest and Son (Paisley) Ltd.[1]	Motherwell

[1] Supported under TRISS 96 and TRISS 97.
[2] Receiving support only under TRISS 97.

The Government do not disclose information about support paid to individual renderers for reasons of commercial confidentiality (exemption 13 in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information).

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received since the end of the consultation exercise on support for the rendering industry; and if he will make a statement; [20270]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of arrangements for the payment of offal subsidies paid out during 1996–97 and 1997–98; and if he will make a statement; [20276]

(3) if he will review his policy of phasing out support for disposal of mammalian bone meal and tallow; [20271]

(4) what plans he has to support the rendering industry in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [20269]

Mr. Rooker: The objective of the support to the rendering industry was to avoid the disorderly collapse of the meat chain in the immediate aftermath of the BSE crisis. This was achieved. A wide range of industry bodies and representatives were involved in drawing up the Schemes, which were always intended to cover only the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98, and to provide reduced support in the second year to allow the meat chain to adjust to the post BSE economic and regulatory realities.

Following the election, the Government carefully considered representations made by a wide range of interested industry bodies, from producers to renderers, before confirming the phasing out of support, which began in July. The principal reason for the decision was that the conditions last year which gave rise to the threat of collapse of the meat chain no longer exist. The support has served its purpose and there are no plans to continue the support into 1998–99.

Cattle Tracing

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what use he will make of electronic tagging in introducing a scheme to ensure traceability of beef cattle. [20150]

Mr. Rooker: It will not be a requirement of the computerised Cattle Tracing System for cattle to have electronic eartags. However, the Cattle Tracing System will take account of the fact that increasing numbers of cattle are likely to have them in the future, which the Government view as a welcome development.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of button plastic tag secondary eartags in ensuring cattle traceability. [20149]

Mr. Rooker: The plastic button eartag is on the current list of UK approved eartags for use in cattle identification. We are looking at all the approved eartags to see which ones conform to new EU legislation effective from 1 January 1998. A list of approved eartags will be made widely available as soon as possible.

Beef and BSE Compensation

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what levels of subsidy for beef and BSE compensation will be provided to farmers in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* 1998–99. [20143]

Mr. Rooker: Expenditure on beef subsidies and BSE compensation measures is expected to reach over £1.4 billion in the current financial year. Provision for these items in 1998–99 is currently under discussion.

Lindane

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the clearance for use afforded to lindane. [20144]

Mr. Rooker: The agricultural uses of lindane were reviewed by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides in 1995. The Committee concluded that approvals should continue.

Lindane is currently the subject of an assessment under the European Community's review programme for agricultural pesticides. The first stage of that process is the production of a summary of scientific data by the rapporteur Member State; in this case Austria.

Organophosphates

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will convene a group of experts to advise Ministers in different Government departments on the control and use of organophosphate sheep dips. [19798]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* Such a group already exists. The independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) advises the agriculture and health Ministers of the United Kingdom on all matters relating to the authorisation of veterinary medicinal products, including sheep dips. Copies of the annual reports of the VPC are deposited in the Library of the House.

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to introduce alternatives to organophosphate sheep dips which *(a)* do not damage the environment and *(b)* are safe to use. [19797]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* No veterinary medicine is authorised unless it satisfies stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety in this context includes the safety of the operator and the environment.

A number of non-organophosphorus sheep ectoparasiticides have been authorised, including dips and injectable products. A complete list is published every six months by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and is deposited in the Library of the House.

Unpasteurised Milk

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to reach a decision on the sale of unpasteurised milk for individual consumption; and what account he has taken of agreements relating to consumer choice in respect of unpasteurised milk. [19686]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The period of public consultation ends on 3 February 1998, after which time we shall take careful stock of all the issues and propose how we wish to proceed as soon as possible thereafter.

I agree there is an issue of consumer choice, and we shall take this into account along with the other relevant issues.

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what stage he required changes to the registration procedures for the over-30-months scheme relating to notification of the date of birth of cattle rather than the month of birth; how many cattle have gone into the scheme without a date of birth record; and if he will make a statement. [19841]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Compensation under the over-30-months scheme is payable only on animals over thirty months of age on the date of slaughter. Producers are therefore required to complete a declaration for each animal presented on which they must confirm that the animal is over thirty months of age and declare the date of birth or number of teeth. This requirement was introduced in June 1996.

If a producer chooses to enter the date of birth, the year and month of birth are often sufficient to confirm that the animal is over thirty months of age. The date becomes an issue only when the month and year of birth entered on the declaration by the producer makes it unclear whether the animal is over thirty months. On these relatively rare occasions, the date of birth is required to establish whether the animal was over thirty months of age on the date of slaughter and therefore eligible for compensation.

The information requested by the hon. Member about the numbers entering the Scheme without a date of birth record is not known. However, apart from steers, which must be accompanied by a cattle identification document/cattle control document, most animals are likely to have entered the Scheme without a date of birth record.

Grass-fed Cattle

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's definition of grass-fed animals for the purposes of food labelling; in what circumstances animals fed on silage or concentrates are deemed to be grass-fed; and if he will make a statement. [19844]

Mr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 9 November 1997]:* Under the Beef Labelling Scheme, launched earlier this year, it is for my Department to approve any definition of "grass-fed" submitted by an applicant. However, I would expect any such definition to cover animals reared primarily on grass in the field.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef Ban

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in lifting the export ban on British cattle. [19464]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger) on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *475*.

Cattle Head Deboners

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to compensate those companies specialising in cattle head deboning whose business was adversely affected by the introduction of the Specified Bovine Material orders relating to head meat. [19450]

Mr. Rooker: I sympathise with the deboners that lost business when tighter restrictions on cattle heads were introduced in March 1996 in line with advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. However, the Government do not compensate for loss of business arising out of measures to protect public health and safety. Deboners are not alone in suffering from the impact of BSE.

HEALTH

Health Promotion

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards achieving the health promotion targets under the GP contract. [18795]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is shown in the table.

Unrestricted Principals, health promotion and target achievements (October 1996): England

	Number	*Percentage*
Childhood immunisations		
Higher (90 per cent. coverage)	22,820	85
Lower (70 per cent. coverage)	2,800	10
Either	25,620	95
Pre-school booster		
Higher (90 per cent. coverage)	22,270	83
Lower 70 per cent. coverage)	3,330	12
Either	25,600	95
Cervical Cytology		
Higher (80 per cent. coverage)	24,330	91
Lower (50 per cent. coverage)	2,410	9
Either	26,740	100

All numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.
Source
GMS Census 1 April 1997.

Medway NHS Trust

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been given to the Medway NHS Trust from the additional £300 million recently announced. [19171]

Mr. Milburn: We are advised by the West Kent Health authority that the Medway National Health Service Trust has been allocated an additional £643,000 in the current year.

Care Homes (Wiltshire)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers of 22 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *564–67*, what was the average cost to Wiltshire County Council of a community care place in a residential home run by *(a)* the county council and *(b)* the private sector in each of the last three years. [19132]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *566*. The routine financial statistics provided by the former Wiltshire County Council wrongly included expenditure on independent sector provision along with that on local authority homes. This means that it is not possible to calculate the unit costs requested, as there is no way of separating the reported gross expenditure by sector. Expenditure data for 1996–97 for the new authorities formed out of the former Wiltshire county are not yet available.

Ill-health Retirement

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria for determining applications for ill-health retirement in the National Health Service; what changes have been made to these criteria since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [19288]

Mr. Milburn: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. Chris Breed, dated 11 December 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, as it falls within my area of responsibility.

There are statutory regulations governing entitlement to an ill-health pension from the NHS Scheme. They are defined in Regulation E2 of the NHS Pension Scheme Regulations 1995:

> "A member who retires from pensionable employment because of physical or mental infirmity that makes him permanently incapable of efficiently discharging the duties of that employment shall be entitled to a pension under this regulation if he has at least 2 years qualifying service...".

There are, therefore four main criteria for determining applications:

(a) that there must be sufficient service to qualify for a pension;

(b) that the member is retiring;

(c) that the contract of employment is being terminated on the grounds that they are incapable of efficiently discharging their duties of employment through ill-health;

(d) that their condition is permanent.

The judgement about permanence is solely a medical one. In practice this is set against the time between retirement and the normally expected retirement age.

The statutory regulations have not changed since 1992. They changed before then, in 1988 to reduce the qualifying period for pensions from 5 to 2 years.

The criteria have not been changed since 1992. The organisation providing independent advice on the issue of permanence had to be changed on 1 April 1997 because of the withdrawal of the service by the previous organisation.

Nursing and Midwifery

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the costs of reorganisation, restructuring and redundancy following the award of the pre-registration nursing and midwifery education contract in Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight. [19336]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive South and West Regional Office has estimated that the overall savings offered by the new service delivery configuration outweigh the costs of moving to that configuration. The savings will significantly exceed the estimated transition costs over the life of the new contracts and these savings will be redeployed to provide both further eduction services and increased direct patient care.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what scrutiny his Department undertook of the terms of the contract award for pre-registration nursing and midwifery education in Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight by the NHS Executive South and West; [19333]

(2) what assessment he has made of the tender process for the award of the pre-registration nursing and midwifery education contract in Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight by the NHS Executive South and West. [19337]

Mr. Milburn: Final contract terms for the pre-registration nursing and midwifery education contract in Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight are currently under negotiation between the National Health Service Executive South and West Regional Office and the preferred bidders, the Universities of Southampton and Bournemouth.

The tender process observed all statutory duties, European Council regulations, Departmental and Treasury guidance. Specialist legal advice was obtained at each stage of the process. The tender process was overseen by a project board consisting of the Directors of Nursing, Public Health and Finance of the NHS Executive South and West Regional Office and the Chief Executive of Dorset Health Authority. The NHS Executive South and West Regional Office is a constituent part of the Department of Health.

Job-related Stress (NHS)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to reduce job-related stress on staff working within the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [19245]

Mr. Milburn: We attach great importance to the health and welfare of staff working in the National Health Service. This includes recognising the effect of occupational stress, addressing the causes, and supporting staff accordingly. Through the Health at Work in the NHS project, we have piloted an Organisational Stress management tool which has been disseminated throughout the service.

The NHS Executive is currently developing this work further; is working with the Health and Safety Executive to produce guidance on Stress Management for Employers; and is sponsoring research on the best use of staff Counselling and Employee Assistance Programmes.

Health and Housing

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the Departmental Review into Health Inequalities has established a link between cold, damp housing conditions and ill health; what is the estimated cost to the National Health Service of treating cold-related illness; and what remedial measures he plans for the future. [19700]

Ms Jowell: The conclusions of the Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health will not be published until the summer of 1998, but research shows that the most significant health risks from poor housing are associated with cold and damp, including respiratory problems and circulatory conditions.

Reliable estimates on the cost to the National Health Service of treating cold-related illnesses are not available.

The Government have enacted a range of measures to help pensioners keep warm in winter. Value Added Tax on fuel has been out to 5 per cent. and from April 1998 the gas levy will be reduced to zero. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 25 November a winter fuel payment for all pensioners, divided into a payment of £20 for over five million pensioner households and £50 for the 1.7 million pensioner households on income support. He also announced a cut in VAT to 5 per cent. for the installation of energy efficiency materials carried out under Government-funded grant schemes, allowing an extra 40,000 grants to be paid each year. The Government's new programme of training and jobs for young people will expand the national home energy efficiency scheme.

Contractors and voluntary organisations will be encouraged to take on young people to insulate the homes of those most in need. In addition, the Capital Receipts Initiative will help local authorities to carry out energy efficiency improvements on homes. The Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme has so far helped 2.4 million households by paying grants for energy efficiency improvements. Four hundred thousand homes will benefit from the scheme this year.

We will shortly be publishing for consultation a Green Paper on the new public health strategy for England.

Value Added Tax

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the costs of implementing new VAT procedures by NHS trusts. [19996]

Mr. Milburn: No estimate of extra costs has been made.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the methodology by which he will calculate the progress made in reducing waiting lists against his target over a five year period. [20023]

Mr. Milburn: A Waiting List Action Team has been established, supported by eight regional task forces, to secure progress in this area including, as a first priority, to ensure that no one is waiting for more than 18 months for in patient treatment by 31 March 1998.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the average level of hospital waiting lists in each quarter from 31 March 1992 to 31 March 1997. [20024]

Mr. Milburn: Available information can be found in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England" which has been published since 1991. Copies are available in the Library.

Haemophiliacs

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding compensation for haemophiliacs infected with Hepatitis C; [19852]

(2) when he intends to respond to *(a)* the Manor House Group and *(b)* the Haemophilia Society in respect of his recent meeting to discuss compensation for haemophiliacs infected with Hepatitis C. [19853]

Mr. Dobson *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* I wrote to the Haemophilia Society on 28 November to assure them that we are giving full and careful consideration to this complex issue. I hope very shortly to be in a position to send them a full reply, which will be copied to the Manor House Group.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safety measures are in place to ensure that haemophiliacs are not infected with *(a)* Hepatitis C and *(b)* HIV as a result of blood transfusions. [19854]

Mr. Dobson *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* All reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety of blood and blood products for all patients. These include the careful questioning of donors to exclude those likely to represent a risk of transmitting infection, and the testing of donations for Hepatitis B and C, HIV 1 and 2 and syphilis. Pools of plasma from which blood products are to be made are tested again. Wherever possible, as with blood products used in the treatment of haemophilia, they also undergo additional manufacturing processes to remove or inactivate viruses. All batches of blood products are separately tested for viral markers of infection by the independent National Institute for Biological Standards and Control.

These arrangements fully meet the requirements laid down by the relevant European Union regulatory authority, the European Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products. In addition, the safety of blood and blood products is kept under regular review by the expert Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues for Transplantation, which gives advice to Health Ministers.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those PFI services associated with projects with a capital value in excess of £10 million and the duration of each part of the PFI project. [19866]

Mr. Milburn: Four projects, each with a capital value in excess of £10 million, have now reached commercial close and the nature of the services that will be provided by the private sector under each scheme has therefore been decided. The schemes, and the services affected, are:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust: Estate maintenance; domestic services; catering; laundry; portering; security; non-emergency patient transport.

Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS Trust: Information Management and Technology (IM and T) systems; grounds and estate maintenance; domestic services; portering; financial services; catering; waste disposal and laundry; car parking; non-emergency patient transport; security; telecommunications; energy and utilities.

Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust: Catering; laundry; communications/telephonist; sterile supplies; waste disposal; accommodation; energy; portering and mail; estates; car parking; domestic services; and reception. In addition, the possible provision by the private sector of non-emergency transport (patient transport service) is being reviewed by the trust and its private sector partner.

South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust: Catering; cleaning; portering; non-emergency transport; laundry and linen; building services maintenance (new build/refurbishment only); private patients' unit.

The duration of each part of each of these schemes is as follows:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust: Contract period of 63 years (including the construction phase of three years) with breakpoints at year 28 and every five years subsequently after. Services provided by the private sector will be benchmarked every five years.

Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS Trust: Contract period of 64 years (including the construction phase of four years) with breakpoints at years 34, 44 and 54. Services provided by the private sector will be market tested in year nine and then every five years with the exception of IM and T Services. The initial contract for these will be for seven years, after which the Trust will be free to procure this service as it wishes.

Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust: Contract period of 47.5 years, consisting of a construction phase of 2.5 years and an operational phase of 45 years. The Trust has the exclusive right to break the relationship in year 30 of the operational phase. Services provided by the private sector will be market-tested at intervals of five to seven years during the operational phase, depending on the service concerned.

South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust: Contract period of 63 years (including the construction phase of three years) with break points at year 30 and then every five years. Services provided by the private sector will be market-tested after 10 years and subsequently every seven years.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department's value for money calculations assume

that patient related activity in connection with PFI projects with a capital value over £10 million will remain constant over the life of the project. [19863]

Mr. Milburn: No. Value for money (VFM) calculations are based on a number of assumptions including expected levels of patient activity and are carried out for all National Health Service capital projects. These levels are determined by a comprehensive analysis of current activity levels, expected changes in activity levels, patient flows and lengths of stay. Sensitivity analysis around these central assumptions is also undertaken to assess the effect on the VFM calculation of any changes. This includes an analysis of the impact of alternative levels of patient related activity.

Private Finance Initiative projects are expected to have a flexibility of design to allow for different types of care should future healthcare requirements alter. This flexibility of design is one of the factors looked at during the approval process of a PFI project and helps give hospitals an in-built capability for coping with changes to patient activity.

Patient Transport Service

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the amount of officer time spent on negotiating Patient Transport Service contracts in the Mersey Regional Ambulance Service *(a)* in 1996–97 and *(b)* in the previous five years; [20110]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of negotiating the Patient Transport Service contracts in the Mersey Regional Ambulance Service. [20111]

Mr. Boateng: None. This is a matter for the Mersey Regional Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust. I therefore advise my hon. Friend to contact the Chairman of the trust.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ambulance staff have been recruited from the Patient Transport Service to the Emergency and Paramedic Service over the past five years *(a)* in the Mersey region and *(b)* nationally; [20108]

(2) what proportion of staff currently working in the Patient Transport Service section of the ambulance service are the former emergency and paramedic staff *(a)* in the Mersey region and *(b)* nationally. [20109]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not held centrally. For details of Mersey Regional Ambulance National Health Service Trust, I suggest my hon. Friend contacts the Chairman of the trust for further information.

Long-term Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 21 July from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam concerning the Commission on Long-term Care. [20277]

Mr. Boateng: I wrote to the hon. Member on 30 July 1997.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of post-graduate training in the treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis. [18755]

Mr. Boateng: The medical Royal Colleges and their Faculties are responsible for the content and standard of postgraduate, or specialist, medical training. The treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis is likely to form part of specialist training programmes in several different medical specialities and also of vocational training for general practice.

St. Michael's Hospital, Hayle

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the grant of £2.5 million by the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority to St. Michael's Hospital, Hayle, in 1995 was approved by his Department's Regional Office, and on what terms; and if he will make a statement. [20112]

Mr. Milburn: In 1994 Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Health Authority made a Section 64 grant of £2.5 million to the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross of Liege in order to ensure the long-term availability of operating capacity in the county.

This grant did not require the formal approval of the then South and West Regional Health Authority, although officers from the regional health authority discussed the grant with officers of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Health Authority and were content with it. The health authority's external auditors, the Audit Commission, were also content with the grant.

Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors led him to conclude that Councillor Mrs. Mary Styth was better qualified to be Chairman of Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust Board than Doctor Bryan Lindley; and what representations he received on this subject. [20151]

Mr. Milburn: All National Health Service appointments are made on merit, and in accordance with guidance from the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the Government's criteria on the qualities required for chairmen and non-executives. All appointees are advised that there can be no presumption of re-appointment at the end of any term of appointment served. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received any representations about his decision on the Chairmanship of Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the names of all those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the

positions to which they have been appointed and whether they receive remuneration. [19983]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested by my hon. Friend is collected by the Department but will take a little time to assemble. I will write to him as soon as it is available.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the basis of the calculation to establish the requirement for £300 million additional expenditure on the NHS this winter. [19011]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply.

A sum of £300 million has been made available for patient care this winter as a result of reordering spending priorities; £270 million was found from cuts in other spending programmes. A reduction in provision for the Ministry of Defence of £168 million related to overspending in 1996–97 and £102 million of provision no longer needed by the public sector nuclear industry as a result of their improved performance. The remaining £30 million will be from efficiency savings within the NHS.

The money will specifically help hospitals cope with emergency admissions, reduce delays in discharging patients and strengthen primary and community services to reduce the need for people to be admitted to hospital in the first place.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 12 December 1997

PRIME MINISTER

Expos

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about departmental responsibility for co-ordinating and promoting bids to host expos within the United Kingdom. [19155]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* A town or city wishing to bid for an Expo would need to obtain the support of the relevant sponsoring Department, and, depending on the nature of the Expo proposed, that of other Whitehall Departments, in order to obtain Government endorsement for the project. Once obtained, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would be responsible for lodging the formal application with the International Bureau of Expositions, the governing body for Expos. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office would provide tactical advice and assistance with lobbying.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Royal Naval College

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he plans to meet the Chairman and trustees of the Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College; and if he will make a statement. [19024]

Mr. Chris Smith: I met the Chairman and the Director of the Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College when I visited the College on Friday 28 November. The Greenwich Foundation is working closely with Government and Greenwich Hospital to conclude arrangements that will allow it to take responsibility for the site as Defence use ceases.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders aged 10 to 19 years to whom one caution has already been administered have received *(a)* a second and *(b)* more than two cautions in respect of further offences in each year since 1994. [19815]

Mr. Michael: Data routinely available centrally do not include details of repeat cautions.

For a sample of offenders cautioned for standard list offences in ten police forces during one week in November 1991, a record was submitted centrally on their first subsequent caution over the next two years.

From this sample, it is estimated that 20,800 offenders aged 10 to 19, who were administered a first caution for an indictable offence in 1991, received a subsequent caution for a standard list offence in the next two years. An estimate relating to those cautioned for summary offences is not available.

It should be noted that concern about repeat cautioning led to revised guidance being issued in March 1994 (Home Office Circular 18/1994) to discourage the use of repeat cautions. In a sample of offenders cautioned for standard list offences in all but two police forces in November 1994, the proportion of those aged 10 to 19 who had one previous caution was 11 per cent. The proportion with more than one caution was 6 per cent. In a similar sample collected in 1991, the respective proportions were 16 per cent. and 10 per cent.

Offences included in the "standard list" are given in appendices 4 and 5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1996" (Cm. 3764). These include all indictable and some of the more serious summary offences.

Donhead St. Andrew Rectory

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the media representatives who were invited by Sussex Police to be present at the raid on the rectory at Donhead St. Andrew on 21 November; and if he will make a statement. [20538]

Mr. Michael: I am told by the forces concerned that neither the Wiltshire Constabulary, which carried out the search at Donhead St. Andrews, nor the Sussex Police, invited any media representatives to attend.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Sussex Police requested Wiltshire Constabulary to raid the rectory at Donhead St. Andrew on 21 November; and if he will make a statement. [20537]

Mr. Michael: I am told by the forces concerned that this operation was part of an inquiry involving a number of forces in which the Wiltshire Constabulary was requested to participate by the Sussex Police, but the decision to conduct the search at the rectory rested with the Wiltshire Constabulary.

Firearms (Amendment) Act

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many outstanding unpaid claims there were for compensation under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 on 30 November. [20480]

Mr. Michael: At the end of November, there were 23,243 claims under options A and B awaiting processing, and an additional 6,479 claims awaiting payment under option C, consisting of option C only claims and mixed claims on which an option A or B payment had been made.

Prisons (Health Care)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the joint Prison Service/Department of Health working group set up in response to the 1996 Report "Patient or Prisoner" to complete its work; and if he will publish its conclusions. [20387]

Ms Quin: The joint Prison Service/Department of Health Working Group is expected to put forward options and recommendations by May 1998 for consideration by Ministers. The Working Group's conclusions will be published in due course.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of those serving on the joint Prison Service/Department of Health working group set up in response to the 1996 Report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Patient or Prisoner. [20386]

Ms Quin: The membership of the joint Prison Service/Department of Health working group is as follows:

Prison Service Department of Health

Dr. Graham Winyard, Medical Director, NHS—joint Group Chairman

Mr. Martin Brown, Ms Andrea Humphrey, mental health policy

Mr. Mike Farrar, medical services policy

Dr. Alison Evans, Director of Public Health, Wakefield Health Authority

Professor John Ashton, Regional Director of Public Health, Northwest Regional Office of the NHS

Dr. Neil Squires (as for Professor Ashton)

Dr. Gillian Fairfield, Health Services Directorate, NHS Executive

Mr. Malcolm Rae, Nursing Officer, Department of Health.

Her Majesty's Prison Service

Dr. Mike Longfield, Director of Health Care, Her Majesty's Prison Service—joint Group Chairman

Dr. Mary Piper, Acting Head, Health Policy, Standards and Audit Group, Directorate of Health Care (DHC)

Mr. Savas Hadjipavlou, Business Manager, DHC

Mrs. Anna Howard, Contracts Manager, DHC

Mrs. Fenella Tayler, policy on delivery of health care, DHC—Group Secretary

Mrs. Yvonne Willmott, Nursing Advise, DHC

Mr. Colin Edwards, Area Nursing Adviser, Directorate of Operations South, Prison Service

Dr. Vicy Foot, Health Care Adviser, Directorate of Operations North, Prison Service

Dr. Jim Mullen, Governor of Her Majesty's Prison Long Lartin, Evesham

Mr. Peter Earnshaw, Governor of Her Majesty's Prison Manchester

Dr. Roger Ralli, Principal Medical Officer, Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution, Glen Parva, Leicester

Mr Kieron Taylor, Head of Health Care, Her Majesty's Prison Elmley, Sheerness

Dr. John Reed, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (as observer)

Dr. Liz Ryman, Home Office, Comprehensive Spending Review, (as observer).

Manslaughter and Reckless Driving

Mr Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of prosecutions on the charge of manslaughter have resulted in a conviction in each of the last three years; [19248]

(2) what percentage of prosecutions on the charge of causing death by reckless driving have resulted in a conviction in each of the last three years. [19328]

Mr. Michael: Data are not available on the basis of prosecutions. However, the numbers of defendants convicted of these offences as a percentage of defendants tried at the Crown Court for those offences plus those proceeded against in magistrates' courts for those offences whose cases were discontinued, withdrawn or otherwise abandoned in each of the last three years are as follows:

Per cent.

Offence	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Causing death by reckless driving	87	85	89
Manslaughter[1]	91	85	85

[1] Includes offences under sections 5, 9 and 10 of the Common Law and Offences against the Person Act 1861 and section 2 of the Homicide Act 1957.

The difference between numbers of defendants prosecuted and those tried or proceeded against by type of offence is that defendants may be prosecuted for a more serious offence but convicted of a lesser offence, and the data on court proceedings collected by the Home Office record the offence for which *(a)* cases against defendants are discontinued or *(b)* defendants are either acquitted or found guilty.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Teacher Training

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provision has been made in the current year to train serving teachers in information and communication technology. [19106]

Ms Estelle Morris: Under the Grants for Education Support and Training programme, £296.8 million has been made available in 1997–98 to support training for serving teachers in all National Curriculum subjects. A subject by subject breakdown is not yet available for this year, but information collected for 1996–97 suggests that approximately 5 per cent. of the funding is spent on IT courses.

In addition, £1.2 million has been provided to fund this year's Multimedia Portable Computers for Teachers pilot, which is aimed at improving serving teachers' competence and confidence in the use of Information and Communications Technology in the classroom.

From early 1999 the first tranche of funds from the People's Lottery will become available to train the UK teaching force in the use of information and communication technologies. This initiative will meet one of the key recommendations of the Stevenson Committee report "Information and Communications Technology in UK Schools" and will be the first attempt to train all teachers in the use of IT.

Special Advisers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body

members his Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19319]

Dr. Howells: On the question of Special Advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answers given on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *615–17*, and on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

The Department has six Task Forces which currently have a total of 93 members; no appointments have yet been made to the Skills Task Force. No salary or benefits are paid to members of these bodies. The Department is not responsible for any review bodies.

After-school Clubs

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many after-school clubs there were on *(a)* 1 May and *(b)* 27 November. [20051]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department makes funds available for after-school clubs in England under the Out of School Childcare Initiative (OSCI). The initiative is delivered locally by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). The Department records the number of places provided through OSCI in out of school clubs but not the number of clubs available throughout the country. The initiative has already created some 78,000 places and offers parents, especially women, the opportunity to participate more fully in the labour market by increasing the supply of good quality, affordable out of school childcare.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the names of all those people who he has appointed to public bodies since 1 May, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed, and whether they receive remuneration. [19976]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is given in the table. My hon. Friend will wish to note that this information will be in the Department's Annual Report when it is published next year, and is also accessible through the Public Appointment Unit's Internet Website.

Name	*Position*	*Remuneration*
Centre for Information on Language Teaching		
Derek Winslow[1]	Governor	None
Andrew Yeomans	Governor	None
Richard Bunker	Governor	None
Jeremy Arliss	Governor	None
Anthony Lunch	Governor	None
Construction Industry Training Board		
Michael Fitchett	Board member	None
Herbert Baggaley	Board member	None
Stewart Tilley	Board member	None
Oliver Robbins	Board member	None
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board		
Norman Dunlop	Chairman	None
Equal Opportunities Commission		
Ms Anne Gibson[1]	Commissioner	£123 per day
Richard Grayson[1]	Commissioner	£123 per day
Funding Agency for Schools		
Sir Anthony Tippet	Chairman	£30,000 p.a.
Robert Lloyd	Board member	£155 per meeting
Professor David Johns	Board member	£155 per meeting
Miss Louise Anne Kidd	Board member	£155 per meeting
Roy Jobson	Board member	£155 per meeting
The Revd Dr. Alan Billings	Board member	£155 per meeting
Robin Wendt	Board member	£155 per meeting
Further Education Funding Council		
Lord Davies of Oldham	Chairman	£37,000 p.a.
Further Education Funding Council—Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Committee		
David Wille	Board member	None
Yvonne Rose	Board member	None
Professor Robert Fryer	Board member	None
Higher Education Funding Council for England		
Dorma Urwin	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Professor Ron Cooke	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Dr. Keith Taylor	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Mrs. Joan Bingley[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Caroline Neville	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Professor Sir Gareth Roberts	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Dr. David Potter CBE	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Professor Marilyn Butler	Board member	£4,000 p.a.

Name	Position	Remuneration
Dr. John Strickson[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Miss Janet Trotter[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Professor Sir Colin Campbell[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Dr. Robert Telfer[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Professor Kay-Tee Khaw[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Mrs. Joan Bingley[1]	Board member	£4,000 p.a.
Sir Michael Checkland	Chairman	£37,822 p.a.
Investors in People UK		
Dr. Louise Wallace	Board member	None
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority		
Sir William Stubbs	Chairman	£47,000 p.a.
Sir Dominic Cadbury	Deputy Chairman	None
Professor Robin Alexander	Board member	None
Geoffrey Ashton	Board member	None
Mrs. Anne Duke	Board member	None
Dr. Philip Evans	Board member	None
Dr. Philip Hunter	Board member	None
Mrs. Patricia Lee	Board member	None
Ian McAllister	Board member	None
Mrs. Patricia Morgan-Webb	Board member	None
Sir George Quigley	Board member	None
Heather Rabbatts	Board member	None
Professor Ted Wragg	Board member	None
Remploy		
Mrs. Sarah Brown	Non-Executive Director	None
David Winterbottom[1]	Non-Executive Director	None
National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities		
Alan Smith[1]	Chairman	None
Paul Newman[1]	Council member	None
Guinette Davies[1]	Council member	None
Rita Donaghy[1]	Council member	None
Richard Exell[1]	Council member	None
Professor Ian Bruce[1]	Council member	None
Stephen Duckworth OBE[1]	Council member	None
Dr. Ann Fingret[1]	Council member	None
Sir Peter Large CBE[1]	Council member	None
Bert Massie MBE[1]	Council member	None
Timothy Pape OBE[1]	Council member	None
Susan Scott-Parker[1]	Council member	None
Richard Sermon[1]	Council member	None
Ian Sneddon[1]	Council member	None
John Spencer[1]	Council member	None
Dianah Worman[1]	Council member	None
National Disability Council		
Alan Smith	Council member	£119 per day
Teacher Training Agency		
Professor Clive Booth	Chairman	£15,759 p.a.
Dr. Peter Knight OBE[1]	Board member	None
Miss J. Trotter[1]	Board member	None
Lady Marie Stubbs	Board member	None
John Steele	Board member	None
Professor John Gray	Board member	None
Waheed Alli	Board member	None
Paul Ennals	Board member	None
Keith Anderson	Board member	None
Mrs. Patricia Pritchard	Board member	None

Note:
[1] These are reappointments.

SCOTLAND

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums each Scottish local authority (i) has budgeted to spend in 1997–98 and (ii) has spent in each of the five previous years in *(a)* grants to voluntary organisations and *(b)* purchasing services from voluntary organisations in respect of (1) youth work, sport, adult education and community education, (2) social work, (3) Citizens Advice Bureaux and other advice giving services and (4) others. [19761]

Mr. Galbraith: Information is not held centrally in the form requested at present, although the collection of

statistics on local authority expenditure on the voluntary sector is being reviewed.

The funding of local voluntary organisations is a matter for local authorities. The Scottish Office has, however, issued guidance to local authorities requesting them to produce policy statements on working with and supporting the voluntary sector in their area. Scottish Office funding of £240,000 over three years has been granted to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations to provide information and support to voluntary bodies building partnerships at local level. As a result, 22 new partnerships agreements are in place between local authorities and their local voluntary sector.

The Scottish Office has joined COSLA's Task Group on the voluntary sector to take forward good practice guidance on positive partnerships and funding.

WALES

Child Abuse

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cost of the North Wales child abuse inquiry. [20253]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The cost to the Welsh Office of running the Tribunal is not expected to exceed £10 million.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20532]

Mr. Ron Davies: The degree of the year 2000 date change problem for my Department depends on a number of factors including the nature and relative importance of non-governmental organisations and suppliers to the business of the Welsh Office. My Department is following the guidance issued by the central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) on the action to be taken to deal with the problem. The Welsh Office will assess the nature of its contractual relationships with non-governmental organisations and suppliers to establish the impact of non-compliance.

All non-governmental organisations and suppliers will need to show that their relevant systems are millennium compliant wherever these would have a significant impact on the business of the Department. If they cannot do so by 31 March 1998 we will review the contractual arrangements.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the forecast level of spending by local authorities for 1998–99; and what is the percentage change in real terms compared to 1997–98. [20549]

Mr. Ron Davies: The provisional capping plans that I announced on 10 December will increase Welsh local authorities spending power by over 4.5 per cent. My capping plans are not spending targets, however, and I cannot predict local authorities spending decisions for 1998–99. They have until March 1998 to set budgets.

Rail Links

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Rail Franchise holders on rail links with *(a)* Cardiff and *(b)* Swansea; and if he will make a statement. [20407]

Mr. Ron Davies: The train operating companies are represented on the Welsh Transport Advisory Group which my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) has recently established. In addition, he has already met the Franchising Director to discuss the scope for improved rail services between North and South Wales, and plans to have separate discussions with the main operators shortly.

Road Links

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve road communications between Deeside and *(a)* Cardiff and *(b)* Swansea; and if he will make a statement. [20406]

Mr. Ron Davies: The extent to which improvements are needed to the road network between north and south Wales was one of the main issues raised for consideration in the recent consultation exercise on the review of the Welsh trunk road programme. The review process is still at an early stage and it is not possible to say when we will be able to give any indications as to the size and composition of the future trunk road programme.

A number of organisations and individuals submitted representations in support of improved links between north and south Wales during the review consultation period; and we will consider these very carefully before making any final decisions on the strategy to be adopted for the trunk road network.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday 22 December

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the President of the Council what estimate she has made of the costs which will be incurred as a result of the decision that the House should sit on a single day in the week beginning Monday 22 December. [20519]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: It is not possible to provide a realistic estimate of the travel cost of one day's travel to and from Westminster.

Stationery

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what representations she has received in respect of the changes to the supply of stationery. [20888]

Mrs. Roe: One, from the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), which has been drawn to the attention of the Serjeant at Arms.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the President of the Council how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members her Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Privy Council Office employs no task force members or review body members. I have one Special Adviser, Mr. Ian McKenzie. Additionally, I have appointed Mr. Keith Hellawell as the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator (from 5 Janaury 1998) and Mr. Michael Trace as Deputy UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator on special adviser terms. As regards costs, I refer the hon. Member to the Answers given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

DEFENCE

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to publish the strategic defence review. [20483]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns 499–500.

Western European Union

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the Greek Defence Minister to discuss the forthcoming Greek presidency of the Western European Union. [20080]

Mr. George Robertson: I held a meeting with the Greek Defence Minister during the Western European Union Ministerial meeting at Erfurt on 18 November. We discussed a number of issues of common interest, including the forthcoming Greek Presidency of the Western European Union.

Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what in the life expectancy of Type 23 frigates and Type 42 destroyers; and when the *(a)* first and *(b)* last of each class entered service with the Royal Navy. [20073]

Dr. Reid: The life expectancy of the Type 23 Frigates and Type 42 Destroyers is expected to be in the order of 25 years, although this will be kept under review. The first Type 23 Frigate, HMS Norfolk, entered service in 1989. HMS Portland, the final ship of the last batch, which is currently under construction at Yarrow Shipbuilders, is due to enter service in 2001. The first type 42 Destroyer to enter service was HMS Birmingham in 1976 and the last HMS Edinburgh in 1985.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the LPH HMS Ocean and the LPDs HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark have the capability to operate *(a)* Sea Harriers and *(b)* RAF Harrier GR7s. [20086]

Dr. Reid: Neither the Helicopter Carrier, HMS Ocean, nor the Amphibious Assault ships, HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, will have the capability to operate Sea Harriers or RAF Harrier GR7S. HMS Ocean will be able to transport up to 20 of these aircraft but not to act as their operational base.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the advantages of replacing the use of frigates as West Indies guard ships or anti-drugs patrols with a smaller class of vessel. [20074]

Dr. Reid: The Strategic Defence Review is examining the whole range of Defence capabilities and activities, including the role of the West Indies' Guard Ship. Once all the work on the Review has been considered by Ministers, we will publish a White Paper setting out our overall conclusions.

Sea Harrier Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Sea Harriers were delivered to the Royal Navy; and what is the life expectancy of a single aircraft of the class. [20077]

Dr. Reid: The Sea Harrier entered service in 1979. Since its entry to service the Sea Harrier has undergone a mid-life update to give it an increased capability. The currently planned out of service date for the Sea Harrier is 2012 although the aircraft will be phased out over a 3-year period, ending in 2015, during which time the aircraft will retain an operational role.

Uncommanded Flying Manoeuvres

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many incidents of uncommanded flying manoeuvres have been reported by RAF pilots in *(a)* fixed wing aircraft and *(b)* helicopters in each of the past five years. [19840]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* The table gives the number of uncommanded movements on flying controls for RAF fixed wing aircraft and helicopters in the past five years.

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Fixed Wing	95	83	42	39	61
Helicopters	51	43	40	35	30

Uncommanded movements cover movements of flying controls including primary surfaces, trimmers, flaps, airbrakes and spoilers, and any induced by malfunctions of autopilots. They also include any found on pre-flight checks.

TREASURY

Scottish Parliament

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the cost of the proposed Scottish Parliament will be met exclusively from the Scottish block grant; and if he will make a statement on the availability of extra funds for this purpose from the Treasury. [18222]

Mr. Darling: The costs of the proposed Scottish Parliament will be met exclusively from the Scottish block grant.

Orion Trust

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the Paymaster General's wife or children have any interest in any offshore trusts apart from the Orion Trust; [20661]

(2) When he was informed about the transfer of 2.95 million TransTec shares into the Orion Trust; [20664]

(3) if he will publish the trust deed of the Orion Trust; [20665]

(4) who informed the Orion Trust that 2.95 million TransTec shares should have been legally settled in the trust; [20663]

(5) who the non-resident settlor was who transferred 2.95 million TransTec shares into the Orion Trust in 1997; [20662]

(6) if he will publish the letter of wishes from the settlor to the trustees of the Orion Trust *(a)* on the setting up of the trust and *(b)* relating to the Deed of Addition. [20660]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *575–76*.

Child Care Facilities

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures his Department is taking to ensure that organisations wishing to contribute to employee childcare facilities are given clear instructions on how to implement section 155A of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. [19926]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Guidance on when Section 155A applies to childcare facilities is given in the Inland Revenue information leaflet IR115, Tax and Childcare, which is available from Tax Inquiry Centres or Tax Offices. Organisations may also consult their Tax Office.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures his Department is taking to ensure that the public are accurately informed of the issues relating to EMU. [19928]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* In July, the Treasury published two booklets, "EMU—Practical Information for Business", and "The Pros and Cons of EMU", of which about 60,000 and 21,000 copies have been distributed respectively. In October, the Treasury published "UK Membership of the Single Currency: An Assessment of the Five Economic Tests", about 6,000 copies of which have been distributed.

Separately, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has set up a Business Advisory Group on the strategic and practical implications of EMU, and a Standing Committee on preparations for EMU. A summary of the findings of the Business Advisory Group will be published in early 1998 and will include recommendations on the information required by business about EMU. The Government have also announced plans for a series of regional conferences to be held early in the New Year to ensure that all regions and sectors of the economy are aware of the need to prepare.

Copies of a folder titled "Business Preparations for the Euro", containing all the information published, including a note on Government activities, have been placed in the Library of the House.

Long-term Investment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that reforms of capital gains tax encourage long-term investment. [19927]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* In his Pre-Budget Report of 25 November, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it clear that he remains attracted to a system of capital gains tax that encourages long-term investment. Work to examine the scope for such a system is continuing.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is responsible for ensuring that the contracts under which his special advisers work are complied with. [18862]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The lines of responsibility are set down in their contracts, a model copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps his special advisers are required to take to obtain authorisation before talking to members of the Press; [18864]

(2) with whom his special advisers' contracts of employment have been made. [18854]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* The terms under which special advisers work are set out in the schedule to their contract, a model copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. These build upon rules in force under previous Administrations.

Market Sensitive Information

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to establish the source of disclosure of market sensitive information in the last week of September. [18863]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 2 December 1997]:* Market sensitive information was not disclosed.

Cyclically Adjusted Budget Deficits

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update table B8, of the "Pre-Budget Report November 1997", to allow for the revenues which would accrue to the Exchequer if the measures included in the Treasury's Report "A Modern System for Corporation Tax Payments" are implemented. [19958]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The net revenue effects of the measures proposed in "A modern system for corporation tax payments" would have negligible impact on the estimates in Table B9 which gives government expenditure and receipts up to 1998–99.

Tax Avoidance Schemes

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Government intend to take against tax avoidance schemes; and if he will make a statement. [19955]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* The Government are determined to stem tax leakage by detecting, deterring and defeating tax avoidance. The last Budget included a package of anti-avoidance measures, and more are likely to be announced in the next Budget. Since the summer, the Inland Revenue have been carrying out a wide-ranging review of avoidance. Both the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are also looking at the possibility of introducing a General Anti-Avoidance Rule.

Credit Unions

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to allow those without a residential qualification to join credit unions. [19858]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* The existing legislation already allows a number of ways for those without a residential qualification to join credit unions.

Fiscal Stability

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the Treasury Committee in respect of monitoring the Government's adherence to a Code of Fiscal Stability; and if he will make a statement. [19964]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* The Chancellor's proposal for a Code for Fiscal Stability will commit the Government to a set of principles of fiscal policy management, transparent fiscal reporting and best-practice accounting methods. This open approach will allow the Treasury Committee to play an important role in the external scrutiny of the Government's fiscal policy.

Lord Sainsbury

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met Lord Sainsbury in an official capacity; and what subjects were discussed. [19535]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 8 December 1997]:* I have met Lord Sainsbury on occasions such as seminars at 11 Downing Street which I have attended in my capacity as Chancellor.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Greece and Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had and with whom on the recommendation made in the Madrid Summit in July 1997, in respect of relationships between Greece and Turkey; and what initiatives have been taken under this agreement. [20081]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has on a number of occasions discussed this subject with ministerial colleagues, including the Greek and Turkish Foreign Ministers. Diplomatic contacts to build on the agreement made in Madrid in July 1997 will continue during our EU Presidency.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British High Commissioner for Cyprus or his officials last visited the Greek Cypriot community living in the Karpas area of Cyprus; what reports he has received in respect of the living conditions; and if he will make a statement. [20082]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A number of the British High Commission last visited the Greek Cypriot community in the Karpas on 4 November as part of a regular series of visits to that area. The High Commission reports no significant changes in living conditions since the previous visit in May.

European Parliament

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has received relating to the misdirection of funds for the construction of the European Parliament buildings in the Espace Leopold; and if he will request an investigation by the Court of Auditors. [20258]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are aware that allegations have been made of impropriety relating to the construction of the new European Parliament building in Brussels. We understand that the Belgium judicial authorities are conducting an inquiry. Decisions on appropriate follow-up action will be taken when the facts of the case are clear.

European Union

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the statement of the Minister of State of 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 567, where, when and between whom the exchanges in private relating to the agreement between Spain and the Dutch presidency took place. [20580]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is not a matter on which we can give precise answers, since by definition, no representative of the Government was present

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the statement of the Minister of State of 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 567, when the attempt to clarify the mix-up over the Spanish amendment to the Treaty of Amsterdam was made. [20579]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We first contacted the Presidency about this matter on 20 June.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the statement of the Minister of State of 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 567, when the bilateral understanding between the Dutch presidency and the Spanish government was reached. [20581]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave him on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *122–23*.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20527]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department deals with many non-governmental organisations and suppliers. Where we identify that such organisations have a millennium problem, which could have a negative impact on this Department, we take appropriate action. Depending on the scale of the problem, and the nature of the organisation, this may result in this Department ceasing to deal with the organisation at an appropriate time, which we anticipate would be no later than 31 December 1999.

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he expects to achieve during the United Kingdom Presidency of the EU on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 425 of 19 March 1978. [20546]

Mr. Fatchett: During our Presidency we will be working to re-inject momentum into the Middle East peace process on all its tracks. We will continue to stress to parties in the region our support for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 425 and withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon.

Zambia

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the consequences of the recent attempted coup in Zambia. [20594]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We welcome the prompt restoration of civilian government. We hope the State of Emergency will soon be lifted. We have expressed concern to the Zambian authorities at the numbers in detention and at reports of torture, most recently when I met the Zambian High Commissioner on 10 November. We welcome the Zambian Permanent Human Rights Commission's statement condemning torture and calling for the officers concerned to be arrested, as well as President Chiluba's support for their stance. We are monitoring developments closely and I will visit Zambia from 7 to 9 January.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Executive

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many clerical officers and clerk/typists are employed in each of the offices of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and what is the breakdown by gender in each case and in total. [19574]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, who has advised me that the information is not held in the form requested, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons applied for posts of clerk/typist and clerical officer with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the last three years and the current year to the latest available date; and in each year how many *(a)* applicants and *(b)* appointees were (i) male, (ii) female, (iii) Protestant, (iv) Roman Catholic and (v) others. [19576]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive who has advised me that the Housing Executive has not recruited staff to the Clerical officer or Clerk/typist posts over the past three years, other than through temporary contracts arranged through Job Centres. The Executive is currently in the process of recruiting staff to these posts and hopes to have completed the exercise by January 1998. The impact of the recruitment exercise on the composition of the Executive's work force as a whole, will be reflected in the annual monitoring return to the Fair Employment Commission (FEC).

District Cancer Centres

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to her answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *128*, what estimate has been made of the number of staff required to support the new consultancy in non-surgical oncology; and what plans are in place to recruit and train them. [19751]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 9 December 1997]:* Assessment of the need for suitably trained staff, to support additional consultants in clinical oncology, will be carried out by the relevant HSS Trusts as this service develops. Recruitment and training will be taken forward in the light of purchasers' requirements and the resources available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards introducing a best value regime for district councils in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [20613]

Marjorie Mowlam: Following our announcement on 20 June of the decision to extend the existing Compulsory Competitive Tendering timetable until 1 November 1998, good progress has been made in developing a suitable Best Value regime for District Councils in Northern Ireland. In developing our plans we have been able to draw on the experience of other parts of the country but it has also been necessary to tailor our proposals to local circumstances.

The Government wish actively to involve local government and to draw on their experience in developing a suitable Best Value regime for District Councils in Northern Ireland. In order to facilitate this process, we are today publishing a Consultation Paper, setting out our proposals and inviting comments form interested parties. A copy of the Consultation Paper has been placed in the Library.

Archives

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how expenditure by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland on the purchase of archives of historical/research importance will be funded. [20739]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Department of the Environment has recently concluded that the Public Records Act (NI) 1923 does not empower the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland to purchase archives. Parliamentary approval for such purchases in the current financial year will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Environmental and Other Services Vote (Department of the Environment Vote 4) Pending that approval, expenditure up to an estimated £120,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Civil Contingencies Fund to ensure that Northern Ireland's archival heritage will be saved for posterity.

I am also examining the possibility of seeking Parliament's approval for new legislation which will specifically authorise such expenditure.

Electoral Officer's Report

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish the report of the Chief Electoral Officer in Northern Ireland for 1996–97. [20740]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Chief Electoral Officer's annual report was laid before parliament on Tuesday 9 December, and copies are available in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Feed

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent to which meat and bonemeal is fed to livestock in other European Union countries; and if he will make a statement. [20249]

Mr. Rooker: We are not in a position to make such

Under EU Directive 94/381, farmers in other Member States are permitted to feed meat and bone meal (MBM), including mammalian MBM, to non-ruminant livestock. The UK has had far more cases of BSE than other Member States, and we therefore have measures which go considerably further than those taken elsewhere.

IACS and BSPS Payments

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the IACS and BSPS payments to be made to farmers. [20535]

Mr. Rooker: All main payments under the Arable Area Payments Scheme in England, except those subject to query, are expected to be made by the EU deadline of 31 December 1997. BSPS advance payments are under way with some £46.5 million distributed to date. BSPS balance payments will be made by the statutory deadline of 30 June 1998.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date his Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20529]

Mr. Morley: The position in the Department is that all dependencies on non-governmental organisations and/or suppliers who may not be millennium compliant are being examined, and associated risks and contingency requirements identified (these will be different from case to case). Assurances regarding millennium compliance are being sought and appropriate contingency action (which could, for example, entail switching to another supplier and product) will be initiated as necessary.

Mink

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many inspectors' visits to check that the conditions of the Mink Keeping Order 1992 and the Mink Keeping Regulations 1975 (as amended) were being adhered to were carried out in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997; [20638]

(2) how many inspectors were employed to ensure the implementation of the Mink Keeping Order in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997. [20637]

Mr. Morley: Inspections of mink farms are carried out by advisers from the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), an Executive Agency of MAFF, as part of their statutory duties as the Department's wildlife advisers. FRCA are resourced to carry out all necessary visits to mink farms to ensure that the security arrangements in place meet the requirements laid down in the Mink Keeping Regulations 1975. Until recently, only one site visit was normally made each year at the time of the issue of the licence. However, to ensure that the necessary security standards are maintained throughout the year, an additional unannounced inspection will now be made to each farm during the year. As before, inspections will also be carried out following any reports

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when the Mink Keeping Order licences next come up for renewal for each of the farms currently licensed; and for what period of time licences are issued; [20642]

(2) how many mink farms were issued licences under the Mink Keeping Order in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997; [20636]

(3) if he will list the names and addresses of the farms currently licensed under the Mink Keeping Order; [20643]

(4) how many licences were granted for the transportation of mink in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997. [20645]

Mr. Morley: The number of mink farms issued licences over the last five years are as follows:

Period/Year ending	*Number of mink farms issued licences*
31 March 1993	19
31 March 1994	13
31 March 1995	13
31 March 1996	14
31 March 1997	13

Where a mink farmer holds a licence to keep mink, a separate licence is not required for the specific action of transporting live mink.

The mink farms currently licensed are located in the following counties:

County	*Number of licensed mink farms*
Cornwall	1
Dorset	1
Hampshire	1
Isle of Wight	1
Lancashire	6
Northumberland	1
South Yorkshire	1
Staffordshire	1
West Yorkshire	3
Total	16

The Department's policy is not to disclose the exact location of fur farms but to give only the county in which a licence is applicable. This is to protect mink fur farmers from the attentions of individuals or organisations who might seek to disrupt by unlawful means the activity of licensed fur farming.

Licences are valid for twelve months and the number expiring in each month is as follows:

Month	*Number of licences expiring*
December 1997	6
Janaury 1998	—
February 1998	1
March 1998	1
April 1998	3
May 1998	1
June 1998	1
July 1998	—
September 1998	1
October 1998	—
November 1998	1
December 1998	1

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate his Department has made of the numbers of mink that have escaped into the wild from mink farms in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997; [20641]

(2) how many mink farms had a licence revoked or suspended in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997; [20640]

(3) how many prosecutions his Department has initiated for keeping mink without a licence under the Mink Keeping Order since 1993; [20646]

(4) how many mink farms have been allowed to operate without a licence under the Mink Keeping Order; [20644]

(5) what penalties exist for mink farms found to have breached a condition or conditions of the Mink Keeping Order or the Mink Keeping Regulations. [20639]

Mr. Morley: I am not aware of any unlicensed mink farms being allowed to operate. All mink farm licensees are sent reminder letters before their licence expires and the Department will chase licensees who do not respond. Where an existing licence holder ceases to keep mink, the Department asks for information on the arrangements for the disposal of the mink. Where mink have been sold to other farms, the Department will check that the new owner is licensed to keep mink. Any reports of unlicensed farms are referred to the Investigation Branch of the

Department's Legal Division for consideration. Since 1993, one prosecution has been undertaken for keeping mink on unlicensed premises. No licences have been revoked or suspended during that period.

Licensed mink fur farmers are required to report any escapes to the Department; the numbers of mink reported to the Department as having escaped from fur farms are detailed. All were the result of reported vandalism to licensed mink farms:

Period	*Number of mink reported to have escaped*
Year ending 31 March 1994	nil
Year ending 31 March 1995	nil
Year ending 31 March 1996	3,005
Year ending 31 March 1997	nil
Eight months to end November 1997	300

Under the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932, anyone failing to comply with the conditions of a licence may be subject to a fine not exceeding level 1 on the standard scale, currently £200 and to a further penalty of £2 for every day on which the offence continues after

Beef Labelling

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will introduce his proposed changes to beef labelling; and what factors underlie the delay in their introduction. [20489]

Mr. Rooker: The Beef Labelling Scheme, which implements EC Regulation 820/97, was introduced in the United Kingdom on 9 October with applications invited from 1 November. The Regulation was due to come into full force from 1 January 1998, but the European Commission has recently decided to postpone entry into force until 31 March 1998. The reason for this postponement was delay in implementing the Regulation in other member states.

Bees (Varroa)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on public health from the importation of honey from countries where bees are treated with anti-varroa products not approved in the United Kingdom. [20576]

Mr. Rooker: The Veterinary Medicines Directorate tested samples of honey for flumethrin as part of its non-statutory residues surveillance programme in 1996. Approximately 70 per cent. of the samples collected at random from retail outlets were imported. None of the samples was positive. Results for this year are not yet available.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Facers and Food what representations he has received from beekeepers with regard to the control of varroa mite by products approved in other EU countries but not approved in the United Kingdom; what response he has given; what is his assessment of the impact on United Kingdom beekeepers of the resistance of bees to the only United Kingdom approved product; and if he will take steps to approve the use of those other products in the United Kingdom. [20577]

Mr. Rooker: I have received a number of letters from hon. Members and Secretaries of beekeeping associations on this subject, and they will all receive full responses to the points they have made about the import and administration of unauthorised products.

We are not aware of any incidence of varroa mite resistance in the UK.

The question of any applications for authorisation of new veterinary medicines to control varroa mites is one for the pharmaceutical industry. No veterinary medicines is authorised unless it satisfies the statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy.

Button Plastic Tags

Mr. Soames: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to permit button plastic tags as a secondary tag as from 1 January 1998. [20547]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir Geoffrey

Beef Imports

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will prevent the importation of all meat from countries where BSE is present and where mammalian meat and bone meal is included in animal feed. [20574]

Mr. Rooker: No. There is no reasonable basis on which I could take such action.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to ensure *(a)* that all beef entering the United Kingdom for human consumption is less than 30 months old and *(b)* that over 30 month old beef imported into the United Kingdom to be processed for pet food does not enter the human food chain. [20490]

Mr. Rooker: The Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations 1996 prohibit the sale for human consumption of bovine meat from animals over 30 months old. Responsibility for enforcement falls to Local Authorities.

It is not an offence to import meat from animals more than 30 months old.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ban the import of beef from cattle aged over 30 months from countries where BSE is present. [20573]

Mr. Rooker: Action to prohibit the sale of human consumption of meat derived from bovine animals born, reared and slaughtered in any country was taken by the previous Government on 28 March 1996 in the Beef (Emergency Control) Order 1996. This prohibited the sale for human consumption of meat derived from bovine animals slaughtered on or after 29 March 1996 which "showed signs of more than one pair of permanent incisors". (This test is used to identify animals aged over 30 months). The prohibition was subsequently modified to exclude beef from certain countries where BSE is not known to occur, and is now contained in the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations.

Poultrymeat

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons poultrymeat is permitted to be imported from countries where BSE has been reported and where mammalian meat and bone meal is permitted in poultry feed. [20575]

Mr. Rooker: Because it is perfectly safe. The prohibitions on the use of meat and bone meal in poultry feed are to avoid cross-contamination with feed for ruminants and not because of concerns in relation to the safety of the poultrymeat.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Sales

Sir Richard Body: To ask the President of the Board

arms sales in each of the last three years; and what was the total value of claims relating to arms sales in each of those years. [12725]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD does not use the term "arms" to identify business. Records are maintained on a buyer basis and any business with a Defence Ministry is described as "defence related". This can cover a wide range of equipment and services.

From the information currently available the claims figures on defence related business are as follows:

	Total value/ Percentage
Financial year 1994–95	
Total value of claims paid on Defence related business:	£133.2 million
Value of claims paid on Defence related business as a percentage of total claims paid:	32 per cent.
Financial year 1995–96	
Total value of claims paid on Defence related business:	£107.3 million
Value of claims paid on Defence related business as a percentage of total claims paid:	36 per cent.
Financial year 1996–97[1]	
Total value of claims paid on Defence related business:	£49.7 million
Value of claims paid on Defence related business as a percentage of total claims paid:	21 per cent.

[1] Figures for 1996–97 are currently being audited.

Yemen

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the current level of British investment in Yemen. [14974]

Mrs. Roche: At the end of 1995, the latest year for which figures are available, the net book value of direct investment by UK firms in Yemen was £15 million. This represents the cumulative value of investment after allowing for depreciation. During 1995, the flow of direct investment by UK firms in Yemen was less than their disinvestment, resulting in net direct investment of minus £36 million.

Biotechnology

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps the Government will take to ensure that the public acceptance of biotechnology features in the discussions of the European Commission relating to its ethical implications. [15339]

Mr. Battle: The debate which has surrounded the European Commission's proposal for a Directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions has highlighted a number of ethical issues which surrounded this technology. Therefore, I announced on 24 November that my Department would be sponsoring a consultation initiative to seek public views on biological research.

My ultimate goal is to engage members of the public in debate to enable us to assess the issues that are of concern to a lay audience. However, I feel that an important pre-cursor to this is to involve interested parties

I shall be hosting an event in the New Year to discuss with groups active in the biosciences and science communication how we can best develop the public activity, which is planned for next summer.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council's progress in addressing the shortage of biochemical engineers. [19238]

Mr. Battle: Last year, the Office of Science and Technology, the Research Councils and The Royal Society commissioned a survey of postgraduate career paths to contribute to the forward planning of training needs. This will be published in the near future, and the sponsors will be considering its results. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) is also undertaking its own research programme on the needs of particular industrial sectors. In all subject areas, the supply of first degree graduates is a factor.

The BBSRC supports postgraduate and postdoctoral training to meet the needs of its research, industrial and educational user communities for highly trained scientists and engineers. The Council has fixed the current level of its overall postgraduate provision at 2,000 studentships which it considers to be in line with those communities' needs. The BBSRC's scientific committees, which comprise experts from both industry and academia, advise on the needs for trained personnel in specific sectors of science and engineering, and allocate research studentships accordingly on an annual basis. The BBSRC also makes awards under the CASE and Industrial CASE schemes which link industry and academia in training and ensure that training is directly relevant to the needs of user industry. Further opportunities for training in biochemical engineering are available through the Council's participation in, and promotion of, the Teaching Company Scheme, Integrated Graduate Development Scheme and joint Industrial Fellowships scheme with EPSRC and the Royal Society, all of which are market driven by the needs of the user community.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the members of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council who are members of the Council's *(a)* Engineering and Biological Systems Committee and *(b)* Strategy Board, giving their engineering or biological science background. [19239]

Mr. Battle: No members of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) are also members of the Engineering and Biological Systems Committee. There are no Council members on any of the BBSRC's science Committees and Directorates.

Three members of the Council are members of the Strategy Board. Professor Sir Brian Follett, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Warwick, has led research teams and taught at the Universities of Bristol, Leeds, Wales and Washington State and published over 250 papers on biological clocks and reproductive physiology. Mr. Guy Walker has been employed in the food industry since 1961, most recently as National Manager for Unilever in the UK. He is also President of the Food and Drink Federation. The BBSRC's Chief Executive, Professor Ray Baker, is a Council member and

industry. Prior to joining BBSRC he was Executive Director of Medicinal Chemistry at the Neurosciences Centre of Merck Sharp and Dohme at Harlow, Essex.

Indonesia (Military Equipment)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for licences for the export of military equipment to Indonesia have been *(a)* granted, *(b)* refused and *(c)* revoked since 1 May. [19206]

Mrs. Roche: With regard to the numbers of applications refused or licences granted for the export to Indonesia of goods controlled under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *124–26*.

Between 2 May and 13 November no such licences were revoked.

However, this information should be considered in light of my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *256–58*.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* task force members and *(c)* review body members her Department employs; what is the total salary and benefits of *(a)* to *(c)*; and what was the equivalent cost prior to 1 May. [19313]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department employs three special advisers. Two are paid and one is unpaid. The level of salary is a private matter for the individuals concerned but I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*. The previous Administration employed one special adviser in this Department before the election.

Since the election, the following bodies have been established to advise Ministers: The President of the Board of Trade's Advisory Group on Competitiveness, the Export Forum, the External Group on Competitiveness in Europe and the Interdepartmental Task Force on Competitiveness in Europe. A total of forty-one representatives from outside of Government have been appointed to these bodies none of whom receive payment other than expenses in some cases. I shall be announcing the membership of five Competitiveness Working Parties shortly. Again the members will be unpaid other than expenses in some cases.

The Government have established the independent Low Pay Commission with nine members from outside Government. None is employed or receives payment other than expenses. I have also appointed the Chairman of Action 2000, my Department's new initiative to tackle the century date change problem. Mr. Cruickshank's appointment will involve [illegible]

In addition, the Department is continually looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of its activities. This process is informed through an on-going dialogue with business and others on a wide range of issues. From time to time the Department will initiate a formal review of policy or consult interested parties on a specific policy proposal. These are undertaken by Ministers and officials: where others outside Government are involved none are employed by the Department or receive payment other than expenses.

Export Licences

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her letter of 3 September, how many applications for export licences her Department has *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order in each month of 1997. [19283]

Mrs. Roche: In due course, statistics of such export licences issued and refused from 1 January up to and including 1 May will be placed in the Library of the House. In addition, the Government will report annually on the state of strategic export controls and their application since 2 May.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will provide details of how many United Kingdom exporters have been visited by her Department's inspectors in relation to the use of Open General Export Licences; and if she will place details of these inspections in the Library. [20032]

Mrs. Roche: Two hundred and eighty one UK exporters have been visited by Export Control Organisation Compliance Offers in relation to the use of Open General Export Licences in the period between 1 April 1995 and 12 November 1997. These statistics were only consistently recorded separately after 1 April 1995.

Disclosure by the Government of the outcome of these visits could reasonably be expected to harm the competitive position of the companies concerned. Therefore this information comes within the category of information "third party's commercial confidences" which is exempt from the commitments to provide information in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Indonesia Air Show

Mr. Todd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support the United Kingdom Government are giving to United Kingdom companies planning to attend the Indonesia Air Show being held in Jakarta in June 1998. [19946]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department has offered support under the Trade Fair Support Scheme for the Society of British Aerospace Companies to organise a group of UK companies to exhibit at the show. Eligible companies will [illegible]

Employment Pacts

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 1 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *15*, to what extent section 2.1 of the Information Report of the Economic and Social Committee on territorial employment pacts (Reg/121, CES 656/97) will apply to the United Kingdom-nominated schemes; and if she will make a statement. [20536]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government proposed the ten UK pilot projects for Territorial Employment Pacts on the basis of their likely local and regional impact on economic development and job creation. The Economic and Social Committee's report provides interesting background on the potential of Pacts throughout the EU, which local partnerships may wish to take into account as they develop their activities.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she plans to adopt the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment in its current form; and if she will make a statement. [15180]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 10 November 1997]:* The Government support the general aims of the proposed MAI. Many issues remain to be resolved. We are working hard to achieve a successful outcome to the negotiations by April 1998.

Late Payments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how her proposals for dealing with problems arising from late payment will protect small firms from immediate cash flow problems. [19864]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* The Government are determined to ensure that small firms benefit from the increased competitiveness that a healthy cash flow can bring. That is why we are committed to changing the payment culture in the UK by bringing forward a comprehensive range of new proposals to tackle the late payment of commercial debt including legislation to give business a right to claim interest. The legislation, introduced on 10 December, will provide suppliers with a statutory right to claim interst on commercial debt.

The Government also recognise the importance of effective credit management in reducing the incidence of late payment and are working with all the main small firms organisations and representatives from the credit management, factoring and trade credit banking and insurance sectors to encourage business support organisations and others to assist small firms with their credit management procedures and to promote a better payment culture.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* it agencies and *(c)* its (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997; and if she will provide a breakdown to show (1) air fares and (2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. [15211]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Disaggregated information in the form requested is not available for the Department and the non-departmental public bodies and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked Agency Chief Executives to reply to the hon. Member as they have their own budgetary responsibility for travel and subsistence costs.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 12 December 1997:

I have been asked to respond to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding estimates of expenditure on overseas travel for Companies House. The information you seek is as follows:

Year	£
1991–92	26,195
1992–93	17,640
1993–94	20,949
1994–95	12,049
1995–96	11,984
1996–97	11,217
May to September 1997	4,024

Information on earlier years and a more detailed analysis can only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Letter from Paul Hartnack to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 12 December 1997:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your Question to the President of the Board of Trade about overseas travel.

The total expenditure on overseas travel, including air fares and other associated expenditure is:

1992–93: £164,087

1993–94: £172,921

1994–95: £184,754

1995–96: £225,682

1996–97: £233,887

1 May to 30 September 1997: £107,966

Further disaggregation of the above and expenditure for 1980/81, 1987/88, 1990/91 and 1991/92 are not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 12 December 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about expenditure on overseas travel. I regret that the disaggregated information on the basis you request is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 12 December 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about The Insolvency Service's air fares and other overseas travel expenditure since 1980–81.

Disaggregated information in the form requested is not available

Letter from Roger Louth to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 12 December 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel and provide a breakdown to show 1) air fares and 2) other expenditure relating to overseas travel. I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive, who is currently away from the office. The information for the Radiocommunications Agency, which is only available in an aggregated form, for the periods quoted is as follows:

1990–91: £243,100

1991–92: £399,185

1992–93: £425,000 (Note 1)

1993–94: £434,503

1994–95: £538,202

1995–96: £659,974

1996–97: £715,215

1997–98: (May to September): £287,121

Note 1 This figure is an estimate only as the information for that year is not readily available.

The Radiocommunications Agency was set up with effect from 2 April 1990. Expenditure on overseas travel and subsistence before that date was the responsibility of the DTI and is not available.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Malcolm Bruce dated 12 December 1997:

I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to reply, in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS), to your question about expenditure on overseas travel.

The ETS was established as an executive agency on 1 April 1997. Prior to that date its expenditure was met by the Department of Trade and Industry and, before July 1995, by the Employment Department. No expenditure on overseas travel was incurred between 1 May 1997 and 30 September 1997.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her estimate of the expenditure by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on official hospitality for (i) 1980–81, (ii) 1987–88, (iii) 1990–91, (iv) 1991–92, (v) 1992–93, (vi) 1993–94, (vii) 1994–95, (viii) 1995–96, (ix) 1996–97 and (x) 1 May to 30 September 1997. [15210]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 11 November 1997]:* Disaggregated information is the form requested in respect of non-departmental public bodies, and for the financial year 1980–81 in respect of the Department and it agencies, could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The other information is as follows (please note the figures are not directly comparable because of Machinery of Government changes over the period):

Entertainment expenditure

	1987–88	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98 (May to September)*
DTI (excluding NRC agencies and trading funds)	—	268,416	399,720	407,965	519,037	516,357	[1]462,509	[1]542,266	[1]135,410
Accounts Services Agency	—	300	300	300	300	300	[4]n/a	—	—
Companies House	—	[2]n/a	5,600	11,187	11,542	18,289	17,664	20,702	7,110
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	—	10,625	17,685	19,519	27,122	29,000	[4]n/a	—	—
National Engineering Laboratory	—	49,000	36,000	20,000	10,000	13,500	[4]n/a	—	—
National Physical Laboratory	—	35,300	45,881	48,408	70,221	83,799	[4]n/a	—	—
Patent Office	—	4,000	8,000	13,000	18,000	15,143	17,878	20,381	8,127
Radiocommunications Agency	—	23,900	21,993	27,592	33,575	35,921	87,291	98,401	36,201
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]3,175	2,596
Total	[1]300,000	391,541	535,971	547,971	689,797	712,309	585,342	684,925	189,444

[1] Information is approximate expenditure for the Department as a whole.
[2] Information not readily available for the six month period prior to attaining trading fund status in October 1991.
[3] Information excludes expenditure in Government Offices which could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
[4] Work previously carried out by the Accounts Services Agency and National Physical Laboratory was contracted out on 1 April and 1 October 1995 respectively. The National Engineering Laboratory was privatised on 31 October 1995 and the Laboratory of the Govnerment Chemist on 31 March 1996.
[5] National Weights and Measures Laboratory became a Net Running Cost Agency on 1 April 1996.

Social Chapter

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the impact of the European social chapter on employment in the United Kingdom. [14335]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 13 November 1997]:* The Social Chapter is a good opportunity to implement decent minimum standards of fair treatment at work to which all employees should be entitled [illegible] impact on employment in the United Kingdom. We will use our influence to ensure that any new legislation promotes flexibility and employability and contributes to competitiveness, without placing excessive burdens on businesses.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

[illegible] Initiative

he has made of the effectiveness of the rough sleepers initiative in the Victoria area. [19503]

Mr. Raynsford: The most recent head counts by voluntary sector organisations show that the number of people sleeping rough in central London on any one night is around 280. In the Victoria area, the number of people sleeping rough in the May 1997 street count was 58.

Independent research into earlier phases of the RSI (1990–93 and 1993–96) has shown that the Initiative has been successful in helping many thousands of people to start a new life away from the streets. Victoria is one of five central London areas which attract large numbers of rough sleepers. It is not possible to disaggregate research data on the effectiveness of the Initiative in the Victoria area from that for central London as a whole. We expect to let a research contract to evaluate the effectiveness of the third phase of the Initiative (1996–99) early next year.

The Social Exclusion Unit, announced by the Prime Minister on 8 December will have tackling issues surrounding street living including rough sleeping and the causes of rough sleeping as one of its priorities.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the total non-domestic rates collected by each local authority in the current financial year. [20128]

Ms Armstrong: Information on the amounts of non-domestic rates collected by local authorities in the financial year 1997–98 is not yet available. I have today placed in the Library of the House a table showing the amounts which local authorities calculated as their provisional contribution to the non-domestic rates pool for 1997–98.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his forecast of the level of spending by English local authorities in 1998–99; and what the percentage change in real terms is compared to 1997–98. [20550]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has not made any forecast of the level of spending by English local authorities in 1998–99. The level will depend on the spending decisions of individual local authorities.

Local Authority Transport

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce the capital settlement for local authority transport. [20552]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We aim to announce the settlement before Parliament rises for the Christmas Recess.

Gilbert's Animal By-Products

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) for how long the Environment Agency has been investigating waste [illegible]

(2) what steps the Environment Agency has taken to establish whether the condensate produced by Gilbert's Animal By-Products as a by-product of its recycling activities is classified as a waste. [19793]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 December 1997]:* Whether or not a substance is waste must be determined on the facts of the case and ultimately the interpretation of the law is a matter for the Courts. However, the Environment Agency's responsibilities for the management and enforcement of the waste management licensing system under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 may require it to take a view on whether a particular substance is waste.

I understand that when the Environment Agency was formed on 1 April 1996 it took over an investigation initiated by the former waste regulation authority, Staffordshire County Council, into the spreading on agricultural land of condensate from the rendering plant operated by John Pointon and Sons, formerly Gilbert's Animal By-products Ltd.

The Environment Agency has continued this investigation with the aim of establishing the facts of the case and reaching a view on whether or not the condensate is waste. In so doing, I understand that the Environment Agency has investigated instances in which the condensate has been spread on agricultural land, has obtained analyses of the condensate, has investigated the methods by which the condensate is produced and following internal legal advice has sought an opinion from Counsel.

A decision on whether to initiate a prosecution will be taken by the Environment Agency on conclusion of its investigations. I understand the Agency hopes to be able to take its decision shortly.

Members' Offices

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the amount of national non-domestic rates not collected as a result of local authorities providing offices to hon. Members free of charge. [20263]

Ms Amstrong *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* No. Local authority property is liable for rates. The use of that property by hon. Members does not affect that liability. Each billing authority has a statutory duty to collect the rates due on properties in its area—including those on its own properties. It is for the auditors to check whether an authority has fulfilled its statutory responsibilities in this regard.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the revenues lost by local authorities as a result of concessions made to hon. Members whose constituency offices are provided rent free by local authorities. [20266]

Ms Amstrong *[holding answer 11 December 1997]:* No.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the [illegible]

(2) what data his Department collates on councils making available local offices free of business rates to Members of Parliament; if he will estimate the cost of such arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [20385]

Ms Armstrong: The terms on which local authorities make local offices available to hon. Members is a matter for them. Local authority property is liable for rates. The use of that property by hon. Members does not affect that liability. Each billing authority has a statutory duty to collect the rates due on properties in its area—including those on its own properties. It is for the auditors to check whether an authority has fulfilled its statutory responsibilities in this regard.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library the response to the consultation on regional development agencies. [20545]

Mr. Caborn: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) on 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *106*.

Business Rates

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change the exemption from business rates under the Local Government Act 1988 enjoyed by bed-and-breakfast accommodation providers with up to six beds. [20578]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no plans to change the exemption from business rates for anyone who offers bed-and-breakfast accommodation in their home to six or fewer people. These small scale providers offer welcome extra bed spaces in the peak summer months and much needed accommodation in the more remote areas which would not support larger guest houses or hotels.

Council Tax

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a table showing the Band D council tax increase for each billing local authority in England, *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* in percentage terms, based on the assumption that all councils spend at the provisional capping limit. [20539]

Ms Armstrong: I have today placed in the Library of the House a table showing the information requested.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if his Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers

Angela Eagle: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has current dealings with many non-governmental organisations and suppliers which are not known to be millennium compliant. However, contractual arrangements stipulate Millennium compliance where this is deemed essential to the continuity of the business function or operation. The Department and its Executive Agencies are actively seeking Millennium compliance statements from suppliers where business continuity is an issue.

There are no central plans at the present time to cease dealings with organisations or suppliers that are not millennium compliant—each case is treated on its own merits. For example the Planning Inspectorate no longer purchase goods where assurances on Millennium compliance are not given.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the amount of extra energy which pensioners will be able to purchase *(a)* this winter and *(b)* next winter on receipt of the extra (i) £20 and (ii) £50 allocated in the pre-budget statement; and what estimate he has made of the impact on carbon emissions. [18545]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

It is not practicable to provide an estimate as it is unclear that all money will be spent on additional heating; in practice many pensioners will use this money to reduce existing fuel bills.

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Pensions

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the net cost to the Exchequer of raising the state pension in line with earnings in the current year over the pension payable in 1996–97; and what would be the net additional cost if the link between pensions and earnings had not been ended in 1980. [17364]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 1997]:* The additional net cost to the Exchequer of raising State Pensions in line with earnings from April 1997 is estimated to be £530 million 1997–98.[1]

If the link between pensions and earnings had continued since 1979 to date the additional net cost to the Department in 1997–98 is estimated to be £11.4 billion[2].

Notes:

[1] Figure is rounded to £10 million.

[2] Figure is rounded to nearest £100 million.

1. These estimates are in respect of contributory Retirement Pension and linked benefits. The gross costs were estimated by the Government Actuary's Department. Net costs were calculated by using income related benefit offset ratios.

May 1996 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry: both uprated to 1997–98 prices, benefits and earnings levels, and calibrated to the forecasts underlying the 1997 Departmental Report.

Pensions Act 19995 (Consultation)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the *(a)* title, *(b)* date, *(c)* consultation period and *(d)* number of responses of each consultation regarding subordinate legislation under the Pensions Act 1995; and if she will make a statement. [14268]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 November 1997]:* The information has been placed in the Library.

There has been wide consultation on all of the secondary legislation made under powers in the Pensions Act 1995. All of the proposals have been discussed extensively with the pensions interests and others at every stage of their development. This consultation produced a large number of responses, both in writing and during discussions. Information on the precise number of responses is not available.

In addition, as part of the Pensions Review, we are seeking ways in which we can further support and strengthen the existing framework of occupational pensions and ways to improve the regulation of pensions.

National Insurance

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will alter the method of calculation of National Insurance contributions to ensure that differences in the pay-period of two identically paid individuals do not lead to different levels of contribution being payable. [20391]

Mr. Denham: The arrangements for the assessment of National Insurance contributions help people who work for only part of the year or who have irregular earnings to build up entitlement to contributory pensions and benefits. As far as is possible they prevent significant differences arising between the contributions paid by people depending on the period over which their employer chooses to pay them.

As my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said in his pre-Budget speech on 25 November, the Government are looking at the scope for bringing the National Insurance structure for the low paid more closely into line with income tax. This work will include consideration of a number of aspects of the National Insurance contribution system.

Sensory Impairments

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research her Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to examine the degree to which sensory impairments are a contributing factor in the low take-up of income-related benefit amongst pensioners. [20602]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Department commissioned a survey of the take-up of benefits which ... [illegible] ... recipients of data from the ...

We have now commissioned research to identify the most important barriers to pensioners not claiming the Income Support to which they are entitled.

We are determined to get help to the million pensioners who are not taking up their entitlement to Income Support, and will be running a number of pilot schemes from April next year to find the best way to help them to claim their entitlement.

Mortgage Interest Support

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to alter the sample base used to calculate the rate of mortgage interest support payable by her Department to ensure that it is properly representative of the different types of lending institutions active in the UK mortgage market. [20390]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Efford) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *856*.

Lone Parents

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 2 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *186–201*, what she estimates to be the total saving in 1998–99 from expenditure on lone parent benefits by not increasing in line with the annual rise in prices *(a)* child benefit for the eldest and only child of a lone parent, *(b)* council tax benefit family premium, lone parent rate, *(c)* housing benefit family premium, lone parent rate and *(d)* income support family premium, lone parent rate. [20635]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table.

Benefit	*Savings £ million*
Child benefit	20
Council tax benefit	1
Housing benefit	3
Income support	20
Total	40

1. Savings below £10 million rounded to the nearest £1 million.
2. Savings above £10 million rounded to the nearest £5 million.
3. Sums may not add due to rounding.

Millennium Compliance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if her Department has current dealings with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* suppliers which are not millennium compliant; and on what date her Department will cease to deal with (i) non-governmental organisations and (ii) suppliers which are not millennium compliant. [20522]

Mr. Field: Yes. Examples are banks, building societies and many other suppliers of goods and services which are not yet fully millennium compliant. We have identified the organisations who provide data for the Department ... [illegible]

The Department also makes use of a range of standard software packages for internal use. We are in discussion with our suppliers to ensure that these are, or will become, Year 2000 compliant where necessary.

The Department's Year 2000 Project is working closely with all its external organisations and suppliers. However, if we become aware that an organisation or supplier will not become Year 2000 compliant to our timetable, in accordance with Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) guidance, we will review our contractual relationship with them, and consider alternative sources of supply.

HEALTH

Renal Dialysis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people receiving renal dialysis on the NHS were aged over *(a)* 60, *(b)* 70, *(c)* 80 and *(d)* 90 years in the last year for which figures are available; and what were the equivalent figures in 1992. [15971]

Mr. Boateng: Figures in the form requested for 1992 are not available. In 1993 a survey of all providers of renal treatment was carried out by the Wessex Institute of Public Health. The results of this National Renal Review were published in 1996. A follow up survey was conducted last year which has collected data for services in 1995. The results of this survey are due to be published shortly. The following figures for the numbers of people receiving renal dialysis aged over 60 in 1993 and 1995 in England have been taken from these surveys. The 1995 figures are provisional:

	Aged 60 and over	*70 and over*	*80 and over*	*90 and over*
1993	4,189	1,968	231	12
1995	5,074	2,534	388	8

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the memorandum he sent to the Prime Minister on 14 October setting out his assessment of the proposed EU directive on tobacco sponsorship. [16748]

Ms Jowell: No. The memorandum of 14 October is exempt from publication under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Pathology Services (Kent)

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what factors led to the commissioning of the 1995 report Review of Pathology Services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust; [17796]

(2) what steps were taken to bring the findings of the 1995 report Review of Pathology Services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust to *(a)* public notice and *(b)* the notice of clinicians who procured the services referred to in the report. [17797]

Mr. Boateng: We understand from the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals National Health Service Trust that the report was commissioned by the Chief Executive to enable the trust to develop a formal strategy in relation to Pathology services. The overall aim and objectives of the report was to ensure that any future development achieved the following standards:

A service which is clinically effective, producing work of a high quality that is subject to regular, rigorous and transparent audit.

A service that is efficient and cost effective.

A service that is progressive, and focused on future requirements rather than past attainments.

A service that is properly trained and fully equipped.

A service that is responsive to the needs of its customers, notably referring consultants and other hospital doctors, general practitioners and patients.

A service that has a flexible outlook in work practice and is multi-skilled.

A service which is staffed at appropriate levels.

A service that is integrated, both internally and with other departments throughout the trust, with all aspects of teaching, training, research and development.

It was an internal document and was circulated to all Clinical Directors for dissemination in each Clinical Directorate and was also circulated to all Consultant and Senior Scientific staff within the Pathology Directorate. However, the October 1997 report of the Review of Cervical Screening Services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust noted that

"the 1995 MPA Consultants Report, as part of the three East Kent Trusts' Pathology Review, raised a number of concerns about the cytology department and recommended its integration with the William Harvey Hospital site and relocation there. This report does not seem to have been widely discussed within the trust and in any case was not supported by the chief executives group."

The 1997 report recommended that

"the trust board should review the current arrangements for the overall management of pathology services still under its control and ensure there are clear roles, responsibilities and reporting lines for all staff involved in the running of the laboratories."

The South Thames Regional Office is asking the trust and health authority to follow through on this recommendation in light of the wider recommendations made in that report.

Breast Cancer Treatment

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on shortfalls within the NHS of specialists involved in breast cancer treatment; and what measures he proposes to address such shortfalls. [18509]

Mr. Boateng: The Specialty Workforce Advisory Group (SWAG) advises the National Health Service Executive and the Welsh Office on the number of higher specialist trainees needed, to ensure an adequate supply of properly trained doctors in each specialty. It carries out annual reviews of each specialty's need for consultants. SWAG has identified the cancer specialties, including those which are involved with the treatment of breast cancer, as having significant shortages.

For 1996–97 and 1997–98, SWAG recommended increases in the number of higher specialist trainees, in the cancer specialties. It has recommended that these be treated as a priority.

School Nurses

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school nurses have been employed by each health authority in England in each of the last five years. [18712]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available for 1995 and 1996. Information for 1992 to 1994 will be placed in the Library.

The information placed in the Library is taken from the Department of Health's annual non-medical work force census. School nurses are not separately identifiable from other community nursing staff after the 1994 non-medical work force census because of the introduction of a new, simpler set of occupation codes used to classify non-medical staff.

Nursing and Midwifery

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria were used in the selection of the preferred tenderers for the pre-registration nursing and midwifery education in Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight by the NHS Executive South and West. [19338]

Mr. Milburn: The criteria used for the pre-registration nursing and midwifery education contract in Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight were drawn up by a Steering Group composed of representatives from the three education consortia (health authorities and National Health Service trusts) in the area. The broad criteria categories against which bids were judged were:

- overall educational institution
- facilities and service delivery resources
- quality of the staff and faculty
- arrangements for clinical placements
- quality of course provision
- development of students
- overall quality management arrangements
- financial factors.

In assessing the bids the first seven categories were given equal weighting scores totalling 63 per cent., while financial factors were given a weighting of 37 per cent.

NHS Contracts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will amend the tendering rules for NHS contracts to allow alternative contract arrangement to be considered. [19334]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service bodies currently have a range of options for the tendering of contracts but any arrangements must comply with their own Standing Financial Instructions and the relevant domestic and European procurement legislation.

Phantom Limb Pain

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into phantom limb pain. [19692]

Ms Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland ha funded two studies into phantom limb pain. Both were undertaken at Glasgow Caledonian University and are entitled "Improving care provision for amputees with phantom limb pain" and "Chronic phantom limb pain: relationship to psychological adjustment, patient characteristics and care provision".

The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The Council is not currently undertaking any research specifically investigating phantom limb pain; however it provides support for areas which may be indirectly relevant to phantom limb pain including general pain research and basis neurobiology which will underpin and inform future work in this area.

The Department of Health's Policy Research Programme and the National Health Service Research and Development Programme are not currently funding any work into phantom limb pain.

Patient Pack Initiative

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will implement the Patient Pack Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [19804]

Ms Jowell: Implementing the patient pack initiative, as presently structured, would be complex and has significant financial implications for the National Health Service. We have set out these concerns to the professional and industry groups concerned and are considering whether it will be necessary to implement the European Council Labelling and Leaflet Directive by other means.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the financial implications of implementing the Patient Pack Initiative. [19806]

Ms Jowell: The Department has produced illustrative estimates of the net costs for the Family Health Services and the Prescription Pricing Authority that would have arisen between 1997–98 and 2001–02 if the proposals inherited from the previous administration for introducing patient pack dispensing had been implemented from November 1997. These estimates indicated net costs, at 1997–98 prices, of £4 million in 1997–98, £16–19 million in 1998–99, £24–26 million in 1999–00, £17–18 million in 2000–01 and £13–14 million in 2001–02.

Medicines Labelling and Leaflet Directive

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the EU medicines labelling and leaflet directive. [19805]

Ms. Jowell: The European Union Directive 92/27/EEC on the labelling of medicines for human use and on

package inserts was implemented into United Kingdom legislation by means of :

The Medicines (Labelling) Amendment Regulation SI 1992 No. 3273.

The Medicines (Leaflets) Amendment Regulations SI 1992 No. 3274.

The Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulations SI 1994 No. 3274.

By 31 December 1998 all medicines on the UK market will have labelling and patient information leaflets approved meeting the requirements of the European Directive. The Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulation 1994 require any person who supplies a medicinal product to ensure that it is accompanied by the relevant statutory information.

Smoking

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died from smoking-related illnesses during *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [20389]

Mr. Boateng: The Health Education Authority estimate that in the United Kingdom in 1995 at least 120,000 people died as a result of their smoking. No estimates are available for 1996.

Dianette

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the safety of the acne/contraceptive drug Dianette. [20341]

Mr. Boateng: Dianette is a medicine authorised for use in the treatment of severe acne and moderately severe hirsutism in women only. It is considered to have an acceptable level of safety in relation to its benefits. A rigorous evaluation of quality, safety and efficacy of Dianette by the Licensing Authority and its expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) was carried out before a marketing authorisation was granted in 1987.

As for all medicines, Dianette has side-effects, and the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and CSM continue to monitor its safety. If new relevant evidence comes to light this is reviewed in order to ensure the risk of possible side-effects is outweighed by the benefits. Information on how to use Dianette, including its side effects and precautions in use, is available to health care professionals and to patients through the manufacturer's product information authorised by the MCA and in the British National Formulary, copies of which are available in the Library.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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1st December—12th December 1997

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A27
Worthing 220–1w

A38
Road accidents 543–4w

A49
Road accidents 36–7w

A465
Road construction 346

A470
Road construction 678w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Schools, Hackney (01.12.97) 133–4
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1042, 1085, 1089–90
Questions
New deal for lone parents 1005
Pensioners, Energy prices 606–7w

Access funds
Higher education 660w
Part-time education 660w

Access to buildings
Handicapped 211w

Access to countryside
352w

Accident and emergency departments
Leigh Infirmary 343–4w
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority 343–4w

Accountants
Professional qualifications 532w

Accounting
Ministry of Defence 502w
Public finance 366w

Action Group on Standards
see Scottish Standards Action Group

Actors
National insurance contributions 275–6w

Administration of justice
Law reform 480–1
Magistrates' courts 452w

Administration Select Committee
(08.12.97) 768

Admission charges
British Museum 652–3
Millennium Exhibition 475w
Museums and galleries 652–3

Adult education
Literacy 1171

Advance corporation tax
1010
Church Commissioners 17

Advertising
Attorney General 578w
President of the Council 491w
Prison Service 53–4w
Scottish Office 367–8w
Social security benefits 475w

Advertising agencies
Millennium Exhibition 165–6w

Advisory Group on Quarantine
see Quarantine Advisory Group

Aerials
Planning permission 426w, 543w

After school clubs
Scotland 353

Age
Prisoners 436w

Age addition
Retirement pensions 603w

Agenda 2000
356w, 486–9w

Agenda 21
Wales 679w

Agricultural land
Integrated administration and control system 598w
Pollution control 598w

Agricultural policy
480

Agricultural production
Eggs 18w

Agricultural subsidies
490w, 714w

Agricultural workers
Sutherland 140

Agriculture
Environment protection 269w, 353w
Regulatory systems 360w
Wales 269w, 337–8, 341–2, 344
Working conditions 223w
Young people 150w

Aid financed trade
236–8w
Unemployment 238w

Aids for handicapped
Palace of Westminster 404w
Telephones 46w
Television 468w
Tourism 651

Ainger, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 380
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 761, (09.12.97) 840, 878
Questions
Beef, Exports 475
Hospital admissions 535w

Air displays
Indonesia 722w

Air freight transport
Transport of radioactive materials 281–2w

Air pollution
M25 30–1w

Air pollution control
Carbon dioxide 423w

Air Quality Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(11.12.97) 1214

Air travel
Heathrow Airport 419–20w

Aircraft
11
British Airways 494w

Airport tax
Tax allowances 367w

Airports
Privatisation 308w
St Helena 999
Signposts 547w

Albania
Official visits 122w

Alcoholic drinks
Measurement (12.12.97) 1331
Smuggling 244–5w
Young people 503w

Alcoholic drinks duties
244w

Alcoholism
Finance 456w

Alexandra Palace
Closures 496w
Disclosure of information 47–8w, 495–6w
Finance 496w

Algeria
EC external relations 406w
Human rights 14–5w, 406w
Political refugees 435w

All Wales agri-environment scheme
Finance 517w

Allan, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 370
Questions
Aricept, Prescription drugs 540w
Jubilee line, Costs 221w
Safer cities scheme, Government grants 210w
South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, Legal costs 633w
South Yorkshire Supertram, Costs 221w
Student loans, Teacher training 1171–2

Altcourse Prison
592–3w

Alternative energy
Planning permission 595w

Alternatives to prison
Scotland 623w

Alyn and Deeside
National Assembly of Wales 338, 449w

Ambulance services
Northern Ireland 308w

Amess, Mr David
Questions
Eastern Arts Board, Arts Council grants 464w
Labour Party, Finance 4w
10 Downing Street, Official hospitality 502w

Anaesthetics
180w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 673–4, 679–80, 685–98, 703, (09.12.97) 816, 822, 852, 891–2, 901–2
Questions
Campbell, Jason, Prisoners' transfers 9w
Farmers, Wales 339–40
Foreign investment in UK, Devolution 147
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 339
Official engagements 212w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 674, 710–5, 758, 761, 763
Questions
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 341

Animal breeding
Cattle 270w

Animal cruelty
Prosecutions 481–3

Animal experiments
Cosmetics industry 50w
Porton Down 171–5w

***Animal experiments**—continued*
Research finance 586w
Secondary legislation 209w

Animal feed
18w
EC countries 713–4w
Food labelling 684w
Poultry 16w

Animal quarantine
479–80

Animal welfare
264w, 479–80

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
209w

Antismoking campaign
347w, 376w
Scotland 213–5w
Wales 271w

Arbitration schemes
Divorce 329w

Arbuthnot, Mr James
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 125

Archives
BBC 373w
Northern Ireland 713w

Argyll and Bute
Student numbers 155–6w

Aricept
Prescription drugs 540w

Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust
Flags 128w

Armed conflict
Children 1000
Zambia 711–2w

Armed forces
Deafness 203–4w
Drug abuse 441w
Racial harassment 13

Armed Forces Act 1996
Questions
384w

Armed forces cadets
Welfare to work 388w

Armed forces casualties
Compensation 440–1w

Armed forces civilians
Defence support agencies 176w

Armed forces deployment
Cyprus 497–8w
Iraq 24w, 27w
Persian Gulf 18
Women 604w

Armed forces housing
Property transfer 331–2w

Armed forces officers
Armed forces recruitment 22w

Armed forces officers' pay
Prisoners of war 4–5

Armed forces recruitment
11–2, 27w
Armed forces officers 22w
Ethnic minorities 12–3

Armed forces reserves
Defence review 22w
UN Special Commission on Iraq 27w

Armed forces strength
175w

Armed forces training
Otterburn 262w

Armed forces women
15
Bosnia-Herzegovina 263w

Armenia
Overseas aid 134w

Arms exports
Export credit guarantees 718–9w

Arms trade
Chile 177w
Indonesia 124–6w, 464w, 577w, 721w
Turkey 93w, 340w, 671w

***Armstrong, Hilary**, Minister of State for Local Government and Housing, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Questions
Alexandra Palace, Closures 496w
Alexandra Palace, Disclosure of information 47–8w, 495–6w
Council tax, Valuation 729w
Local government services, Best value 227–8w
Members' facilities, Local government revenue 728–9w
Non-domestic rates 112–4w, 727w

Army strength
11–2
Royal Irish Regiment 176w
Territorial Army 173–5w

Art works
Insurance 1–2w

Arts Council grants
Eastern Arts Board 464w

Arts finance
657

Asbestos
Scotland 212–3w

Asbestosis
War pensions 201–2w

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 347
Offshore trusts 1005–6

Ashford Hospital NHS Trust
347w

Ashton, Mr Joe
Debates etc.
Doctor Assisted Dying Bill, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (10.12.97) 1025–7
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1019
Motion to introduce Bill negatived (10.12.97) 1025–30
Questions
Terminal care 182–3w

Asia
UK contributions 643–4w

ASTOR system
Defence procurement 23–4w

Astra Training Services
Pensioners 10w

Asylum
see Political refugees

Atherton, Ms Candy
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 370

Athletics
557–9w
Handicapped 654
Training 467w

Atkins, Charlotte
Questions
Agricultural land, Pollution control 598w
Gilberts Animal By-Products, Waste management 727–8w
Minimum wage 351
Sheep dipping 683w
Sheep dipping, Organophosphates 351w, 683w

Atkinson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1272–5
Questions
Millennium compliance 3w, 89w
Millennium compliance, Business 594w
Millennium compliance, Industrial health and safety 32w
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 148w

Atkinson, George
Public petitions (10.12.97) 1154

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Council tax 348
Hill farming, Northumberland 350w

Attendance allowance
Warrington 534–5w

Attorney General
Advertising 578w
Extradition 322w

Austin, Mr John
Debates etc.
Industrial health and safety, Points of order (10.12.97) 1032
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 492
Questions
Drugs, EC law 736–7w
Patient pack initiative 736w
Prisoners, Death 56w
Prisons Ombudsman 55–6w

Average earnings
Social security benefits uprating 471w

Aviation fuels
Environment protection 495w
Taxation 645w

Bail hostels
West Midlands 436–7w

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 509
House of Commons questions, Points of order (08.12.97) 669–70
Open government (11.12.97) 1194
Questions
Airports, Signposts 547w
Animal cruelty, Prosecutions 481–2
BBC external services, Security vetting 370w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Slaughterhouses 354w
China, Human rights 650w
Defence Intelligence Staff 336–7w
Diplomatic immunity 302w
Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964, Prosecutions 322w

***Baker, Norman**—continued*
EC aid, Environment protection 501w
EC Development Council, Sustainable development 501w
EC Environment Council, EC Development Council 501w
Electronic surveillance, Cellular phones 299w
Electronic surveillance, Telephone tapping 321w
European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters 298w
Food standards 354–5w
Heads of state, Official gifts 584w
Intelligence services 301w
Intelligence services, Civil servants' secondment 302w
Intelligence services, Computer privacy 301–2w
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 297w
Intelligence services, Finance 298w
Intelligence services, Interception warrants 301w
Intelligence services, Legal profession 303w
Intelligence services, Manpower 301w
Intelligence services, National asset register 321w
Intelligence services, Party conferences 301w
Intelligence services, Performance standards 297–8w
Intelligence services, Visas 302–3w
Irradiated food 524–5w
Joint Intelligence Committee 320w
Lindane 682–3w
MI5, Disclosure of information 434w
Millennium Exhibition, Contracts 476–7w
Minister Without Portfolio, Departmental responsibilities 320w
Minister Without Portfolio, Food standards 321w
Minister Without Portfolio, Oral questions 318w
Ministers, Security 502–3w
Official secrets 298–9w
Official secrets, Telecommunications industry 298w
Ottawa Convention 649w
Parliamentary private secretaries, Early day motions 410w
Police, Video recordings 296–7w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 173–5w
Public Record Office, Disclosure of information 452w
Telephone tapping 299w
Telephone tapping, Intelligence services 297w
Toys and games, Safety standards 161–2w, 343w
Transport of radioactive materials 337w
Unemployment, Statistics 573w
Water pollution, Prosecutions 421–2w
Xenotransplantation 349w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 383
Local government finance (02.12.97) 173
NHS (09.12.97) 808
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 367–8
Questions
Beef, Farmers 473
Caribbean, British dependent territories 577w
Class sizes, Primary education 651w
Defence review, Armed forces reserves 22w

***Baldry, Mr Tony**—continued*
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 144–5

Ballard, Jackie
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1065–6
Questions
Agricultural subsidies 714w
Dental services, Private health services 259w
Dental students, Tuition fees 260w
Divorce, Arbitration schemes 329w
Labour market, Statistics 168w
Lowell Park Mortgages 30w
Motorcycles, Orange badge scheme 494w
Numeracy Task Force 549w
Tuition fees 656w
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator 129–30w
World Bank, UK contributions 610w

Ballistic missile defence
(04.12.97) 570–8

Bananas
Caribbean 612w
Windward Islands 470–1

Bangladesh
Offences against children 577–8w
Overseas aid 609w

Banks
507w

***Banks, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Athletics 557–9w
Athletics, Handicapped 654
Athletics, Training 467w
Challenge Fund, Physical education 515w
Manchester United Football Club, Planning permission 135w
Marylebone Cricket Club 465w
National Coaching Foundation, Teacher training 514–5w
National Lottery 319w
National Lottery, Eastern region 319w
National Lottery, Museums and galleries 134–5w
National Lottery, Northavon 318w
National Lottery, Romford 371–2w
Sports, Conferences 515w
Sports, Young people 515–6w, 649–50
Sports facilities, Cricket 135–6w
Sports sponsorship 465w
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco advertising 136w, 464w
Sportsmark 514–5w
Sportsmark, Primary education 650
UK Sports Institute 653–4
World Cup 466w, 654–5

Barclays Bank
Industrial disputes 529w

Barnardos
Personal records 346–7w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 505
Local government finance (02.12.97) 172
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 24w
Central Community Relations Unit, Finance 675–6w
Credit unions 709w
Detection rates, Northern Ireland 674–5w
Local government finance 418–9w
Milk, Dioxins 353w

Barnet
Health services 539w

Battery hens
18w
EC action 18w

***Battle, Mr John**, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Motor industry (09.12.97) 921–6
Questions
Alternative energy, Planning permission 595w
Biochemistry, Skill shortages 720w
Biotechnology, EC action 719–20w
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council 720–1w
Coal 463w
Coal, Electricity generation 94w
Economic and Social Research Council, Research finance 670w
European Coal and Steel Community 15–6w
European Coal and Steel Community budget 594–5w
Exhibitions, Government grants 594w
Gas fired power stations 673w
Mixed oxide fuel, Exports 248–9w
Mixed oxide fuel, Terrorism 548w
North Western Electricity Board, Electric cables 255–6w
Nuclear accidents, Disclosure of information 252w
Nuclear fuels, National asset register 249–50w
Nuclear safety 250w
Nuclear safety, Treaties 249w
Pensioners, Heating 730w
Petroleum exploration licences, Shetland 342w
Plutonium, Radioactive waste disposal 163–4w
Plutonium, Sellafield 249w
Public utilities, Energy consumption 463w
Research councils, Contracts of employment 253w
Shipbuilding, EC grants and loans 252–3w
Technology foresight programme 462–3w
Textile industry 250w
Transport of radioactive materials, Liability 228w
Wind power 672–3w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1203
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1040, 1069
Questions
Economic and Social Research Council, Research finance 670w
Iraq, UN resolutions 13w

BBC
Archives 373w

BBC external services
Security vetting 370w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 477

Beaufort Dyke
Radioactive waste disposal 219–20w

***Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret**, President of the Board of Trade*
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 93–100
Questions
Air displays, Indonesia 722w
Business 255w

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret*—*continued
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 723–6w
Coal mine closures 670w
Coal mine closures, Gas fired power stations 160w
Coal mine closures, Regional aid 160w
Coal mining 254–5w, 340w
Council for Science and Technology, Publications 342–3w
Dept for International Development, World Trade Organisation 365w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Public expenditure 672w
EC Industry Council 341w
EC Internal Market Council 527w
Electronic mail, Dept of Trade and Industry 338–9w
Energy policy 531w
Export licensing, Administrative delays 159w
Foreign investment in UK 255w
Gas fired power stations 531–2w
Indonesia, Arms trade 124–6w
Insurance companies, Company accounts 526–7w
Members' correspondence 595w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of Trade and Industry 721–2w
Ministerial statements, Dept of Trade and Industry 365w
Ministers' visits abroad, India 463w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 254w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 726w
Power stations 160w
Retail prices 159w
Simon of Highbury, Lord 255w
Tobacco advertising, Sports sponsorship 340w
Treaty of Amsterdam 159–60w

Bed and breakfast accommodation
Homelessness 35–6w
Non-domestic rates 729w

Beef
477–9, 1009
Exports 475, 685w
Farmers 473–8
Food labelling 717w
Imports 718w
Quality control 525w

Beef (Emergency Control) Order 1996
Questions
718w

Beekeeping
717w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 45
Questions
After school clubs, Scotland 353
Neighbourhood nuisance, Scotland 149–50
NHS administration, Scotland 152–3w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Questions
New deal for young unemployed, Educational qualifications 1166
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 423–4w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Questions
Altcourse Prison 592–3w
Blakenhurst Prison 52w
Community service orders 295w
Firearms, Compensation 503–4w
Group 4 Securitas, Civil servants 434–5w
Home Office, Early retirement 54w

Beith, Rt Hon A J*—*continued
Judiciary, Probation and aftercare 207w
Prison population 593w
Prison Service, Advertising 53–4w
Prison Service, Information services 52–3w
Prison visitors, Annual reports 51–2w
Prisons, Private sector 54–5w
Probation and aftercare 589w
Probation and aftercare, Government grants 207w
Probation officers 207w
Secure training centres, Private sector 299w
Sexual offences, Data banks 207–8w

Belfast
Child Support Agency 606w

Bell, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Stankovic, Milos (10.12.97) 970–4
Questions
Mines, Bomb disposal 4–5
Ottawa Convention 497w

Bell, Mr Stuart, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Questions
Church property 16w

Belmarsh Prison
Death 56w

Benefit integrity project
Disability living allowance 327w

Benefits Agency Medical Service
382–3w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Members' facilities (04.12.97) 488
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1137–8

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 361

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 93–4, 96, 100–5, 110, 124
Business questions (11.12.97) 1206
European Communities (04.12.97) 518–9, 535
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 192, 203, 210, 212, 216, (03.12.97) 398–401, 409, 412–3, 417, 425, 453–6
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 498–9
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1271, 1277, 1287, 1295, 1306
Open government (11.12.97) 1193
Oral question time intervention (03.12.97) 341
Questions
Literacy, Teaching methods 1180
National Assembly of Wales, Foreign investment in UK 343–4
NHS, Bureaucracy 792
Road safety, Cellular phones 421w

Bereavement counselling
88w
Contracts for services 88–9w

Beresford, Sir Paul
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 169

Berkshire Health Authority
Finance 791–2

Berlaymont building
Repairs and maintenance 229w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1200
Industrial health and safety, Points of order (10.12.97) 1031
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1020
Questions
Digital broadcasting 596–7w

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Disability Rights Task Force, Public appointments 242–3w
Lone parents, Expenditure 732w
Means tested benefits, Take-up 731–2w

Best value
Local government services 227–8w
Northern Ireland 712–3w

Beta-interferon
Prescription drugs 540w

Betts, Mr Clive, An Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 569

Bicycles
Tax allowances 423w

Biochemistry
Skill shortages 720w

Biodiversity
352w, 500–1w, 1001

Biotechnology
EC action 719–20w

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
720–1w

Birds
Common agricultural policy 474
Nature conservation 473
Nature reserves (02.12.97) 258–66

Birmingham
Theatres 372w

Birmingham Health Authority
783–4

Blackman, Mrs Liz
Questions
Student loans 661–2w

Blackpool
NHS trusts 783

Blair, Rt Hon Tony, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Questions
Advance corporation tax 1010
After school clubs, Scotland 353
Beef 1009
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 347
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Inquiries 503w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Prime Minister 411w
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force, Public appointments 410w
Coal mining 1002–3
Coal mining, Cabinet committees 411w
Council tax 348, 354
Electronic mail, Prime Minister 411w
Electronic surveillance, Telephone tapping 321w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**—continued*
Exhibitions, Departmental responsibilities 695w
Greenbelt, Hertfordshire 583w
Heads of state, Official gifts 584w
Intelligence services, National asset register 321w
International conferences, Canary Wharf 4w
IRA 1008
Iraq, Sanctions 354–6, 584w
Joint Intelligence Committee 320w
Labour Party 1008–9
Labour Party, Finance 4w
Leicestershire 584w
Local government finance 346–7
Lockerbie, Bombings 408w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Scottish Parliament 408w
Meirionnydd 584w
Minimum wage 351
Minister Without Portfolio, Departmental responsibilities 320w
Minister Without Portfolio, Food standards 321w
Ministerial statements, Prime Minister 320w
Ministers, Codes of practice 320–1w
Ministers, Security 502–3w
National Assembly of Wales 352
New deal for lone parents 1005
NHS 1009–10
Official hospitality, Prime Minister 411w
Offshore trusts 1005–6
One parent benefits 353–4
One parent benefits, Northern Ireland 1007–8
Opencast mining 352
Ottawa Convention 1010
Parliamentary private secretaries, Early day motions 410w
Personal equity plans 353
Personal savings 351–2, 1006–7
Personal savings, Tax allowances 349
Public expenditure 1006
Publicity, Prime Minister 412w
RJB Mining 348–9
Royal yacht 320w
Security Service Commissioner, Public appointments 584w
Social Exclusion Unit 4w, 319w, 408–10w
Social Exclusion Unit, Children 1007
Taxation, Married people 1003–5
10 Downing Street, Cats 103–5w
10 Downing Street, Official hospitality 502w
Tobacco advertising, Sports sponsorship 4w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 1008
UN Security Council 211w
Voting System Independent Commission, Referendums 348
Young offenders 347

Blakenhurst Prison
52w

Blears, Ms Hazel
Questions
GP commissioners 539–40w
Parole Board, Public appointments 295–6w
Primary health care 778–9

Blind
Social security benefits backdating 97–8w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 260

***Blizzard, Mr Bob**—continued*
Questions
Environment protection, Norfolk Broads 350–1w
Pesticides, Health hazards 524w

Blood donors
Palace of Westminster 403–4w

Blood transfusions
Haemophilia 689–90w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
School Standards and Framework Bill, 1R (04.12.97) 512
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 72
Questions
Education action zones 1167
Educational finance 1175–6
Educational finance, Council tax 1175–6
Educational finance, Gloucestershire 1175
Educational standards 522w
Educational standards, Deprivation indicators 1167
Educational standards, Schools 655–6w
Educational standards, Sixth form colleges 1167–8
Educational standards, Vocational training 651w
Further education colleges, Welfare to work 654–5w
Schools, Deprivation indicators 1168
Youth unemployment 522–3w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 226, (03.12.97) 427, 444, 447
Oral questions, Points of order (08.12.97) 668
Questions
Agricultural policy 480
Beef 1009
Defence review 705w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 151w

***Boateng, Mr Paul**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Community care, Private sector (03.12.97) 333–6
Guy's Hospital (12.12.97) 1337–40
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1280–1, 1300, 1313, 1328–31
Questions
Antismoking campaign 347w, 376w
Barnardos, Personal records 346–7w
Breast cancer 734–5w
Breast cancer, Finance 182w
Breast cancer, Medical research 344w
Breast cancer, Screening 259–60w, 344–5w
Child workers 87w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 260–2w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Medical treatments 692w
Dept of Health, Press 345w
Elderly 781–2
Elderly, Medical treatments 537w
Elderly, Social services 454w
Electroconvulsive therapy 376w
Haemophilia, Factor VIII 536w
Head lice, Schools 345w
Health authorities, Worcestershire 787–8
Health insurance 536w
Hospital admissions 535w

***Boateng, Mr Paul**—continued*
Hospital discharges 260w, 349w
Hospitals, Complaints 458w
Incontinence aids, VAT 262w
International Labour Organisation, Child workers 86–7w
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust, Pathology 178–9w, 733–4w
Kidderminster Hospital 787
Kidney patients, Elderly 733w
Leicestershire Health Authority, Patients 542w
Long-Term Care Charter 375w
Long-Term Care Royal Commission 540w, 691w
Meningitis 346w
Millennium compliance, NHS finance 349–50w
Oral contraceptives, Drug side effects 738w
Oxfordshire County Council, Local government social services 89w
Patients' transport 691w
Patients' transport, Merseyside 691w
Permanent secretaries, Dept of Health 349w
Residential care, Wiltshire 686w
Smoking related diseases, Death 737w
Terminal care 182–3w
Tuberculosis, Drug resistance 540–1w
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 374w
Wheelchairs, Administrative delays 183w
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority, Accident and emergency departments 343–4w
Xenotransplantation 349w

Body, Sir Richard
Questions
Arms exports, Export credit guarantees 718–9w
Arms trade, Indonesia 721w
Berlaymont building, Repairs and maintenance 229w
EC budget 407w
European Coal and Steel Community 15–6w
European Commission, Costs 121w
European Commission, Information 641–2w
European Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 710w
Pension funds, EC budget 168w
Shipping accidents, Inquiries 224w
Telecommunications technology, Privacy 229w

Bomb disposal
Mines 3–5, 611w

Bombings
Lockerbie 408w

Borrow, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 103, 105, 107, 116
Defence industries (03.12.97) 284–5
Questions
Voting System Independent Commission, Referendums 348

Bosnia-Herzegovina
Armed forces women 263w
Homicide 230w
Missing persons 230w

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Members' interests, Points of order (08.12.97) 668–9
Questions
Developing countries, Intermediate technology 997–8

Boswell, Mr Tim*—*continued
Higher education admission 652w
Hospital waiting lists 536w
National asset register 5w
National asset register, Fees and charges 506–7w
Self-assessment of tax 279w
Self-assessment of tax, Premium bonds 243w
Student grants, Higher education admission 1172
Tax collection, Euro 5–6w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 950–1, 958–9
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 761–2, 766–7
Questions
Overseas aid 610w
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust, Public appointments 179–80w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 171
NHS (09.12.97) 804–5
Stankovic, Milos (10.12.97) 972
Questions
Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College 384–5w, 695w
Primary health care, GP fundholders 778
Royal Naval College 13, 384w
Royal Naval College, Crown immunity 384w
Sports, Finance 657
Sustainable development 613w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
472, 477, 525w
Compensation 682w, 685w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 476
Disease control 19–20w, 150w, 347, 355–7w, 684–5w, 718w
Inquiries 503w
Ministerial statements (03.12.97) 372–89
Slaughterhouses 354w
Waste disposal (03.12.97) 313–21, 525w

***Bradley, Mr Keith**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social security benefits uprating, Ministerial statements (02.12.97) 174–85
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1108–11, 1123
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service 382–3w
Child benefit 603w
Child Support Agency 606w
Child Support Agency, Belfast 606w
Child Support Agency, Members' correspondence 204–5w
Council tax benefits 604–6w
Council tax benefits, Social security recipients 599–600w
Family credit 602w
Family income 381–2w
Habitual residence test 380w
Habitual residence test, Costs 379w
Housing benefits 273–4w
Housing benefits, Students 98w
Housing benefits, Young people 473w
Income support, Lone parents 276w, 600w
Income support, Mortgages 275w, 732w
Independent Tribunal Service, Wales 185w
Lone parent premium 669–70w
Lone parents, Child benefit 473–4w
Lone parents, Children 328w
Lone parents, Employment 600w
Lone parents, Expenditure 328–9w, 732w

Bradley, Mr Keith*—*continued
Lone parents, Income support 328w
Lone parents, Social security benefits 534w
Maintenance, Children 472w
Means tested benefits, Take-up 731–2w
New deal for lone parents 328w, 601w
New deal for lone parents, Costs 328–9w
Pensioners, Energy prices 606–7w
Permanent secretaries, Dept of Social Security 329w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 380w
Social security benefits, Finance 380–1w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 381–2w
Social security benefits, Students 380w
Social security benefits, Take-up 475w
Social security benefits backdating, Deaf 97–8w
Social security reform 203–4w

Bradley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1189–90

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 401, 407–12, 414, 453, 455
Tax Exempt Special Savings Accounts, Points of order (02.12.97) 187
Questions
Film industry 465w
Manchester United Football Club, Planning permission 135w
Overseas aid 610w
Tourist industry 659
Youth unemployment 230–1w

Brake, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1108
Questions
Alternative energy, Planning permission 595w
Bicycles, Tax allowances 423w
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force, Public appointments 288w, 410w
Hospitals 689w
National parks, Power industry 544–5w
Parking, Dept for Education and Employment 430–1w
Parking, Dept of Health 459w
Parking, Dept of Social Security 474w
Parking, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 422w
Parking, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 407w
Parking, Home Office 437–8w
Parking, House of Commons 404w
Parking, Ministry of Defence 440w
Parking, Treasury 507w

Brand, Dr Peter
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 499
Questions
NHS trusts, Road accidents 782–3
Organophosphates, Medical records 110w
Private finance initiative 690–1w
Private finance initiative, NHS 690w
Sheep dipping, Organophosphates 351w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
British Board of Film Classification, Public petitions (09.12.97) 917
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Points of order (01.12.97) 19

Brazier, Mr Julian*—*continued
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 37
Questions
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust 783
Territorial Army 1

Brazil
Crops 499w
Rain forests 1001

Breast cancer
734–5w
Finance 182w
Medical research 344w
Screening 259–60w, 344–5w
Surgery 247–8w

Breasts
Plastic surgery 675w

Brecon Beacons National Park
Management 119–20w

Breed, Mr Colin
Questions
Early retirement, NHS 686–7w
Health service staff, Stress related illnesses 687–8w
Road accidents, Death 543–4w
Technology foresight programme 462–3w
Unfair dismissal, Industrial tribunals 527–8w

Bridges
Philippines 646w

Brinton, Mrs Helen
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 26
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1035
Questions
Literacy summer schools initiative 1179–80
Ministry of Defence, New deal for young unemployed 24–5w
National Lottery 319w
Smuggling, Tobacco 244–5w

British Airways
Aircraft 494w

British Board of Film Classification
Public petitions (09.12.97) 917

British Broadcasting Corporation
see BBC

British citizenship
436w

British dependent territories
Caribbean 577w

British embassies
India 13w, 120w, 300w
Nigeria 14w

British Library
469w
Conservation 470w
Construction 470w
Income 469w
Offices 470w
Pay 468–9w
Property transfer 468–9w

British Museum
Admission charges 652–3

British residents abroad
European Commission 498w
Homicide 120–1w

Broadcast Journalism
Sports 374w

Broadcasting Act 1996
Questions
373–4w, 468w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 169
Questions
Productivity 366w

Brown, Rt Hon Gordon, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Questions
Disclosure of information 708w
EC Finance Council 513–4w
International Monetary Fund, South Korea 245w
Ministers' visits abroad, Treasury 645–6w
Offshore trusts, Guernsey 575–6w
Offshore trusts, Taxation 576w
Recording industry 567w
Robinson, Geoffrey, Shares 575–6w, 707w
Sainsbury, Lord 709–10w
Tax evasion 709w
Treasury, Ministerial policy advisors 708w

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Chief Whip)
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1093

Brown, Mr Russell
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 118

Browne, Mr Desmond
Questions
Welfare to work, Scotland 159w

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 381–2
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1268, 1282, 1288–92, 1308
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 930, 939, 946–7
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 50, 69–73
Special education (05.12.97) 586–91, 611–2, 615
Questions
Higher education, Cornwall 1177

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 93–4, 96, 101, 119, 121, 124
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 449, 452
Open government (11.12.97) 1191–2
Questions
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 269w
Legal aid, Personal injury compensation 662–3
New deal for young unemployed 1178–9
NHS finance, Information technology 781
South America, Children 611–2w
Student numbers, Scotland 154w
Tourist industry, Scotland 140–1

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 388
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 936
Questions
Advertising, Scottish Office 367–8w
Air pollution control, Carbon dioxide 423w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm*—*continued
Civil servants' visits abroad, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 377w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 723–6w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 480–3w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Prime Minister 411w
Corporation tax 709w
Dept for International Development, Civil service recruitment 613–4w
Economic growth 559–60w
Employers' contributions, Income 668w
Fiscal policy 709w
Hospitals 689w
House of Commons special standing committees 130–1w
Millennium compliance, Business 594w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept for International Development 132–3w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 396–8w
Ministers' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 479–80w
Ministers' visits abroad, Treasury 645–6w
Official hospitality, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 376–7w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 726w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 477–9w
Official hospitality, Northern Ireland Office 616w
Official hospitality, Prime Minister 411w
Police, Manpower 505–6w
Private finance initiative 566–8w
Private finance initiative, Government departments 571–3w
Public expenditure 559w, 561–6w
Public sector assets 560w
Publicity, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 377w
Publicity, Dept for International Development 131–2w
Publicity, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 483–6w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 441–9w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 616–7w
Publicity, Prime Minister 412w
Tax avoidance, Northern Ireland Office 127w
Tax burden 560w
Tax evasion 709w
VAT, NHS 428w

Buck, Ms Karen
Questions
Welfare to work, Ethnic groups 388w

Buckinghamshire Health Authority
Finance 535w

Building alterations
Housing 107–8w
Planning appeals 109w

Building industry
Working conditions 223w

"Building Partnerships for Prosperity White Paper"
(03.12.97) 357–71

Building regulations
Inspections 286w

Building societies
507w
Consumer expenditure 507w
Shares 507w

Burden, Mr Richard
Questions
Birmingham Health Authority 783–4
Combined Cadet Force, Schools 502w
Smoke alarms 56–7w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1018
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 947
Questions
Administration of justice, Law reform 480–1
Tuition fees, University finance 1174

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 505–6
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 497
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 33–4, 40, 46, 67
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 177–8, 185
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1041–8, 1085
Written questions, Points of order (03.12.97) 391–2, (04.12.97) 511
Questions
General Electric Company 16
Social security reform 203–4w

Burstow, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1204
Local government finance (02.12.97) 166–7
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1023
Questions
Armed forces, Deafness 203–4w
British Library 469w
British Library, Conservation 470w
British Library, Construction 470w
British Library, Income 469w
British Library, Offices 470w
British Library, Pay 468–9w
Council tax 493w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 659w
Discrimination, Handicapped 663w
European Charter of Local Self-Government 115w, 496w
Greater London Authority 35w
Handicap benefits, Members' correspondence 669w
Handicapped, Discrimination 663w
Handicapped, EC economic policy 519w
Handicapped, Employment discrimination 519w
Handicapped, Employment schemes 185w
Handicapped, Equal opportunities 518w
Income support, Pensioners 202w
Incontinence aids, VAT 262w, 459–60w, 560–1w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 607–8w
Judiciary, Training 453w
Legal aid, Handicapped 663–4w
Local government expenditure 494w, 703–4w, 727w
Local government expenditure, Wales 518w
Local government finance 286w
Long-Term Care Royal Commission 691w
National Sound Archive, Property transfer 469–70w
New deal for sick and disabled people 203w
Pensioners, Winter fuel payments 276w, 327w
Prescription drugs, Waste disposal 454–5w

Burstow, Mr Paul*—*continued
Professional qualifications, Accountants 532w
Prosecutions, Police 322w
Regional government 496w
Single regeneration budget 105–6w
Social security benefits backdating, Deaf 97–8w
Social security reform 202w
Value Added Tax (Drugs Medicines and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997 460w
VAT, Health services 561w

Buses
Child safety 548w

Business
255w
Millennium compliance 594w
Opposition days (01.12.97) 81–127

Business link
254w

Business motions
(02.12.97) 256, (05.12.97) 637, (10.12.97) 1112, (12.12.97) 1332

Business statements
(04.12.97) 500–12, (11.12.97) 1197, 1199–208

Butler, Mrs Christine
Questions
NHS, Contracts for services 537w

Byers, Mr Stephen*, *Minister for School Standards, Dept for Education and Employment
Debates etc.
Schools, Hackney (01.12.97) 134–8
Questions
Church schools, Muslims 1182
Class sizes, Educational standards 392–3w
Class sizes, Primary education 139–47w, 431w, 651w
Class sizes, School admission 431w
Colleges of education, Inspections 315–6w
Educational finance 389w
"Excellence in Schools White Paper" 654w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Educational standards 394–6w
General Teaching Council, Fees and charges 552w
General Teaching Council, Private education 552w
Higher education admission, Educational standards 429w
Literacy 1170
Literacy, Adult education 1171
Literacy, Educational assessment 1170–1
Literacy, Educational finance 658–9w
Literacy, Teaching methods 1180
Literacy summer schools initiative 430w, 1179–80
Local education authorities, Cycling 138w
New deal for schools 396w
Non-teaching staff 432w
Numeracy Task Force 549w
Playing fields, Property transfer 661w
Pupil-teacher ratios 312–6w
Rushey Mead School, New deal for schools 520w
Schools, Finance 392w, 659w
Schools, Performance standards 661w
Schools, Teaching methods 552w
Special education, Headteachers 315w
Teachers, Holiday leave 392w
Teachers, Lost working days 9w
Voluntary schools 1181–2

C17 aircraft
11

Cabinet committees
Coal mining 411w
Women 534w

Cabinet Office
Information technology 277–8w

Caborn,Mr Richard*, *Minister for the Regions Regeneration and Planning, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Housing, West Midlands 288–9w
Regional development agencies 106w, 729w
Regional government 496w
Rural Development Commission 495w
Single regeneration budget 105w
Structure plans, Gloucestershire 400w
Supermarkets, Planning permission 632–3w

Cairngorms
Railway transport 628w

Camelon
Redundancy 140

Cameras
Speed limits 289w, 506w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 963
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 29, 36
Questions
NHS administration 779

Campbell, Jason
Prisoners' transfers 9w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 444, 447, 456
Questions
Armed forces, Racial harassment 13
Tuition fees, Scotland 144

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Elderly 781–2

Campbell-Savours, Mr Dale
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 87, 89–90, 114
Open government (11.12.97) 1192
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 35
Questions
Beef 479
Overseas aid 998
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco advertising 655
Supermarkets, Cockermouth 634w

Campsfield House Detention Centre
Prison riots 83–4w

Canary Wharf
International conferences 4w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1050, 1077–8
Questions
Attorney General, Extradition 322w
Food standards 354w
Nursing homes, Scotland 617w
Redundancy, Camelon 140

Cancer
see Breast cancer, Leukaemia

Cannabis
Medical treatments 291w

Capital gains tax
Investment 708w

Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group
see National Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group

Caplin, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 46
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 682w
Funerals, Consumer protection 92–3w
Funerals, Fees and charges 90w
Local government services, Best value 228w
Long-Term Care Royal Commission 540w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 423w
Climate Change Convention 423w
Fuels 730w

Cardiff
Railway network 704w

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Contracts 117w

Cardiff County Council
Local government expenditure 85–6w

Caribbean
Bananas 612w
British dependent territories 577w
Frigates 706w

Carlisle
Hospitals 788

Cars
Retail trade 252w

Casale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 194, (03.12.97) 445, 448
Questions
Special Educational Needs Tribunal, Annual reports 551–2w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 381
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 197, 225, 236–7, 246–7,(03.12.97) 398, 412, 417–22, 446, 454
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 73
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1061, 1135

Category A prisoners
638w

Catering Select Committee
(08.12.97) 768

Caton, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 760–8
Questions
GP fundholders, Vaccination 305w
Local government finance, Wales 117–8w
Non-domestic rates, Wales 119w
Police authorities, Finance 118–9w
Public expenditure, Wales 580–3w
Refugees, Wales 580w
Vaccination, Children 579–80w

Cats
49w, 149w
Departmental coordination 148–9w
Norfolk 49w, 149w
10 Downing Street 103–5w

Cattle
Animal breeding 270w
Data banks 356–7w
Ear tagging 149w, 682w
Offal 679–80w
Theft 637w
Transport of animals 359w

Cellular phones
Electronic surveillance 299w
Health warnings 456w
Road safety 421w

CELTEC
Redundancy 306w

Central Community Relations Unit
Finance 675–6w

Central line
Railway signals 634w

Cerebral palsy
Special education 138w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (02.12.97) 191, 201, 233, 247–8, (03.12.97) 396, 442
Conduct of proceedings (02.12.97) 243, 254, (03.12.97) 416, 432, 448, 455

Challenge Fund
Physical education 515w

Chambers of commerce
Training and enterprise councils 673–4w

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Civil servants' visits abroad 377w
Millennium compliance 325w
Official hospitality 376–7w
Open government 164–5w
Publicity 377w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel 4 (Application of Excess Revenues) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(10.12.97) 1149

Channel tunnel
Railway network 284–5w, 421w
Transport of radioactive materials 280–1w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Bananas, Windward Islands 470
War pensions, Asbestosis 201–2w

Chapman, Sir Sydney,
Questions
Health services, Barnet 539w
Museums and galleries, Admission charges 652–3
Palace of Westminster, Aids for handicapped 404w
Portcullis House 578–9w

Charities
Finance 657–8
Funerals 92w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 451w
Uniform business rate 428w
VAT 428w

Charities Board
see National Lottery Charities Board

Chatham Dockyard
Radiation hazards 26w

Chaytor, Mr David
Questions
Chambers of commerce, Training and enterprise councils 673–4w
Lone parents, Children 328w
Lone parents, Expenditure 328–9w
Lone parents, Income support 328w
Mixed oxide fuel, Emergency planning 492–3w
Mixed oxide fuel, Export controls 528w
Mixed oxide fuel, Exports 248–9w
Mixed oxide fuel, Japan 492w
Mixed oxide fuel, Terrorism 548w
Mixed oxide fuel, Transport of radioactive materials 122w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 995–6
New deal for lone parents, Costs 328–9w
New deal for young unemployed, Vocational training 432w
Nuclear safety 250w
Nuclear safety, Treaties 249w
Plutonium, Sellafield 249w
Public utilities, Energy consumption 463w
Transport of radioactive materials, Air freight transport 281–2w
Transport of radioactive materials, Channel tunnel 280–1w
Transport of radioactive materials, Liability 228w
Transport of radioactive materials, Sea transport 281w

Chemical and biological warfare
Iraq 647–8w

Chemical weapons
Police equipment 208w

Chernobyl Children Lifeline
367w

Chevening scholarship programme
1000–1

Chidgey, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 109–12
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 301–4, 309
Questions
Bereavement counselling 88w
Bereavement counselling, Contracts for services 88–9w
Funerals, Consumer protection 90–2w, 160–1w, 339–40w
Funerals, Manpower 169w
Funerals, Marketing 91w
Funerals, Unfair dismissal 92w
Minimum wage 162–3w
Pay 170–2w
Pay, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 136–7w
Pay, Dept for Education and Employment 138w
Pay, Dept of Health 182w
Pay, Dept of Social Security 204w
Pay, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 111–2w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 163w
Pay, Home Office 102–4w
Pay, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 264–7w
Pay, Ministry of Defence 175–7w
Pay, Northern Ireland Office 116–7w, 424w
Pay, Scottish Office 215w
Pay, Treasury 170w
Pay, Welsh Office 119w

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland
713w

Child Abuse in North Wales Judicial Inquiry
Costs 703w

Child benefit
603w
Lone parents 328w, 473–4w, (10.12.97) 1033–148

Child care
Vocational training 429w

Child safety
Buses 548w

Child Support Agency
606w
Belfast 606w
Members' correspondence 204–5w

Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(09.12.97) 913

Child workers
87w
Contracts 615w
International Labour Organisation 86–7w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 649w
United Arab Emirates 577–8w

Children
121w
Armed conflict 1000
Divorce 329w
Leukaemia 181w
Lone parents 328w
Maintenance 472w
Overseas aid 238–9w
Play 467w
Social Exclusion Unit 1007
South America 611–2w
Vaccination 579–80w

Children Act 1989
Questions
665w

Children in care
Special education 1169

Chile
Arms trade 177w

China
Human rights 650w
Poultry meat 358w

Chinook helicopters
263–4w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm,
Debates etc.
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 944–7
Questions
Beaufort Dyke, Radioactive waste disposal 219–20w
Council house sales, Scotland 461–2w
Ferries, Scotland 147–8
Glasgow City Council 152w
Public transport, Scotland 152w
Transport policy 212w
Transport policy, Scotland 153–4w

Chocolate
Food labelling 20w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 963–5, 967
Local government finance, Dorset (10.12.97) 1155–9, 1162
Questions
Public appointments, Ethnic minorities 326w
Regional development agencies 729w

Chope, Mr Christopher*—*continued
Transport, Government grants to local authorities 727w
Tuition fees, Scotland 151–2

Christmas
Drinking and driving 547w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
260–2w, 382–3w
Medical treatments 692w

Church Commissioners
Advance corporation tax 17

Church of England
General Electric Company 15

Church property
16w

Church schools
Muslims 1182

Civil proceedings
Law reform 663

Civil servants
Data banks 359w
Group 4 Securitas 434–5w
Pay 364–5w, 544w, 667–8w, 678w, 698–9w, 705w, 721–2w

Civil servants' secondment
Intelligence services 302w

Civil servants' visits abroad
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 377w
Dept of Trade and Industry 723–6w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 480–3w
Prime Minister 411w

Civil service
Conditions of employment 325–6w

Civil service agencies
Food hygiene 360w
Students 662w

Civil service recruitment
Dept for International Development 613–4w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 507–8
Questions
Coal mining 1002–3
Industrial diseases, Social security claims 603–4w

Clappison, Mr James
Questions
Crimes against the person, Sentencing 294w
Housing construction, Wales 344–5
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Official residences 452w
Political refugees, Czech Republic 504w
Political refugees, Dover 361–2w
Young offenders, Police cautions 695–6w
Youth Justice Task Force 637–8w

Clark, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Defence industries (03.12.97) 269, 272–4
Questions
Agricultural workers, Sutherland 140
10 Downing Street, Cats 103–5w

Clark, Rt Hon Dr David, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Debates etc.
Disclosure of information, Points of order (09.12.97) 811
Open government, Ministerial statements (11.12.97) 1183–96

Clark, Rt Hon Dr David*—*continued
Questions
Cabinet Office, Information technology 277–8w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 377w
Civil service, Conditions of employment 325–6w
Millennium compliance 3w
Millennium compliance, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 325w
Millennium compliance, Government departments 324–5w
Public appointments, Ethnic minorities 326w

Clark, Dr Lynda
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1195
Questions
Students, Scotland 143–4

Clarke, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 948–52
Questions
National asset register, Norwich 279w

Clarke, Mr Eric
Questions
Asbestos, Scotland 212–3w
East and Midlothian NHS Trust, Hospitals 150

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 192–201

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom, Minister for Film and Tourism, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Film industry 465w
Pay, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 136–7w
Royal Shakespeare Company 650–1
Tourism, Aids for handicapped 651
Tourism, Income 466w
Tourism, Investment 465w
Tourist industry 650, 659
Tourist industry, Employment 136w, 319w, 514w
Tourist industry, Finance 136w
Tourist industry, Greater London 136w
Tourist industry, Minimum wage 651
Tourist industry, Training 136w, 658
Tourist industry, Welfare to work 465–6w

Clarke, Mr Tony
Questions
NHS trusts, Debts 784

Class sizes
Educational standards 392–3w
Primary education 139–47w, 431w, 651w
School admission 431w

Classification schemes
Computers in National Health Service 87–8w

Cleaner Vehicles Task Force
Public appointments 288w, 410w

Clergy
Pensions 16–7

Clerk of the House
Speaker's rulings and statements (09.12.97) 795

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Members' interests, Points of order (09.12.97) 812
Questions
Commonwealth, Population 609w
NHS finance 780
Portcullis House 578–9w
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator 129w

Climate Change Convention
611w
Carbon dioxide 423w

Clubs
Schools 515w

Clwyd, Ann
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 497
Open government (11.12.97) 1192
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1086, 1090–1
Questions
Arms trade, Indonesia 464w
Arms trade, Turkey 671w
Breasts, Plastic surgery 675w
Church of England, General Electric Company 15
Electric shock equipment 592w
Exhibitions, Government grants 594w
Export licensing 671w
Home Office exports initiative 648w
NATO, Costs 9–10
Open general export licences 671w, 722w
Residential care of children, Wales 340
Silicone, Health hazards 517w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 408, 426–9
Questions
Council for Science and Technology, Publications 342–3w
Educational standards, Deprivation indicators 1167
Plutonium, Radioactive waste disposal 163–4w
Police grant 100–2w
Schengen Agreement 296w
Tuition fees, Publicity 137w

Coal
463w
Electricity generation 94w

Coal mine closures
670w
Gas fired power stations 160w
Regional aid 160w

Coal mining
254–5w, 340w, 1002–3
Cabinet committees 411w

"Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal"
268w

COBRA Project
28w

Cockermouth
Supermarkets 634w

Cohabitation
415–6w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
NHS (09.12.97) 807
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1108

Cohen, Mr Harry—continued
Questions
Central line, Railway signals 634w
Developing countries, Spectacles 614w
Lone parents, Child benefit 473–4w
Overseas aid, Water treatment 614–5w
Philippines, Bridges 646w

Cold weather payments
472–3w

Coleman, Mr Iain
Questions
Animal welfare 479–80

Colleges of education
Inspections 315–6w

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 387–8
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 415, 456–9
Questions
Habitual residence test, Costs 379w
National Assembly of Wales 267–8w
Recording industry 567w

Colman, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 612–6
Questions
Heathrow Airport, Air travel 419–20w
New deal for young unemployed, Small businesses 1177–8
Northern Ireland, Best value 712–3w
Social Exclusion Unit 408–10w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1270, 1273, 1327

Combined Cadet Force
Expenditure 502w
Schools 502w

"Coming of Age"
454w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment
181w

Common agricultural policy
352w, (11.12.97) 1210–4
Birds 474
Eastern Europe 474
Hill farming 471–2
Ministerial duties 598w
Rural areas 352w

Common fisheries policy
469–70, (12.12.97) 1332

Commonwealth
Population 609w

Commonwealth Development Corporation
995

Community action
Crime prevention 362–3w

Community care
Government grants to local authorities 184w
Private sector (03.12.97) 330–6

Community health councils
343w, 453–4w

Community policing
362w

Community service orders
295w

Commuters
285–6w
Town and country planning 32–3w

Companies
Scotland 146–7

Companies Act 1985
Questions
462w

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (12.12.97) 1331

Company accounts
Economic and monetary union 89–90w
Insurance companies 526–7w

Company cars
Tax allowances 573w

Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986
Questions
462w

Competition
Contracts for services 307w

Complaints against police
589–90w
Scotland 627–8w
Surveillance 506w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Computer Aided Medical Systems
Income 87–8w

Computer privacy
Intelligence services 301–2w

Computers in National Health Service
Capital investment 87w
Classification schemes 87–8w

Conditional fee agreements
115w
Damages 115w
Insurance 663
Legal aid 663–4
Negligence 115w
Public opinion 115–6w
Research 115w

Conditions of employment
Civil service 325–6w
New Millennium Experience 165w
Part-time employment 163w
Temporary employment 530w

Conflict of interests
Health service staff 6[illegible]w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 146

Consent to medical treatment
Mental patients (03.12.97) 393–5

Conservation
British Library 470w

Consolidated Fund Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (09.12.97) 907
House of Commons procedure (02.12.97) 256

Consultants
Millennium Exhibition 166w, 659

Consumer credit
89w

Consumer Credit Act 1974
Questions
89w

Consumer expenditure
Building societies 507w

Consumer information
Food packaging 524w

Consumer protection
Dental services 455w
Funerals 90–3w, 160–1w, 339–40w

Contingency reserve
Yugoslavia 24w

Contracts
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation 117w
Child workers 615w
Group 4 Securitas 592–3w
House of Commons stationery 704w
Millennium Exhibition 165w, 476–7w
NHS 538w

Contracts for services
Bereavement counselling 88–9w
Competition 307w
Employment Service 390–1w
Local government services 228w
New Millennium Experience 165–6w
NHS 537w, 735w

Contracts of employment
317w
Dept for Education and Employment 138–9w
Research councils 253w

Convictions
Homicide 591w, 697–8w
Reckless driving 697–8w

Conygar Quarry
(08.12.97) 769–76

Cook, Frank
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1045, 1047, 1054, 1079–82
Questions
NHS administration 537w

Cook, Rt Hon Robin, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 513–21, 528, 544
Questions
Intelligence services 301w
Intelligence services, Civil servants' secondment 302w
Intelligence services, Computer privacy 301–2w
Intelligence services, Interception warrants 301w
Intelligence services, Legal profession 303w
Intelligence services, Manpower 301w
Intelligence services, Party conferences 301w
Intelligence services, Visas 302–3w
Telecommunications technology, Privacy 229w

Cooper, Ms Yvette
Questions
EC Foreign Affairs Council 649–50w

Copyright
Data banks (10.12.97) 1149

Copyright and Rights in Databases Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(10.12.97) 1149

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 494
Questions
Royal Shakespeare Company 650–1
Security Service Commissioner, Public appointments 584w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1199–200
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1091
Questions
Arms trade, Chile 177w
Arms trade, Turkey 93w, 340w
Campsfield House Detention Centre, Prison riots 83–4w
Child workers 87w
Democratic Republic of the Congo 15w
Democratic Republic of the Congo, Overseas aid 3–4w
Ferries, Passports 85w
International Labour Organisation, Child workers 86–7w
Ministers' visits abroad, Russia 25–6w
Nigeria, British embassies 14w
Nigeria, Immigration applications 14w
Political refugees, Nigeria 84w
Retirement pensions, Index linking 730–1w
Rockall 14w
Security industry, Immigrant detainees 85w
Theatres, Inner city areas 466–7w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 510–1
Disclosure of information, Points of order (09.12.97) 811
Open government (11.12.97) 1185
Questions
House of Commons, Operating costs 704w
Prime Minister's questions 154
Smoking related diseases, Death 737w

Cornton Vale Prison
625w

Cornwall
Higher education 1176–7

Corporation tax
709w
Science and technology research 489–90w

Corston, Jean
Debates etc.
NHS (09.12.97) 806
Questions
Social security benefits uprating, Average earnings 471w

Cosmetics industry
Animal experiments 50w

Cost per student
Further education 309w, 551w

Cotter, Mr Brian
Questions
Dept of Trade and Industry, Public expenditure 672w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Small businesses 550w
Export promotion 596w
Head lice, Schools 345w
School nurses, Manpower 735w

Cotter, Mr Brian—continued
Speed limits, Cameras 506w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 164w

Council for Science and Technology
Publications 342–3w

Council house sales
Northern Ireland 425–6w
Scotland 461–2w

Council housing
284w
Greater London 419w

Council of Ministers
231–6w

Council tax
348, 354, 493w
Educational finance 1175–6
Liability 37w
Valuation 729w

Council Tax Benefit (General) (Amendment) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(10.12.97) 1024

Council tax benefits
604–6w
Social security recipients 599–600w

Council tax capping
493w

Counselling
Prisoners 577–8w, 625w

Court rules and procedures
668w
Law reform 662
Racial harassment 85w

Courts martial
331w, 336w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 369
Questions
Family credit 602w
Income support, Mortgages 275w
Lone parents, Employment 600w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Armed forces, Drug abuse 441w
Armed forces housing, Property transfer 331–2w
Armed forces strength 175w
Bed and breakfast accommodation, Homelessness 35–6w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces women 263w
British citizenship 436w
Category A prisoners 638w
Council housing, Greater London 419w
Defence procurement 332–4w
Duty free allowances 244w
European Commission, British residents abroad 498w
Homelessness, Greater London 111w
Housing construction, Greater London 283w
Housing improvement, Finance 222w
Immigrant detainees, Nationality 438–9w
Industrial accidents, Death 221w
Industrial health and safety, Prosecutions 412–4w
Kenya, Ministers' visits abroad 323–4w
Know-how Fund 439w
Land pollution, Land reclamation 220w
London Underground, Expenditure 545w
Millennium, Greater London 371w

Cox, Mr Tom—continued
Mobility allowance 669w
Northern Cyprus, Official visits 710w
Overseas aid, Children 238–9w
Political refugees, Algeria 435w
Political refugees, Sri Lanka 636w
Post Office 93w
Post offices, Closures 161w
Priority routes, Road length 286w
Prison discipline 436w
Prisoners, Age 436w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 638w
Set-aside schemes 149w
Slovakia, Human rights 121w
Territorial Army, Army strength 173–4w
Turkey, Greece 710w
Western European Union 705w
Working conditions, Building industry 223w

Cran, Mr James
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 629–31

Credit unions
709w

Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 476

Cricket
Sports facilities 135–6w

Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
362w

Crime prevention
Community action 362–3w

Crime victims
Disclosure of information 294–5w
Prosecutions 322w

Crimes against the person
Sentencing 294w

Criminal injuries compensation
363w

Criminal investigation
Northern Ireland (09.12.97) 916

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
Questions
107w

Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (Code of Practice) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(09.12.97) 916

Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995
Questions
623w

Criminal proceedings
Keighley 452–3w
Rape 483
Scotland 619w

Criminal records
Voluntary organisations 363w

Crops
Brazil 499w

Crown immunity
Royal Naval College 384w

Crown Prosecution Service
481, 590–1w
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 482

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Questions
Criminal proceedings, Keighley 452–3w

Cryer, Mrs Ann—continued
Ostriches, Slaughterhouses 358w

Cryer, Mr John
Debates etc.
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 182–3

CS sprays
208w

Cuba
EC aid 239w

Cunliffe, Mr Lawrence
Questions
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority, Accident and emergency departments 343–4w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 503w
Capital gains tax, Investment 708w
Day care of children, Taxation 707w
Drinking and driving, Christmas 547w
Economic and monetary union 707–8w
Legal aid, Social security recipients 576w
Lone parents, Social security benefits 534w
Pre-school education 553w
Schools, Teaching methods 552w
Small businesses, Debts 723w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 372–89
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Ministerial statements (03.12.97) 372–89
Questions
Access to countryside 352w
Agenda 2000 486–9w
Agricultural subsidies 490w
Animal feed, Food labelling 684w
Bananas, Windward Islands 470–1
Beef, Farmers 474–5
Beef, Quality control 525w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 472
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 355w, 684w
Cattle, Data banks 356w
Cattle, Transport of animals 359w
Common agricultural policy 352w
Common agricultural policy, Birds 474
Common agricultural policy, Eastern Europe 474
Common agricultural policy, Hill farming 471–2
Common agricultural policy, Ministerial duties 598w
Farmers, Marginal land 350w
Food standards 489w
Hill farming 472
Hill farming, EC law 490w
Hill farming, Northumberland 350w
Hill livestock allowances 471
Hill livestock allowances, Compensation 472–3
Milk, Food standards 357w, 490w
Ministers' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 479–80w
Official engagements 597–8w
Science and technology research, Corporation tax 489–90w
Untreated milk, Food standards 357w

Cunningham, Ms Roseanna
Questions
Alternatives to prison, Scotland 623w
Cornton Vale Prison 625w

Cunningham, Ms Roseanna—continued
Land ownership and tenure, Scotland 152w
Prisoners, Counselling 577–8w, 625w
Prisoners, Death 586w
Prisoners, Expenditure 626w
Prisoners, Mental illness 588w
Prisoners, Scotland 622w
Prisoners, Suicide 587w
Prisoners, Women 621–2w, 625w
Proceeds of crime, Scotland 623–4w
Remand in custody, Women 588w
Transsexuals 503w
Transsexuals, Scotland 622w

Curriculum
Developing countries 520–1w
Music education 520w
Physical education 551w
United Nations 239w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 379
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 207
Local government finance (02.12.97) 168
NHS (09.12.97) 807
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 364
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 472
Rural Development Commission 495w

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Questions
National Assembly of Wales 267w
Prisoners' rights, Publications 58w

Cycling
(10.12.97) 948–69
Local education authorities 138w
Transport policy 282w

Cyprus
Armed forces deployment 497–8w
Military aircraft 497–8w

Czech Republic
Political refugees 361–2w, 504w

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 678, 684
Questions
Brazil, Crops 499w
Developing countries, Technology transfer 998
Food packaging, Consumer information 524w
Police equipment, Codes of practice 504–5w
Sports sponsorship 656
Voluntary schools 1182
Water and sewerage companies, Rodents 111w
Water conservation 36w
Water supply, Housing construction 223w

Dairy farming
478–9

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 684, 687, 693, 705, 707, 720, 748, (09.12.97) 818, 834, 845, 855, 861, 869, 874
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1018
Ministerial statements, Points of order (09.12.97) 812
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 263
NHS (09.12.97) 804
Open government (11.12.97) 1190–1

Dalyell, Mr Tam—continued
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 183
Stankovic, Milos (10.12.97) 974, 976
Questions
Iraq, Sanctions 354–6, 584w
Lasers 628w
Lockerbie, Bombings 408w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Scottish Parliament 408w
Millennium Exhibition 660
Ministerial statements 152
NHS, Scotland 151w
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 5
Sanctions, Poverty 615w
Tuberculosis, Drug resistance 540–1w

Damages
Conditional fee agreements 115w
Legal aid 665w

Dance
Young people 470w

Darling, Mr Alistair, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Economic growth 559–60w
Fiscal policy 709w
National asset register 5w, 509w
National asset register, Fees and charges 506–7w
National asset register, Norwich 279w
Private finance initiative 566–8w
Public expenditure 559w, 561–6w, 568–72w
Public sector assets 560w
Public service pensions 641w
Scottish Parliament, Finance 707w
Scottish Parliament, Public expenditure 510–3w

Data banks
Cattle 356–7w
Civil servants 359w
Copyright (10.12.97) 1149
Sexual offences 207–8w

Data Protection Act 1984
Questions
301–2w

Davey, Mr Edward
Questions
Alexandra Palace, Closures 496w
Alexandra Palace, Disclosure of information 47–8w, 495–6w
Departmental correspondence 527w
Vocational guidance, Greater London 521–2w

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 956–8

Davidson, Mr Ian
Questions
Army strength 12
Common agricultural policy 352w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Scotland 148–9

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 529–33
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 222–3
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 678, 682, 704, 707, 754, (09.12.97) 890
Questions
Charities, Government grants to voluntary organisations 451w
National income, Wales 516–7w

Davies, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 85, 113–5, 117
Questions
Loan guarantee scheme 252w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1146

***Davies, Rt Hon Ron**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 671–87, 691–2, 697, 713, 717–21, 733–5, 752–5, 757, 762, 764–6, (09.12.97) 821–2, 828, 832–3, 886, 902
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 341–2
Brecon Beacons National Park, Management 119–20w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Contracts 117w
Cardiff County Council, Local government expenditure 85–6w
Farmers, Wales 339–40
Government of Wales Bill 1997/98 340–1
Local government, Wales 338
Local government expenditure 703–4w
Local government finance, Wales 117–8w, 270w
Millennium compliance, Welsh Office 703w
Ministerial policy advisors, Welsh Office 678w
Ministerial statements, Welsh Office 273w
National Assembly of Wales 267–8w, 304w, 337–8, 342
National Assembly of Wales, Alyn and Deeside 338, 449w
National Assembly of Wales, Costs 342–3
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 337–9, 341–2, 450w
National Assembly of Wales, Sustainable development 304w
National Assembly of Wales, Youth organisations 267w
Non-domestic rates, Wales 119w
Pay, Welsh Office 119w
Permanent secretaries, Welsh Office 306w
Police authorities, Finance 118–9w
Private finance initiative, Wales 268w
Public expenditure, Wales 580–3w
Railway network, Cardiff 704w
Regional planning and development, Wales 345–6
Roads, Deeside 704w

Davis, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Ballistic missile defence (04.12.97) 570–3
European Communities (04.12.97) 563
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 420, 423, 426

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1043
Questions
Algeria, Human rights 14–5w
Astra Training Services, Pensioners 10w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 525w

Day care of children
316–7w
Equal opportunities 1168–9
Government grants 549–50w
Scotland 608w

***Day care of children**—continued*
Taxation 707w
Wales 303–4w

Deaf
Social security benefits backdating 97–8w

Deafness
Armed forces 203–4w

Death
Belmarsh Prison 56w
Industrial accidents 221w
Methadone 574w
Prisoners 55–6w, 586w
Road accidents 543–4w
Smoking related diseases 737w
Transport 225–6w

Debts
672w
Developing countries 993–4
NHS trusts 784
Small businesses 723w

Debts written off
Developing countries 613w

"Dedicated Resources Dedicated Responses"
620w

Deeside
Roads 704w

Defence contracts
Foxley, Gordon 553w

Defence Diversification Agency
7–8

Defence equipment
Exhibitions 335w

Defence estimates
(09.12.97) 907

Defence expenditure
10

Defence industries
(03.12.97) 267–89
Diversification 25w

Defence Intelligence Staff
336–7w

Defence land
8–9, 337w
Fox hunting 385w
Housing 9
Hunting 27w, 385–6w

Defence medical services
22–3w

Defence procurement
332–4w
ASTOR system 23–4w
Sea Harrier aircraft 706w
Trident missiles 27w
Warships 23w, 705w

Defence review
26w, 705w
Armed forces reserves 22w
European fighter aircraft 383w
International cooperation 439–40w
Territorial Army 331w

Defence support agencies
Armed forces civilians 176w

Democratic Republic of the Congo
15w
Overseas aid 3–4w

Demonstrations
Northern Ireland 127w, 363w

***Denham, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 71
Questions
Armed forces, Deafness 203–4w
Attendance allowance, Warrington 534–5w
Cold weather payments 472–3w
Council tax benefits 605w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 327w
Employers' contributions, Income 668w
Handicap benefits, Members' correspondence 669w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 451–2w
Handicapped, Employment schemes 185w
Incapacity benefit 275w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 606w
Income support, Pensioners 202w
Industrial diseases, Social security claims 603–4w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 607–8w
Invalid care allowances 606w
Invalidity benefits 533w
Local exchange and trading schemes 602w
Mobility allowance 669w
National insurance contributions 383w, 731w
National insurance contributions, Actors 275–6w
New deal for sick and disabled people 203w
Pension funds, Economic and monetary union 575w
Pensioners, Winter fuel payments 276w, 327w
Pensions 603w
Pensions Act 1995, Secondary legislation 731w
Retirement pensions, Age addition 603w
Retirement pensions, Index linking 730–1w
Social security abuse, Prosecutions 533w
Social security benefits uprating, Average earnings 471w
Stakeholder pensions 532w
War pensions, Asbestosis 201–2w

Dental services
Consumer protection 455w
Private health services 259w
Scotland 620w
Staffordshire 259w
Wales 304–5w

Dental students
Scotland 460w, 677w
Student grants 599w
Tuition fees 260w

Dentists
Wales 305w

Dentists Act 1984
Questions
455w

Departmental coordination
Cats 148–9w

Departmental correspondence
527w

Departmental publications
Dept of Social Security 203w
Higher education 429–30w

Departmental responsibilities
Exhibitions 695w
Minister Without Portfolio 320–1w

***Departmental responsibilities**—continued*
Poverty 383–4w

Deportation
50w

Deprivation indicators
Educational standards 1167
Schools 1168

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Ethnic minorities 2w
Pay 136–7w

Dept for Education and Employment
Contracts of employment 138–9w
Electronic mail 521w
Ethnic minorities 662–3w
Facsimile transmission 388–9w
Ministerial policy advisors 698–9w
Ministerial statements 660–1w
Open government 549w
Parking 430–1w
Pay 138w
Permanent secretaries 317w
Public bodies 700–2w

Dept for International Development
Civil service recruitment 613–4w
Ethnic minorities 132w
Ministerial policy advisors 364–5w
Ministerial statements 240w
Ministers' visits abroad 132–3w
Public bodies 615w
Publicity 131–2w
World Trade Organisation 365w

Dept for the Environment Transport and the Regions
see Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions

Dept of Health
Annual reports 184–5w
Developing countries trade 343w
Ethnic minorities 177w
Ministerial statements 262w
Parking 459w
Pay 182w
Permanent secretaries 349w
Press 345w
Public appointments 86w
Public bodies 692–3w

Dept of Social Security
Departmental publications 203w
Millennium compliance 732–3w
Ministerial statements 276–7w
Parking 474w
Pay 204w
Permanent secretaries 329w

Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Millennium compliance 729–30w
Ministerial policy advisors 544w
Ministerial statements 399w
Ministers' visits abroad 396–8w
Parking 422w
Pay 111–2w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Civil servants' visits abroad 723–6w
Electronic mail 338–9w
Ethnic minorities 255w
Ministerial policy advisors 721–2w
Ministerial statements 365w
Official hospitality 726w
Open government 95w
Pay 163w
Public expenditure 672w

Deregulation (Licence Transfers) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(11.12.97) 1214

Deregulation Select Committee
(05.12.97) 637

"Designed to Care White Paper"
491–2w

Detection rates
Northern Ireland 674–5w

"Developing an Integrated Transport Policy"
212w

Developing countries
1002
Curriculum 520–1w
Debts 993–4
Debts written off 613w
Health education 993
Intermediate technology 997–8
Spectacles 614w
Technology transfer 998

Developing countries trade
Dept of Health 343w

Development aid
323w
World Bank 610w

Development plans
RAF Quedgeley 554w

Development Policy Forum
Annual reports 323w

Devolution
Foreign investment in UK 147

Devon
Health services 181w

***Dewar, Rt Hon Donald**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc.
Scottish Agricultural College Order Confirmation Bill, 1R (03.12.97) 336
Questions
Advertising, Scottish Office 367–8w
Agricultural workers, Sutherland 140
"Designed to Care White Paper" 491–2w
EC regional policy, Scotland 153w
Electronic mail, Scottish Office 677w
Employment opportunities, Fife 141
Employment opportunities, Scotland 139
Employment opportunities, Tayside 141–2
Employment zones, Glasgow 139–40
Ethnic minorities, Scottish Office 211w
Fisheries, Moray Firth 624w
Fisheries, Scotland 624–5w
Land ownership and tenure, Scotland 152w
Local government finance, Scotland 215–8w
Millennium compliance, Scotland 621w
Ministerial statements, Scottish Office 619w
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 158w
Official engagements 212w
Pay, Scottish Office 215w
Permanent secretaries, Scottish Office 678w
Public expenditure, Scotland 152w, 154w
Railway transport, Cairngorms 628w
Redundancy, Camelon 140
Scottish Office, Relocation of employees 95w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 151w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary elections 152w
Skye bridge 675–6w
Tourist industry, Scotland 140–1
Tuition fees, Scotland 151–2
Unemployment, Scotland 141

Diabetes
Driving licences 48–9w

Digital broadcasting
596–7w

Digital television
Norfolk (10.12.97) 977–83

Dioxins
Milk 353w

Diplomatic immunity
302w

Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964
Questions
302w
Prosecutions 322w

Dir76/160/EEC
629w

Dir91/676/EEC
630w

Dir92/27/EEC
736–7w

Dir96/61/EC
37w

Dir96/71/EC
635w

Directors
NHS trusts 538w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
46w, 243w, 519w, 659w, 663–4w
Small businesses 550w

Disability living allowance
Benefit integrity project 327w
Opposition days (01.12.97) 22–80
Warrington 534–5w

Disability Rights Task Force
Public appointments 242–3w

Discretionary student grants
Handicapped 1172

Discrimination
Handicapped 663w

Disease control
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 19–20w, 150w, 347, 355–7w, 684–5w, 718w
Infectious diseases 457–8w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1283, 1302–12
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1022
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1100–2
Questions
Court rules and procedures, Law reform 662
Employment Appeal Tribunal 93–4w

Divorce
Arbitration schemes 329w
Children 329w

***Dobson, Rt Hon Frank**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission, Ministerial statements (04.12.97) 489–99
NHS, Ministerial statements (09.12.97) 796–810
Questions
Community care, Government grants to local authorities 184w
East Cheshire NHS Trust 786
Haemophilia, Blood transfusions 689–90w
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 689w
Health authorities, Mergers 785–6
Hospitals, Carlisle 788

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank—continued
NHS, Bureaucracy 792
NHS, Capital investment 788–9
NHS administration 792
NHS finance 780
NHS finance, Information technology 781
NHS finance, Warwickshire 780–1
NHS trusts, Leeds 786
NHS trusts, Public appointments 789–90
Personal social services, Government grants to local authorities 184w
Primary health care 777–9
Primary health care, GP fundholders 778
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital Margate 788

Doctor Assisted Dying Bill 1997/98 (Proposed)
Debates etc.
Motion to introduce Bill negatived (10.12.97) 1025–30

Domestic energy conservation
Environmental Task Force 631w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Questions
Firearms, Northern Ireland 615–6w
Royal Irish Regiment, Army strength 176w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Local enterprise agencies, Scotland 155w

Doran, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 102

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Questions
Educational finance, Council tax 1175–6
Student grants, Higher education admission 1172–3

Dorset
Local government finance (10.12.97) 1155–63

Dounreay
Plutonium 249w

Dover
Political refugees 361–2w

Down District Council
Local government staff 364w

Drew, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 379
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal (03.12.97) 315
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 933, 937–40
Questions
Buses, Child safety 548w
Cattle, Data banks 356–7w
Cattle, Transport of animals 359w
Community policing 362w
Crime prevention, Community action 362–3w
Gloucester Prison, Rehabilitation of offenders 437w
Local exchange and trading schemes 543w, 602w
Motor vehicle testing 633–4w
Ottawa Convention 300w
Political refugees 436w
RAF Quedgeley, Development plans 554w
Road haulage licences 548w
Students, Finance 551w
Untreated milk 683–4w

Drinking and driving
Christmas 547w

Driving
EC action 591–2w

Driving instruction
Further education 241w

Driving licences
Diabetes 48–9w
Handicapped drivers 48w

Driving offences
Prosecutions 590–1w
Sentencing 294w
West Yorkshire 289w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal (03.12.97) 313–6

Drug abuse
Armed forces 441w
Finance 456w
Prisoners 504w, 638w

Drug resistance
Tuberculosis 540–1w

Drug side effects
Oral contraceptives 738w

Drugs
181w
EC law 736–7w
VAT (09.12.97) 913–6

Drugs Czar
see UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator

Duchess of Kent Military Hospital
456w

"Due for Renewal"
635–6w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1079

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 22–32, 38–9, 42
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1132–4
Questions
Extracurricular activities 699–700w
New deal for lone parents 328w
Public expenditure 185–6w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Motor industry (09.12.97) 918–21
Open government (11.12.97) 1186
Transport Safety Bill, 1R (02.12.97) 188–90
Questions
Cars, Retail trade 252w
Local education authorities, Cycling 138w
Railway safety, Radio engineering 280w
Railway safety, Telephone services 280w
Transport, Death 225–6w

Duty free allowances
244w
EC action 94w
Employment 253w, 559w
Whisky 625–6w

Eagle, Angela, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Air pollution control, Carbon dioxide 423w
Energy conservation, Performance standards 110w

Eagle, Angela—continued
Environmental Task Force, Domestic energy conservation 631w
Factories, Noise control 37w
Fuel poverty 629w
Gilberts Animal By-Products, Waste management 727–8w
Government buildings, Insurance 225–6w
Home energy efficiency scheme 630–1w
Industrial accidents, Death 221w
Industrial health and safety 43w
Industrial health and safety, Prosecutions 42–3w, 412–4w
Land pollution, Land reclamation 220w
Millennium compliance, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 729–30w
Millennium compliance, Industrial health and safety 32w
Ministerial statements, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 399w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 396–8w
Nuclear accidents, Emergency planning 222w
Nuclear safety, Licensing 223–4w
Organophosphates, Medical records 110w
Pay, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 111–2w
Pollution control 422–3w
Sea pollution 32w
Sea pollution, Fylde 31–2w
Single regeneration budget 105–6w
Sites of special scientific interest, Thorne Moors 226–7w, 285w
South Downs, Environment protection 46–7w
Sustainable development 107w
Urban areas, Trees 110w
Waste management, West Yorkshire 37–42w
Water and sewerage companies, Rodents 111w
Water conservation 36w
Water distribution, Lead pipes 399w
Water pollution 629w
Water pollution, Pollution control 630w
Water pollution, Prosecutions 421–2w
Water supply, Hampshire 629w
Working conditions, Building industry 223w

Eagle, Maria
Questions
Debts 672w

Ear tagging
717w
Cattle 149w, 682w

Early day motions
Parliamentary private secretaries 410w

Early retirement
Home Office 54w
NHS 686–7w

East and Midlothian NHS Trust
Hospitals 150

East Cheshire NHS Trust
786

East Sussex
Housing construction 400w

Eastern Arts Board
Arts Council grants 464w

Eastern Europe
Common agricultural policy 474

Eastern Health and Social Services Board
Prosthetics 128–9w

Eastern region
National Lottery 319w

EC action
Battery hens 18w
Biotechnology 719–20w
Driving 591–2w
Duty free allowances 94w
Employment discrimination 386w
Employment opportunities 15w, 723w
Tobacco advertising (03.12.97) 459

EC aid
323w, 611w
Cuba 239w
Environment protection 501w

EC budget
407w
Pension funds 168w

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC Cons Doc 9984/97
(10.12.97) 1152, (11.12.97) 1210–4

EC countries
Animal feed 713–4w
Export controls 300w
Public service pensions 508–9w

EC Development Council
EC Environment Council 501w
Sustainable development 501w

EC Draft 10230/97
163w, (10.12.97) 1149

EC Draft 10975/97
(10.12.97) 1149

EC Draft 10975/97/1
(10.12.97) 1149

EC Draft 10975/97/2
(10.12.97) 1149

EC Draft 6294/92
(03.12.97) 459

EC economic policy
Handicapped 519w

EC enlargement
229–30w
Own resources (11.12.97) 1210

EC Environment Council
EC Development Council 501w

EC Environmental policy
EC presidency 576–7w

EC external relations
Algeria 406w
Tibet 405w

EC Finance Council
513–4w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
649–50w

EC grants and loans
Northern Ireland 308w
Shipbuilding 252–3w
Wales 518w

EC Health Council
458–9w

EC immigration
Treaty of Amsterdam 236w

EC Industry Council
341w

EC Internal Market Council
527w

EC internal trade
Smuggling 428–9w

EC labour policy
(10.12.97) 1149

EC law
82–4w
Drugs 736–7w
Employment protection 342w
Hill farming 490w
Water pollution 289–91w

EC presidency
EC Environmental policy 576–7w

EC regional policy
(10.12.97) 1152
Scotland 153w

EC Social Charter
725–6w

EC Telecommunications Council
525–6w

Economic and monetary union
245w, 707–8w
Company accounts 89–90w
Expenditure 369w
Financial institutions 168w
Pension funds 575w
Publicity 369w

Economic and Social Research Council
Research finance 670w

Economic growth
559–60w

Education action zones
1167

Education and Employment Select Committee
(08.12.97) 768

Education (Student Loans) (Amendment) Regulations 1997
Questions
661–2w

Educational assessment
Literacy 1170–1

Educational finance
11w, 389w, 1175–6
Council tax 1175–6
Further education 241w, 309–10w, 662w
Further education colleges 654–5w
Gloucestershire 1175
Literacy 658–9w
Scotland 143

Educational qualifications
New deal for young unemployed 1166
School leaving 654w
Tuition fees 387w

Educational standards
522w
Class sizes 392–3w
Deprivation indicators 1167
English language 661w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 394–6w
Higher education admission 429w
Physical education 520w, 551w
Schools 655–6w
Sixth form colleges 1167–8
Vocational training 651w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 725, (09.12.97) 842–6
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 269w
Territorial Army, Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers 2–3

Efford, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1290–1

Eggs
Agricultural production 18w
Food consumption 17w
Food hygiene 19w

Egypt
Terrorism 300–1w

Elderly
781–2
Kidney patients 733w
Medical treatments 537w
Social services 454w

Electric cables
North Western Electricity Board 255–6w

Electric shock equipment
592w

Electricity
Imports 352

Electricity Act 1989
Questions
595w

Electricity generation
Coal 94w
Energy resources 219w

Electroconvulsive therapy
376w

Electroconvulsive Therapy (Restrictions on Use) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (03.12.97) 393–5

Electronic mail
Dept for Education and Employment 521w
Dept of Trade and Industry 338–9w
Prime Minister 411w
Scottish Office 677w

Electronic surveillance
Cellular phones 299w
Telephone tapping 321w

Electronic tagging
589w

"Eliminating World Poverty"
383–4w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 363
Questions
Theatres, North West region 372w

Emergency planning
Mixed oxide fuel 492–3w
Nuclear accidents 222w

Emergency services
Millennium compliance 433–4w

Employers' contributions
Income 668w

Employment
Duty free allowances 253w, 559w
Lone parents 600w
Tax yields 167w
Tourist industry 136w, 319w, 514w

Employment Appeal Tribunal
93–4w

Employment discrimination
EC action 386w
Handicapped 243w, 519w
Northern Ireland 307–8w, 516w
Northern Ireland Civil Service 8w

Employment discrimination*—*continued
Small businesses 243w, 519w
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights 516w

Employment opportunities
EC action 15w, 723w
Fife 141
Scotland 139
Tayside 141–2
Tourist industry 465–6w
Wales 304w, 450–1w

Employment protection
EC law 342w

Employment schemes
Handicapped 185w

Employment Service
Contracts for services 390–1w

Employment zones
523–4w
Glasgow 139–40

"EMU Practical Information for Business"
365–6w, 369w

Energy conservation
Performance standards 110w

Energy consumption
Public utilities 463w

Energy policy
531w

Energy prices
Pensioners 606–7w
VAT 606–7w

Energy resources
Electricity generation 219w

English language
Educational standards 661w

Ennis, Mr Jeff
Questions
Art works, Insurance 1–2w
Council of Ministers 231–6w
Tourist industry, Training 658

Enterprise zones
Internet 250–1w

Environment protection
Agriculture 269w, 353w
Aviation fuels 495w
EC aid 501w
Norfolk Broads 350–1w
Opencast mining 268w
South Downs 46–7w

Environmental Audit Select Committee
(02.12.97) 256

Environmental health
Scotland 151

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
111w, 598w

Environmental Task Force
Domestic energy conservation 631w

Equal opportunities
604w
Day care of children 1168–9
Handicapped 518w
Northern Ireland Civil Service 8–9w

Equal Opportunities Commission
Government grants 522w, 533–4w

Espionage
Fishing vessels 171w, 173w
Kingston upon Hull 171w
Russia 173w

Etherington, Bill
Questions
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority, Finance 420–1w

Ethnic groups
Welfare to work 388w

Ethnic minorities
Armed forces recruitment 12–3
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 2w
Dept for Education and Employment 662–3w
Dept for International Development 132w
Dept of Health 177w
Dept of Trade and Industry 255w
Home Office 54w
Judges 330w
Northern Ireland Office 7w
President of the Council 130w
Public appointments 326w
Scottish Office 211w

Euro
Publicity 365–6w
Tax collection 5–6w

European Charter of Local Self-Government
115w, 496w

European Coal and Steel Community
15–6w

European Coal and Steel Community budget
594–5w

European Commission
British residents abroad 498w
Costs 121w
Information 641–2w
Personnel 498w

European Communities
see also EC headings

European Communities
(04.12.97) 513–69

European Communities (Amendment) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Com (02.12.97) 191–256, (03.12.97) 396–459

European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European Police Office) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(09.12.97) 910–3

European Communities (Recognition of Professional Qualifications) Regulations 1991
Questions
532w

European Community (Immunities and Privileges of the European Police Office) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(09.12.97) 908–10

European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters
298w

European Council
11w

European fighter aircraft
22w, 639w
Defence review 383w

European Parliament
Parliamentary buildings 710w
Voting methods 13w

European Parliament elections
Gibraltar 499w

European Police Office
(09.12.97) 908–13

European voluntary service for young people
123–4w, 147–8w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1205
Defence industries (03.12.97) 271–2
European Communities (04.12.97) 515, 518
Farm incomes, Points of order (01.12.97) 19
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 706, 730, 744, 750, (09.12.97) 820–9, 839, 843, 872
Industrial disputes, Standing Order No 24 applications (02.12.97) 186–7
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 344
Child Abuse in North Wales Judicial Inquiry, Costs 703w
Developing countries 1002
Rough sleepers initiative, Greater London 726–7w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 245w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1201
Ministerial statements, Points of order (09.12.97) 811–2
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Scotland 213–5w
Duty free allowances, Employment 559w
Fisheries, Moray Firth 624w
Fisheries, Scotland 624–5w
Medical research, Scotland 618–9w
Pensions Act 1995, Secondary legislation 731w
Scottish Office, Medical research 617w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 151w
Smoking related diseases, Scotland 214–5w, 318w
Trident 335–6w
Universities, Scottish Islands 619–20w
Whisky, Duty free allowances 625–6w

"Excellence For All Children Consultation Paper"
(05.12.97) 580–637

"Excellence in Schools White Paper"
137–8w, 552w, 654w

Exchange rates
171w

Executives
Post Office 341w

Exhaust emissions
(11.12.97) 1214

Exhibitions
Defence equipment 335w
Departmental responsibilities 695w
Government grants 594w

Export Control Organisation
596w

Export controls
EC countries 300w
Mixed oxide fuel 528w

Export credit guarantees
Arms exports 718–9w

Export Credits Guarantee Dept
Disclosure of information 94–5w

Export licensing
671w, 722w
Administrative delays 159w

Export of live animals
Pigs 355–6w

Export promotion
596w

Exports
Beef 475, 685w
Mixed oxide fuel 248–9w

Extracurricular activities
699–700w

Extradition
Attorney General 322w

Faber, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 210
Questions
Export Control Organisation 596w
Export licensing 722w
Free trade 996–7
Indonesia, Police training 406w
Nigeria, Vision 2010 405–6w
Sudan, UN resolutions 406–7w
Tibet, Human rights 405w
West Indies Guardship 383w
Zimbabwe, Land nationalisation 303w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 324w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 508
House of Commons questions, Points of order (08.12.97) 669
Intervention during question after statement (09.12.97) 808
Questions
Cattle, Animal breeding 270w
House of Commons procedure, Prayer 130w
NHS, Training 790

Facsimile transmission
Dept for Education and Employment 388–9w

Factor VIII
Haemophilia 536w

Factories
Noise control 37w

Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland
Royal Ulster Constabulary 246w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 117–20
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 295, 304–10
Questions
Coal mining, Cabinet committees 411w
Egypt, Terrorism 300–1w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 476w
Public expenditure, Scotland 152w

Families
466w

Family conciliation services
378–9w
Publicity 379w

Family credit
602w
Income tax 429w

Family income
381–2w

Family Law Act 1996
Questions
378–9w

Family practitioner services
Wales 579–80w

Farm buildings
150w

Farm incomes
Food exports 480
Hill farming 350w

Farmers
Beef 473–8
Marginal land 350w
Wales 339–40

Farms
Mink 714–6w

***Fatchett, Mr Derek**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Albania, Official visits 122w
Algeria, EC external relations 406w
Algeria, Human rights 14–5w
BBC external services, Security vetting 370w
Children 121w
China, Human rights 650w
Democratic Republic of the Congo 15w
EC Environmental policy, EC presidency 576–7w
Egypt, Terrorism 300–1w
Home Office exports initiative 648w
Immigration applications 120w, 405w, 500w
India, British embassies 13w, 120w, 300w
India, Immigration applications 120w, 369w, 496–7w
India, Ministers' visits abroad 13w
India, Overseas trade 12w
India, Ports 577w
India, Visas 405w
Indian subcontinent, Immigration applications 496w
Indonesia, Arms trade 577w
Indonesia, Police training 406w
Iraq, Sanctions 407w
Iraq, UN resolutions 13w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 711w
Millennium compliance, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 711w
Mixed oxide fuel, Transport of radioactive materials 122w
Museum of Europe 12–3w
Nigeria, British embassies 14w
Nigeria, Immigration applications 14w
Rehman, Abdul, Visas 122w
Rockall 14w
South Africa, Homicide 120–1w
Sudan, Foreign policy 499w
Sudan, UN resolutions 406–7w
Tibet, EC external relations 405w
Tibet, Human rights 405w
UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara, UK contributions 498–9w
United Arab Emirates, Child workers 577–8w
Visas 500w
World Summit for Children 121w

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Museums and galleries, Wheelchairs 211w
Tourism, Graduates 386w
Tourism, Higher education 386–7w
Tourism, Investment 465w
Tourist industry, Employment 136w
Tourist industry, Finance 136w
Tourist industry, Greater London 136w
Tourist industry, Minimum wage 651

Fearn, Mr Ronnie—continued
Tourist industry, Training 136w

Fences
Railway track 110–1w

Ferries
Passports 85w
Scotland 147–8

***Field, Rt Hon Frank**, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 25
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Departmental publications 203w
Millennium compliance, Dept of Social Security 732–3w
Parking, Dept of Social Security 474w
Pay, Dept of Social Security 204w
Public expenditure 185–6w
Social security benefits, Advertising 475w
Social security benefits, Legislation 532–3w
Social security reform 202w

Fife
Employment opportunities 141

Film industry
465w

Financial institutions
Economic and monetary union 168w

Fines
Railway transport 285w

Fire services
Manpower 58–82w

Firearms
Compensation 210w, 295w, 503–4w, 639w, 696w
Northern Ireland 615–6w

Firearms Act 1968
Questions
592w

Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997
Questions
503–4w, 696w

Firearms (Amendment) (No 2) Act 1997 Compensation Scheme 1997
Questions
503–4w

Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981
Questions
615–6w

Fiscal policy
709w

***Fisher, Mr Mark**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
Digital television, Norfolk (10.12.97) 980–3
Parliamentary broadcasting (11.12.97) 1258–62
Questions
BBC, Archives 373w
British Library 469w
British Library, Conservation 470w
British Library, Construction 470w
British Library, Income 469w
British Library, Offices 470w
British Library, Pay 468–9w
Eastern Arts Board, Arts Council grants 464w
Jazz 467w
Libraries, Training 373w
Museums and galleries, Wheelchairs 211w

Fisher, Mr Mark—continued
National Sound Archive, Property transfer 469–70w
Public libraries, Information services 465w
Sports, Broadcast Journalism 374w
Sports, Radio 373w
Theatres, Inner city areas 466–7w
Theatres, North West region 372w

Fisheries
Moray Firth 624w
Scotland 624–5w

Fishing vessels
Decommissioning 469
Espionage 171w, 173w
Safety equipment 547–8w

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1075–7
Questions
UN Conference on Environment and Development 1008

Flags
Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust 128w

Flight, Mr Howard
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 106
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 204–8, 222
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1069–70
Questions
COBRA Project 28w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 995
Community health councils 343w, 453–4w
Cuba, EC aid 239w
Employment opportunities, EC action 15w, 723w
European Parliament, Voting methods 13w
Hospital waiting lists 535–6w
Museum of Europe 12–3w
Public expenditure, Wales 345
Shipbuilding, EC grants and loans 252–3w
Stakeholder pensions 532w
Treaty of Amsterdam, EC immigration 236w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 25, 58–62, 70
Questions
Sites of special scientific interest, Thorne Moors 226–7w, 285w

Flood control
Set-aside schemes 150w

Floods
Thames estuary 350w

Flotta
Port state control 31w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1202–3
Open government (11.12.97) 1196
Questions
Animal experiments, Cosmetics industry 50w
Defence equipment, Exhibitions 335w
Defence land, Fox hunting 385w
Defence land, Hunting 385–6w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 171–3w

Food consumption
Eggs 17w
Poultry meat 17w

Food (Control of Irradiation) Regulations 1990
Questions
524w

Food exports
Farm incomes 480

Food hygiene
Civil service agencies 360w
Eggs 19w
Expenditure 361w
Poultry meat 19w

Food imports
352w
Poultry meat 718w

Food labelling
353w
Animal feed 684w
Beef 717w
Chocolate 20w
Ritual slaughter 19w

Food Labelling Regulations 1996
Questions
524w

Food packaging
Consumer information 524w

Food Safety Act 1990
Questions
540w

Food standards
354–5w, 489w
Expenditure 353w
Milk 357w, 490w
Minister Without Portfolio 321w
Untreated milk 357w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Millennium compliance 711w
Parking 407w
Public bodies 647w

Foreign investment
USA 529w

Foreign investment in UK
255w, (03.12.97) 290–312, 529w
Devolution 147
Minimum wage 267w
National Assembly of Wales 343–4
Scotland 144–6, 152w
South East Asia 344
USA 529w
Wales 270w, 343–4, 449w

Foreign policy
Sierra Leone 500w
Sudan 499w

Foreign relations
Russia 12w

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1192

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (11.12.97) 1199
Business questions (11.12.97) 1201
NHS (09.12.97) 810
Questions
National Assembly of Wales 337
Private Members' bills 154
Sports sponsorship 465w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1191

Foster, Rt Hon Derek—continued
Questions
New deal for young unemployed, Training 1179

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 591–5
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 139–47w
Colleges of education, Inspections 315–6w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Educational standards 394–6w
Home-school partnership agreements 137–8w
Literacy, Educational assessment 1170–1
Pupil-teacher ratios 312–6w
Schools, Internet 9–10w
Special education, Headteachers 315w
Teacher training, Shortage subjects 393–4w
Teacher training, Vacancies 393w
Teachers, Lost working days 9w
Teachers, Tax allowances 427–8w

Foster, Mr Michael, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 454
Questions
Employment zones 523–4w
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 6
Tourist industry, Training 658

Foulkes, Mr George, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development
Questions
Aid financed trade 236–8w
Aid financed trade, Unemployment 238w
Armed conflict, Children 1000
Armenia, Overseas aid 134w
Chevening scholarship programme 1000–1
Commonwealth, Population 609w
Cuba, EC aid 239w
Developing countries, Intermediate technology 997–8
Developing countries, Technology transfer 998
Development aid 323w
Development Policy Forum, Annual reports 323w
EC aid 323w
Ethnic minorities, Dept for International Development 132w
Kenya, Ministers' visits abroad 323–4w
Ministerial statements, Dept for International Development 240w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept for International Development 132–3w
Mixed credits 239w
Non-governmental organisations, Manpower 239w
Overseas aid 239–40w, 322–3w, 610w, 998
Overseas aid, Children 238–9w
Publicity, Dept for International Development 131–2w
St Helena 999
St Helena, Airports 999
South Africa, Information technology 998
Transcaucasus, Refugees 123w
United Nations, Curriculum 239w
World Bank, UK contributions 610w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 324w

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 164–5

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman*—*continued
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 359–60
Questions
Council tax, Valuation 729w
Members' facilities, Local government revenue 728–9w

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 510
Conuygar Quarry (08.12.97) 769–71, 776
Disclosure of information, Points of order (03.12.97) 390
European Communities (04.12.97) 515, 533–9, 541, 549, 567
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 303, 312
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 762–3
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 942–4
Questions
Foreign investment in UK 529w
Higher education, Scotland 461w
Maternity services, Scotland 212w
Scottish Parliament, Finance 707w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 151w
Tuition fees, Scotland 461w
Unemployment, Scotland 141

Fox hunting
437w
Defence land 385w

Foxley, Gordon
Defence contracts 553w

Fraser, Mr Christopher
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 993–4
Health insurance 536w
Lotteries 295w
Sports sponsorship 655

Free trade
996–7

Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No 2) Regulations 1996
Questions
718w

Frigates
Caribbean 706w

Fruit
355w

Fuel poverty
629w

Fuels
Carbon dioxide 730w

Funerals
Charities 92w
Consumer protection 90–3w, 160–1w, 339–40w
Fees and charges 90w
Manpower 169w
Marketing 91w
Ombudsman 91w
Unfair dismissal 92w

Further education
Cost per student 309w, 551w
Driving instruction 241w
Educational finance 241w, 309–10w, 662w
New deal for young unemployed 240w
Student numbers 240–1w

Further education colleges
Educational finance 654–5w
New deal for young unemployed 432w
Welfare to work 654–5w

Fyfe, Maria
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1044, 1085, 1089–90, 1142–3

Fylde
32w
Sea pollution 31–2w

Galbraith, Mr Sam, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Scotland 213–5w
Asbestos, Scotland 212–3w
Breasts, Plastic surgery 675w
Dental services, Scotland 620w
East and Midlothian NHS Trust, Hospitals 150
Housing, Scotland 150–1
Housing finance, Scotland 151
Maternity services, Scotland 212w
Medical research, Scotland 618–9w
Mental illness specific grant, Scotland 620w
NHS, Scotland 150–1w
NHS administration, Scotland 152–3w
Nursing homes, Scotland 617w
Scottish National Sleep Laboratory 626w
Scottish Office, Medical research 617w
Smoking related diseases, Scotland 214–5w, 318w
Students, Expenditure 621w
Voluntary organisations, Scotland 701–3w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
NHS (09.12.97) 808
Questions
Duty free allowances, EC action 94w
Duty free allowances, Employment 253w
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital Margate 788

Galloway, Mr George
Questions
Glasgow City Council 152w

Gaming machines
292w
Licensed premises 292w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 242, 253–6, (03.12.97) 396–403, 444

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 621–4
Questions
Hospital discharges 260w
Northern Cyprus 370w
Smuggling, EC internal trade 428–9w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1016–7
Open government (11.12.97) 1191
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 938
Questions
Conditional fee agreements 115w
Conditional fee agreements, Damages 115w
Conditional fee agreements, Legal aid 663–4
Conditional fee agreements, Negligence 115w
Conditional fee agreements, Public opinion 115–6w
Defence medical services 22–3w

Garnier, Mr Edward*—*continued
House of Commons questions, Minister Without Portfolio 156
Legal costs, Insurance 116w
Military law 331w

Gas fired power stations
531–2w, 673w
Coal mine closures 160w

Gas supply industry
North Sea 279w
Taxation 279w

Gene Therapy Advisory Committee
Public appointments 598–9w

General Certificate of Secondary Education
Educational standards 394–6w

General Electric Company
16
Church of England 15

General practitioners
Primary health care 456–7w

General Teaching Council
Fees and charges 552w
Private education 552w

General Teaching Council for Wales
583w

Geneva Conventions (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (12.12.97) 1331

George, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1208
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 754
Universities, Public petitions (10.12.97) 1154
Questions
Higher education, Cornwall 1176–7
Tax administration, Rural areas 6w

George, Mr Bruce
Questions
Stabilisation Force in Bosnia 24w

George House Trust
Members' correspondence 256w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1143–5
Questions
Climate Change Convention 611w
Immigrant detainees 292–3w
Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities 7–8w
Political refugees, Reviews 99w, 293–4w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 50–1, 59, 62–4
Questions
Elderly, Medical treatments 537w
Literacy 366w
Minimum wage, Wales 267w
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 5–6, 25w
Public finance, Accounting 366w
Social security reform 204w
Tax credits, USA 244w
Tax harmonisation 168w
Tuition fees, Costs 310–1w
VAT, Home care services 508w

Gibraltar
European Parliament elections 499w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 260
Questions
Biotechnology, EC action 719–20w
Contracts of employment 317w
Dept for Education and Employment, Contracts of employment 138–9w
Foreign investment in UK, USA 529w
NHS trusts, Road accidents 782
Oral contraceptives, Drug side effects 738w
Research councils, Contracts of employment 253w
Water pollution 629w

Gilberts Animal By-Products
Waste management 727–8w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 516–7, 531, 537, 554–7, 569
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 43
Questions
A49, Road accidents 36–7w
Common fisheries policy 469–70
Economic and monetary union 245w
Employment discrimination, EC action 386w
European Coal and Steel Community budget 594–5w
European voluntary service for young people 123–4w, 147–8w
Exchange rates 171w
Kidderminster Hospital 177–8w, 787
Members' travel, Costs 491w
Prisoners of war, Armed forces officers' pay 4–5

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Questions
Business link 254w
Consumer credit 89w
Emergency services, Millennium compliance 433–4w
Equal opportunities 604w
Equal Opportunities Commission, Government grants 522w, 533–4w
Gas fired power stations 673w
Home Office exports initiative 245–6w
Members' correspondence 595w
Millennium compliance, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 325w
Millennium compliance, Dept of Social Security 732–3w
Millennium compliance, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 729–30w
Millennium compliance, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 711w
Millennium compliance, Government departments 324–5w
Millennium compliance, Local government expenditure 287w
Millennium compliance, NHS finance 349–50w
Millennium compliance, Welsh Office 703w, 714w
Minister for Women 669w
National childcare strategy 522w
Women, Armed forces deployment 604w
Women, Cabinet committees 534w
Women, Internet 471–2w

Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Questions
Royal yacht 7

Glasgow
Employment zones 139–40

Glasgow City Council
152w

Gloucester Prison
Rehabilitation of offenders 437w

Gloucestershire
Educational finance 1175
Structure plans 400w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 291, 309
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1228, 1236, 1246–8
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1087, 1100–2, 1110
Questions
Beaufort Dyke, Radioactive waste disposal 219–20w
Cold weather payments 472–3w
Ferries, Scotland 148
Fishing vessels, Safety equipment 547–8w
Grant maintained schools, Scotland 462w
Local education authorities, Scotland 462w
Mental illness specific grant, Scotland 620w
Royal yacht 6
UN Security Council 211w

Godsiff, Mr Roger
Questions
BBC, Archives 373w

Goggins, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1078–80

Gold
Nazi victims 370w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Questions
Social Exclusion Unit 319w

Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Questions
Aid financed trade 236–8w
Aid financed trade, Unemployment 238w
Common agricultural policy, Ministerial duties 598w
Curriculum, Developing countries 520–1w
Defence review, International cooperation 439–40w
Dept for International Development, World Trade Organisation 365w
Development aid 323w
Development Policy Forum, Annual reports 323w
EC aid 323w
Indonesia, Police training 615w
Mixed credits 239w
Non-governmental organisations, Manpower 239w
Overseas aid 239–40w
Poverty, Departmental responsibilities 383–4w
Zimbabwe, Land nationalisation 994

Gordon, Eileen
Questions
Further education colleges, Welfare to work 654–5w
Line of route, House of Commons catering 403w
National Lottery, Eastern region 319w
National Lottery, Romford 371–2w
Palace of Westminster, Blood donors 403–4w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 386–7
Business (01.12.97) 102, 107, 110
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 28, 34, 40, 45

Gorrie, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 70–1
Questions
Athletics 557–9w
Languages education, Secondary education 460w
New deal for young unemployed 652w
Scottish Office 95w
Scottish Office, Relocation of employees 95w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 95–7w, 151w, 318w
Transport policy 212w
Voluntary organisations, Scotland 701–3w

Government assistance to industry
Costs 644w

Government buildings
Insurance 225–6w
Ministry of Defence 23w
Property transfer 272–3w
Welsh Office 272–3w

Government contracts
Northern Ireland Office 427w

Government departments
Millennium compliance 324–5w
Private finance initiative 571–3w

Government grants to local authorities
634w
Community care 184w
Personal social services 184w
Transport 727w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
Charities 451w
Wales 451w

Government of Wales Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R (08.12.97) 671–768
2R and Money res* (09.12.97) 815–906
Questions
267–8w, 340–2

GP commissioners
539–40w

GP fundholders
see also General practitioners

GP fundholders
Primary health care 778
Surrey 348–50w
Vaccination 305w

Graduates
Tourism 386w

Grant, Mr Bernie
Questions
South Africa, Information technology 998

Grant maintained schools
Scotland 462w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 932
Questions
Dairy farming 478–9
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 144–5
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Parliamentary building maintenance and repair 452w
Residential care, Wiltshire 686w

Great Yarmouth
New deal for young unemployed 1180–1

Greater London
Council housing 419w
Health services 179w
Homelessness 111w
Housing construction 283w
Millennium 371w
Rented housing 283w
Rough sleepers initiative 726–7w
Standard spending assessments 33–4w
Tourist industry 136w
Vocational guidance 521–2w

Greater London Authority
35w

Greece
Turkey 710w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 212–3
Tax avoidance, Points of order (01.12.97) 20
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties 244w
Insurance premium tax 428w
Personal savings 351–2
Tibet, Human rights 405w
UNESCO, Costs 613w
VAT, Charities 428w

Green Lily
see MV Green Lily

Green pound
Compensation 21w

Greenbelt
Hertfordshire 583w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Defence industries (03.12.97) 277–80
Local government finance (02.12.97) 170
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1019
Questions
Hill livestock allowances 471

Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College
384–5w, 695w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1237
Questions
Playing fields, Property transfer 661w

Griffiths, Jane
Debates etc.
NHS (09.12.97) 807

Griffiths, Mr Nigel, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 93, 95
Questions
Cars, Retail trade 252w
Consumer credit 89w
Departmental correspondence 527w
Ethnic minorities, Dept of Trade and Industry 255w
Funerals, Consumer protection 90–3w, 160–1w, 339–40w
Funerals, Fees and charges 90w
Funerals, Marketing 91w
Guinness 462w
Open government, Dept of Trade and Industry 95w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel*—*continued
Toys and games, Safety standards 161–2w, 343w
World War II, Property law 595w, 673w

Griffiths, Mr Win, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 687, 764, (09.12.97) 886–93, 900–1
Postal services, Wales (05.12.97) 642–8
Questions
Agenda 21, Wales 679w
Agriculture, Wales 269w
All Wales agri-environment scheme, Finance 517w
Antismoking campaign, Wales 271w
Cattle, Animal breeding 270w
Charities, Government grants to voluntary organisations 451w
Child Abuse in North Wales Judicial Inquiry, Costs 703w
Contracts for services, Competition 307w
Dental services, Wales 304–5w
Dentists, Wales 305w
GP fundholders, Vaccination 305w
Hill livestock allowances, Wales 269–70w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 269w
Housing construction, Wales 344–5
Housing for Wales 306w
Local government expenditure, Wales 518w
NHS administration, Expenditure 273–4w
NHS trusts, NHS administration 270w
NHS trusts, North Wales 450w
Police, Wales 272w
Refugees, Wales 580w
Residential care of children, Wales 340
Sheep premiums, Wales 451w
Silicone, Health hazards 517w
Smoking related diseases, Wales 271w
Town and country planning, Wales 305w
Uniform business rate, Wales 269w
Vaccination, Children 579–80w
Wales Agri-environment Scheme Working Group, Public appointments 517w
Welsh Office, Government buildings 272–3w
Wood, Wales 679w

Griffiths Committee
see Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education Etc

Grogan, Mr John
Questions
Biodiversity 352w
Millennium Exhibition 2–3w

Group 4 Securitas
Civil servants 434–5w
Contracts 592–3w

Guernsey
Offshore trusts 575–6w

"Guidelines for the Management of Civil Plutonium"
163–4w

Guinness
462w

Gunnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Electroconvulsive Therapy (Restrictions on Use) Bill, 1R (03.12.97) 393–5
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 496–7
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 364
Questions
Cycling, Transport policy 282w
National cycling strategy 282w

Gunnell, Mr John*—*continued
NHS trusts, Leeds 786
Prisoners, Suicide 435w, 587–8w
Speed limits, Cameras 289w

Guy's Hospital
(12.12.97) 1333–40

Habitual residence test
380w
Costs 379w

Hackney
Schools, (01.12.97) 130–8

Haemophilia
Blood transfusions 689–90w
Factor VIII 536w
Hepatitis 689w

Hague, Rt Hon William,
Questions
Personal savings, Tax allowances 349
Taxation, Married people 1003–5

Hain, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 740, 750, 753, 758–9, 763, 766–7, (09.12.97) 815–20, 823, 827, 836, 839, 848–9
Questions
A465, Road construction 346
A470, Road construction 678w
Agriculture, Wales 344
CELTEC, Redundancy 306w
Day care of children, Wales 303–4w
EC grants and loans, Wales 518w
Employment opportunities, Wales 304w, 450–1w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 270w, 343–4, 449w
General Teaching Council for Wales 583w
Local education authorities, Wales 270–1w
Minimum wage, Foreign investment in UK 267w
Minimum wage, Wales 267w
National Assembly of Wales 345
National Assembly of Wales, Foreign investment in UK 343–4
National income, Wales 516–7w
Opencast mining, Environment protection 268w
Public expenditure, Wales 345
Public transport, Wales 450w
Schools, Vandalism 271–2w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 274w
Windfall tax, Local government revenue 272w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Questions
Immigration applications 405w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 115
Questions
"Excellence in Schools White Paper" 654w
Firearms, Compensation 696w
Mass media, Ownership 466w
Minimum wage, Foreign investment in UK 267w
Mortgages, Income support 732w
National insurance contributions 731w

Hampshire
Water supply 629w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Questions
Armenia, Overseas aid 134w

Hancock, Mr Mike—continued
Defence support agencies, Armed forces civilians 176w
Employment Service, Contracts for services 390–1w
European fighter aircraft 639w
Frigates, Caribbean 706w
Harrier aircraft 706w
HMS Daedalus, Rescue services 419w
Members' correspondence 291w
Meningitis 346w, 457–8w
NHS, Contracts for services 735w
NHS finance 693–4w
Nimrod aircraft 263w, 332w
Royal yacht 7, 320w, 333–5w, 385w
Sea Harrier aircraft, Defence procurement 706w
Self-assessment of tax 574w
South Western Regional Health Authority, Nurses' training 687w, 735w
Transcaucasus, Refugees 123w
Warships, Defence procurement 705w
Youth unemployment, Portsmouth 390w

Handicap benefits
Members' correspondence 669w
Social security reform 451–2w

Handicapped
Access to buildings 211w
Athletics 654
Discretionary student grants 1172
Discrimination 663w
EC economic policy 519w
Employment discrimination 243w, 519w
Employment schemes 185w
Equal opportunities 518w
Legal aid 663–4w
Married personal allowance 367w
Means tested benefits 731–2w
Treaty of Amsterdam 310w

Handicapped drivers
Driving licences 48w

Hanson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 82, 87
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 688, 739, 741–6
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 343
NHS administration 792

Hare Coursing Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (12.12.97) 1332

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet, Secretary of State for Social Security
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 32–43
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1045, 1084–92, 1131–2
Questions
Ministerial statements, Dept of Social Security 276–7w
National insurance contributions 205–6w
Social security benefits rates 186–201w

Harmon (CFEM) Facades (UK)
(12.12.97) 1332

Harrier aircraft
706w

Harris, Dr Evan
Questions
Dental students, Student grants 599w
Haemophilia, Blood transfusions 689–90w
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 689w
Medical students, Student grants 599w
Oxfordshire County Council, Local government social services 49w, 89w

Harrogate
Local government finance 418w

Harvey, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 362
Questions
Health services, Devon 181w
House of Commons Chamber 131w
Regional development agencies 106w

Hatfield Moor
Sites of special scientific interest 226–7w, 285w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1206
Questions
Firearms, Compensation 295w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Education and Employment 698–9w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 364–5w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 544w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of Trade and Industry 721–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Lord Chancellor's Dept 667w
Ministerial policy advisors, Minister Without Portfolio 668w
Ministerial policy advisors, President of the Council 705w
Ministerial policy advisors, Welsh Office 678w
Special education, Finance 1169–70
Sports sponsorship 655–6

Hayes, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 458
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 264
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1068, 1070

Head lice
Schools 345w

Heads of state
Official gifts 584w

Headteachers
Professional qualifications 552–3w
Special education 315w

Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Questions
Youth employment 653–4w

Healey, Mr John
Questions
Handicapped, Employment discrimination 243w
New deal for young unemployed 652w
Tourist industry, Employment 514w

Health
Housing standards 688w

Health and Safety Executive
Manpower 223w

Health authorities
Administrative costs 455w
Mergers 785–6
Worcestershire 787–8

Health education
Developing countries 993
Performance standards 685w

Health hazards
Pesticides 524w

Health hazards—continued
Silicone 517w

Health insurance
536w

Health service staff
734–5w, 784
Conflict of interests 617w
Stress related illnesses 687–8w

Health services
Barnet 539w
Devon 181w
Greater London 179w
VAT 561w

Health warnings
Cellular phones 456w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 385–6
European Communities (04.12.97) 520, 543–7
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 406–7
Questions
Pollution control 422–3w
Regional planning and development, Wales 345–6
St Helena 999

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David,
Questions
International Monetary Fund, South Korea 642–3w
South Korea, UK contributions 643–4w

Heathrow Airport
Air travel 419–20w

Heating
Pensioners 730w

Hemp
Licensing 21w

Henderson, Mr Doug, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 543, 561, 563–9
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 218–29, 245–7, (03.12.97) 434–7, 445, 448–9
Questions
Berlaymont building, Repairs and maintenance 229w
Council of Ministers 231–6w
Cyprus, Armed forces deployment 497–8w
EC enlargement 229–30w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 649–50w
Economic and monetary union, Expenditure 369w
Economic and monetary union, Publicity 369w
European Commission, British residents abroad 498w
European Commission, Costs 121w
European Council 11w
European Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 710w
European Parliament, Voting methods 13w
Gibraltar, European Parliament elections 499w
Intergovernmental Conference 1996 11–2w
Nazi victims, Gold 370w
Northern Cyprus 370w
Northern Cyprus, Official visits 710w
Russia, Foreign relations 12w
Schengen Agreement 123w, 303w, 648–9w
Slovakia, Human rights 121w

Henderson, Mr Doug—continued
Treaty of Amsterdam 122–3w, 710–1w
Turkey, Greece 710w
Turkey, Political prisoners 370w
Youth unemployment 230–1w

Henderson, Mr Ivan
Questions
Welfare to work 311–2w

Hepatitis
Haemophilia 689w

Heppell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1274, 1292–7
Questions
Athletics, Training 467w
Occupational pensions 256–8w

Herefordshire Health Authority
Bureaucracy 779–80

Hertfordshire
Greenbelt 583w

Hesford, Mr Stephen
Questions
Housing benefits, Young people 473w
New deal for young unemployed, Vocational training 389–90w

Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1058, 1062–5

Higher civil servants
Northern Ireland Information Service 364w

Higher education
Access funds 660w
Cornwall 1176–7
Departmental publications 429–30w
Scotland 142–3, 461w
Tourism 386–7w
Tuition fees 10–1w, 656–8w

Higher education admission
651–2w
Educational standards 429w
Scotland 156w
Student grants 1172–3

Higher education teachers
UNESCO 392w, 646–7w

Highlands of Scotland
Universities 619–20w

Highways Agency
Members' correspondence 634w

Hill, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 595–600

Hill farming
472
Common agricultural policy 471–2
EC law 490w
Farm incomes 350w
Northumberland 350w

Hill livestock allowances
471
Compensation 472–3
Marginal land 361w
Wales 269–70w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1020–1
NHS (09.12.97) 802
Questions
Child Support Agency, Members' correspondence 204–5w
Council tax, Liability 37w

Hinchliffe, Mr David—continued
Driving licences, Diabetes 48–9w
Driving licences, Handicapped drivers 48w
Factories, Noise control 37w
Planning appeals 36w
Special education, Children in care 1169
Waste management, West Yorkshire 37–42w

Hindley, Myra
Prison sentences 56w

HM Coastguard
45–6w, 291w

HM Prison Service
see Prison Service

HMS Caroline
502w

HMS Daedalus
Rescue services 419w

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 28
Questions
Educational finance 389w
Further education, Driving instruction 241w
Further education, Educational finance 309–10w
Student loans, Finance 1172

Hoey, Miss Kate
Questions
HMS Caroline 502w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 377
Members' constituency work, Points of order (10.12.97) 1152–3
Orders and regulations motions, Points of order (10.12.97) 1149
Questions
Personal equity plans 353

Holiday and travel insurance
Insurance premium tax 507–8w, 567w, 644w

Holiday leave
Teachers 392w

Home care services
VAT 508w

Home energy efficiency scheme
630–1w
VAT 631–2w

Home insulation scheme
VAT 5w

Home Office
Early retirement 54w
Ethnic minorities 54w
Ministerial statements 209w
Parking 437–8w
Pay 102–4w

Home Office exports initiative
245–6w, 648w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Accounts Commission for Scotland, Points of order (03.12.97) 390
Questions
NHS 1009–10
Transport policy, Scotland 153–4w

Homelessness
Bed and breakfast accommodation 35–6w
Greater London 111w

Home-school partnership agreements
137–8w

Homicide
Appeals 368w
Bosnia-Herzegovina 230w
British residents abroad 120–1w
Convictions 591w, 697–8w
Sentencing 368w
South Africa 120–1w

Honey
Imports 717w

Hoon, Mr Geoffrey, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged, Ministerial statements (10.12.97) 1011–24
Questions
Civil proceedings, Law reform 663
Conditional fee agreements 115w
Conditional fee agreements, Damages 115w
Conditional fee agreements, Insurance 663
Conditional fee agreements, Legal aid 663–4
Conditional fee agreements, Negligence 115w
Conditional fee agreements, Public opinion 115–6w
Court rules and procedures 668w
Court rules and procedures, Law reform 662
Courts martial 331w
Criminal proceedings, Keighley 452–3w
Discrimination, Handicapped 663w
Divorce, Arbitration schemes 329w
Family conciliation services 378–9w
Family conciliation services, Publicity 379w
Handicapped, Discrimination 663w
Judges, Ethnic minorities 330w
Judges, Public appointments 661
Judges, Welsh language 329–30w
Judiciary, Training 453w, 667w
Law reform, Information technology 666–7w
Legal aid 666w
Legal aid, Damages 665w
Legal aid, Expenditure 664–5w
Legal aid, Handicapped 663–4w
Legal aid, Personal injury compensation 662–3
Legal aid, Social security recipients 576w
Legal costs 668w
Legal costs, Insurance 116w, 666w
Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education Etc, Annual reports 491w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Official residences 452w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Parliamentary building maintenance and repair 452w
Magistrates, Warrington 666
Magistrates' courts, Administration of justice 452w
Magistrates' courts, Lancashire 665–6
Medical malpractice, No-fault compensation 329w
Military law 331w
Ministerial policy advisors, Lord Chancellor's Dept 667w
National Family Mediation 378w
Pay, Northern Ireland Office 116–7w
Pensions appeal tribunals 330w
Public Record Office, Disclosure of information 452w
Racial harassment, Court rules and procedures 85w
Solicitors 664–5
Solicitors, Fees and charges 666w

Hope, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 24, 45

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Questions
Schools, Finance 392w

Horse racing
100w

Horticulture
Minimum wage 529–30w

Hospital admissions
535w

Hospital consultants
Oncology 128w, 712w

Hospital discharges
260w, 349w

Hospital waiting lists
535–6w
Prosthetics 128–9w, 246–7w
St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust 348w
Wales 269w

Hospitals
689w
Carlisle 788
Complaints 458w
East and Midlothian NHS Trust 150
Private finance initiative 539w

House of Commons
Operating costs 704w
Parking 404w
Tobacco 403w

House of Commons catering
Line of route 403w

House of Commons Chamber
131w

House of Commons Commission
(02.12.97) 257
Passive smoking 131w

House of Commons Liaison Committee
(02.12.97) 256

House of Commons Modernisation Select Committee
see Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee

House of Commons procedure
Prayer 130w

House of Commons questions
Costs 641w
Minister Without Portfolio 156

House of Commons special standing committees
130–1w

House of Commons stationery
Contracts 704w

House of Commons times of sittings
130w

House purchase
29w

"Household Growth Consultation Paper"
Public meetings 109w

Housing
Building alterations 107–8w
Defence land 9
Scotland 150–1
West Midlands 288–9w

Housing associations
Rents 283–4w

Housing benefits
273–4w

Housing benefits—continued
Students 98w
Young people 473w

Housing construction
282w, 416–8w
East Sussex 400w
Greater London 283w
Land use 108–9w
Planning appeals 287–8w, 399–400w
Urban areas 282w
Wales 344–5
Water supply 223w

Housing finance
Scotland 151

Housing for Wales
306w

Housing improvement
Finance 222w

Housing standards
Health 688w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 522–9, 563, 567–8
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 223, 225, 229–30, 237–8, 247–51, 254, (03.12.97) 437–8
Questions
Economic and monetary union, Expenditure 369w
Economic and monetary union, Publicity 369w
Schengen Agreement 123w, 303w, 648–9w
Treaty of Amsterdam 122–3w, 710–1w

***Howarth, Mr Alan**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 30, 41, 44, 71, 73–6
Questions
Day care of children 316–7w
Day care of children, Equal opportunities 1168–9
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 659w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Small businesses 550w
Disability Rights Task Force, Public appointments 242–3w
Employment discrimination, EC action 386w
Employment Service, Contracts for services 390–1w
Extracurricular activities 699–700w
Handicapped, EC economic policy 519w
Handicapped, Employment discrimination 243w, 519w
Handicapped, Equal opportunities 518w
National childcare strategy 522w
National Disability Council, Disclosure of information 310w
New deal for young unemployed, Great Yarmouth 1180–1
New deal for young unemployed, Service industries 652w
New deal for young unemployed, Vocational training 389–90w
Out of school childcare grant scheme, Training and enterprise councils 549–50w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Handicapped 310w
Vocational guidance, Greater London 521–2w
Welfare to work, Armed forces cadets 388w
Youth unemployment, Portsmouth 390w

***Howarth, Mr George**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office*
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 503w
Animal experiments, Cosmetics industry 50w
Animal experiments, Research finance 586w
Animal experiments, Secondary legislation 209w
Cannabis, Medical treatments 291w
Fire services, Manpower 58–82w
Fox hunting 437w
Gaming machines 292w
Gaming machines, Licensed premises 292w
Horse racing 100w
Lotteries 295w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 504w
Smoke alarms 56–7w
Smoke alarms, Publicity 100w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 99
Defence industries (03.12.97) 278–9, 287
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 221
Members' constituency work, Points of order (10.12.97) 1153
Stankovic, Milos (10.12.97) 971, 976
Questions
Mine Information and Training Centre 4

Howarth Task Force
see Disability Rights Task Force

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1134
Questions
Astra Training Services, Pensioners 10w
Chambers of commerce, Training and enterprise councils 673–4w
Dept for Education and Employment, Contracts of employment 138–9w
Discretionary student grants, Handicapped 1172
Educational finance 11w
Educational qualifications, Tuition fees 387w
Electronic mail, Dept for Education and Employment 521w
Ethnic minorities, Dept for Education and Employment 662–3w
European voluntary service for young people 123–4w, 147–8w
Facsimile transmission, Dept for Education and Employment 388–9w
Further education, Cost per student 309w, 551w
Further education, Driving instruction 241w
Further education, Educational finance 241w, 309–10w, 662w
Further education, Student numbers 240–1w
Further education colleges, Educational finance 654–5w
Higher education, Access funds 660w
Higher education, Cornwall 1176–7
Higher education, Departmental publications 429–30w
Higher education, Tuition fees 10–1w
Higher education admission 651–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Education and Employment 698–9w

Howells, Dr Kim—continued
Ministerial statements, Dept for Education and Employment 660–1w
New deal for young unemployed, Further education 240w
Open government, Dept for Education and Employment 549w
Parking, Dept for Education and Employment 430–1w
Pay, Dept for Education and Employment 138w
Permanent secretaries, Dept for Education and Employment 317w
Public bodies, Dept for Education and Employment 700–2w
Pupils, Lone parents 658w
Retirement age 431w
Road haulage industry, Training 549w
School leaving, Educational qualifications 654w
Schools, Internet 9–10w
Student grants 662w
Student grants, Higher education admission 1172–3
Student loans 661–2w
Student loans, Finance 1172
Student loans, Teacher training 1171–2
Students, Civil service agencies 662w
Students, Finance 551w
Tourism, Graduates 386w
Tourism, Higher education 386–7w
Training and enterprise councils 660w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 164w
Tuition fees 656–8w, 1174
Tuition fees, Costs 11w, 310–1w
Tuition fees, Higher education 656–8w
Tuition fees, Non-payment 651w
Tuition fees, Parental contributions 550w
Tuition fees, Publicity 137w
Tuition fees, Sandwich courses 657w
Tuition fees, Student numbers 651w, 657w
Tuition fees, University finance 656w, 1174
UNESCO, Higher education teachers 392w, 646–7w
Universities, Fees and charges 660w
Universities, Student wastage 660w
Vocational training, Inspections 387w
Youth employment 653–4w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Debates etc.
Defence industries (03.12.97) 267–72, 279
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 27w
Barclays Bank, Industrial disputes 529w
Court rules and procedures 668w
Industrial disputes, Barclays Bank 529w
Judiciary, Training 667w
Labour Party 1008–9
Law reform, Information technology 666–7w
Legal costs 668w
Legal costs, Insurance 666w
NHS trusts 542w
Solicitors, Fees and charges 666w

Hughes, Ms Beverley
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 171
Questions
Crime victims, Disclosure of information 294–5w
Food labelling 353w
Jazz 467w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 673

Hughes, Mr Simon—continued
Guy's Hospital (12.12.97) 1333–7
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 492–3
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1271, 1279–85, 1323
NHS (09.12.97) 802–4
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1102–3, 1145–6
Questions
Bangladesh, Overseas aid 609w
Dept of Health, Annual reports 184–5w
Dept of Health, Public appointments 86w
Health authorities, Administrative costs 455w
Health service staff 784
Health services, Greater London 179w
NHS internal market 541–2w
NHS trusts, Administrative costs 455w
Non-domestic rates 634–5w
Primary health care 542w
Solicitors 664

Human rights
Algeria 14–5w, 406w
China 650w
Slovakia 121w
Tibet 405w

Human Rights Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
Sentencing 297w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Questions
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 469
NHS trusts, Blackpool 783
Tourism, Income 466w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 360w, 374w
Water supply, Hampshire 629w

Hunting
Defence land 27w, 385–6w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 929–32

Hutton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 507
Defence industries (03.12.97) 274–7
Questions
Defence industries, Diversification 25w

Hydroelectric power
672–3w

IBAMA
1001

Iddon, Dr Brian
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1189
Questions
Council housing 284w
Methadone, Death 574w
Museums and galleries 653
Rents, Housing associations 283–4w

Illegal immigrants
100w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
EC Health Council 458–9w

Immersion suits
547–8w

Immigrant detainees
292–3w
Nationality 438–9w

Immigrant detainees—continued
Security industry 85w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
Manpower 104w

Immigration appeals
57w

Immigration applications
120w, 405w, 500w
India 120w, 369w, 496–7w
Indian subcontinent 496w
Nigeria 14w
Pakistan 497w

Immigration controls
Relocation of employees 433w

Imports
Beef 718w
Electricity 352
Honey 717w
Pet foods 718w

"Improving the Payment Culture"
672w

Incapacity benefit
275w
Medical examinations 606w

Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988
Questions
707w

Income support
Lone parents 276w, 328w, 473–4w, 600w
Mortgages 275w, 732w
Pensioners 202w
Students 98w

Income tax
Family credit 429w
Tax rates and bands 7w

Incontinence aids
VAT 262w, 459–60w, 560–1w

Independent Advisory Panel Review of Health Care in London
see Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel

Independent Commission on the Voting System
see Voting System Independent Commission

Independent Tribunal Service
Administrative delays 185w
Wales 185w

Index linking
Retirement pensions 730–1w

India
British embassies 13w, 120w, 300w
Immigration applications 120w, 369w, 496–7w
Ministers' visits abroad 13w, 463w
Overseas trade 12w
P and O 595w
Ports 501w, 577w
Trade promotion 463w
Visas 405w

Indian subcontinent
Immigration applications 496w

Indonesia
Air displays 722w
Arms trade 124–6w, 464w, 577w, 721w
Police training 406w, 615w

Industrial accidents
Death 221w
Safety measures 221w

Industrial diseases
Social security claims 603–4w

Industrial disputes
Barclays Bank 529w
Standing Order No 24 applications (02.12.97) 186–7

Industrial health and safety
43w
Millennium compliance 32w
NHS trusts 538–9w
Prosecutions 42–3w, 412–4w

Industrial injuries disablement benefit
607–8w

Industrial tribunals
Unfair dismissal 527–8w

Infectious diseases
Disease control 457–8w

Inflation
560w
Local government finance 417–8w

Influenza
Vaccination 786–7

Information
European Commission 641–2w

Information services
Prison Service 52–3w
Public libraries 465w

Information technology
Cabinet Office 277–8w
Law reform 666–7w
NHS 537w
NHS finance 781
South Africa 998
Teacher training 698w

***Ingram, Mr Adam**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1217–9, 1222–5, 1231–4, 1236–7, 1249–51
Questions
Campbell, Jason, Prisoners' transfers 9w
Demonstrations, Northern Ireland 127w, 363w
Detection rates, Northern Ireland 674–5w
Down District Council, Local government staff 364w
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 307–8w
Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland, Royal Ulster Constabulary 246w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 615–6w
Personal records, Disclosure of information 246w
Public order offences, Northern Ireland 307w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 127w

Inner city areas
Theatres 466–7w

Insurance
Art works 1–2w
Conditional fee agreements 663
Government buildings 225–6w
Legal costs 116w, 666w

Insurance companies
Company accounts 526–7w

Insurance Companies Act 1982
Questions
526–7w

Insurance premium tax
428w, 508w
Holiday and travel insurance 507–8w, 567w, 644w

Integrated administration and control system
Agricultural land 598w

Intelligence services
301w
Civil servants' secondment 302w
Computer privacy 301–2w
Disclosure of information 297w
Finance 298w
Interception warrants 301w
Legal profession 303w
Manpower 301w
National asset register 321w
Party conferences 301w
Performance standards 297–8w
Telephone tapping 297w
Visas 302–3w

Intelligence Services Act 1994
Questions
301w, 584w

Interception of Communications Act 1985
Questions
299w

Interception warrants
Intelligence services 301w

Interest rates
Mortgages 1009

Intergovernmental Conference 1996
11–2w

Intermediate technology
Developing countries 997–8

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
see World Bank

International conferences
Canary Wharf 4w

International cooperation
Defence review 439–40w
Japan 612–3w

International Labour Organisation
Child workers 86–7w

International Monetary Fund
South Korea 245w, 642–3w

Internet
Enterprise zones 250–1w
Schools 9–10w
Women 471–2w

Invalid care allowances
606w

Invalidity benefits
533w

Invest in Britain Bureau
530–1w

Investment income
USA 244w

IRA
1008

Iraq
Armed forces deployment 24w, 27w
Chemical and biological warfare 647–8w
Sanctions 354–6, 407w, 584w
UN resolutions 13w

Irradiated food
524–5w

J Sainsbury
Richmond upon Thames 632–3w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 373–4

***Jack, Rt Hon Michael**—continued*
Oral question time intervention (04.12.97) 479
Questions
Agenda 2000 486–9w
Agricultural subsidies 490w
Cattle, Data banks 356w
Cattle, Transport of animals 359w
Class sizes, Educational standards 392–3w
Food standards 489w
Hill farming, EC law 490w
Hill livestock allowances, Compensation 472–3
Milk, Food standards 357w, 490w
Official engagements 597–8w
Science and technology research, Corporation tax 489–90w
Sea pollution 32w
Sea pollution, Fylde 31–2w
Tax rates and bands 167w
Untreated milk, Food standards 357w

***Jackson, Ms Glenda**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 965–9
Questions
A27, Worthing 220–1w
A49, Road accidents 36–7w
Airports, Signposts 547w
Aviation fuels, Environment protection 495w
British Airways, Aircraft 494w
Buses, Child safety 548w
Central line, Railway signals 634w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 284–5w, 421w
Commuters 285–6w
Cycling, Transport policy 282w
Drinking and driving, Christmas 547w
Driving licences, Diabetes 48–9w
Driving licences, Handicapped drivers 48w
Emergency planning, Mixed oxide fuel 492–3w
Fishing vessels, Safety equipment 547–8w
Heathrow Airport, Air travel 419–20w
Highways Agency, Members' correspondence 634w
HM Coastguard 45–6w, 291w
HMS Daedalus, Rescue services 419w
Jubilee line, Costs 221w
London Underground 106w
London Underground, Expenditure 545w
M25, Air pollution 30–1w
Members' correspondence 402w
Mixed oxide fuel, Japan 492w
Motor vehicle testing 633–4w
Motorcycles, Orange badge scheme 494w
MV Green Lily, Inspections 47w
National cycling strategy 282w
Pedestrian areas 397–8w
Port state control, Flotta 31w
Priority routes, Road length 286w
Railtrack 398–9w, 421w
Railtrack, Repairs and maintenance 399w
Railway industry, Regulatory systems 225w
Railway safety 280w
Railway safety, Radio engineering 280w
Railway safety, Telephone services 280w
Railway track, Fences 110–1w
Railway transport, Fines 285w
Railway travel, Telephones 46w
Rescue services 49w
Road accidents, Death 543–4w
Road haulage licences 548w
Road safety, Cellular phones 421w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Transport of radioactive materials 413–5w

Jackson, Ms Glenda—continued
Shipping accidents, Inquiries 224w
Shipping safety, Sea pollution 43–4w
Ships, Inspections 47w
South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, Legal costs 633w
South Yorkshire Supertram, Costs 221w
Train operating units, Performance related pay 493w
Transport, Death 225–6w
Transport, Government grants to local authorities 727w
Transport of radioactive materials, Air freight transport 281–2w
Transport of radioactive materials, Channel tunnel 280–1w
Transport of radioactive materials, Sea transport 281w, 413–4w

Jackson, Helen
Debates etc.
Disclosure of information, Points of order (11.12.97) 1209

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 523–4, 541, 551–4, 567
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 196

Japan
International cooperation 612–3w
Mixed oxide fuel 122w, 492w

Jazz
467w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 226
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 294–5, 301
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 681, 707–8, 712–3, 719, 743, 745, 754, 757, (09.12.97) 822, 835, 850, 859, 869, 871, 882–6, 888–90
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 931
Tax avoidance, Points of order (01.12.97) 20
Questions
Class sizes, School admission 431w
Electronic mail, Dept for Education and Employment 521w
Electronic mail, Dept of Trade and Industry 338–9w
Electronic mail, Prime Minister 411w
Electronic mail, Scottish Office 677w
Medical students, Scotland 460w, 677w
Political parties, Finance 226w
School admission, Primary education 521w
Students, Expenditure 621w

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Industrial health and safety 43w
Industrial health and safety, Prosecutions 42–3w
Public sector housing, Expenditure 28–30w
Small businesses, Staffordshire 254w

Jenkins of Hillhead Commission
see Voting System Independent Commission

Jobseeker's allowance
New deal for young unemployed 652w

Johnson, Mr Alan
Questions
Espionage, Fishing vessels 171w

Johnson, Miss Melanie
Questions
Discretionary student grants, Handicapped 1172
Literacy, Educational finance 658–9w

Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Questions
Cattle, Ear tagging 682w
Integrated administration and control system, Agricultural land 598w
NATO, Costs 10

Joint Intelligence Committee
320w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 377
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 672
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Wales 271w
ASTOR system, Defence procurement 23–4w
Employment opportunities, Wales 450–1w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 449w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 451–2w
Local education authorities, Wales 270–1w
National Assembly of Wales, Alyn and Deeside 338, 449w
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 450w
NHS trusts, North Wales 450w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 789
Police, Wales 272w
Public transport, Wales 450w
Railway network, Cardiff 704w
Roads, Deeside 704w
Schools, Vandalism 271–2w
Smoking related diseases, Wales 271w
Welfare to work 311w

Jones, Ms Fiona
Questions
Animal experiments, Research finance 586w

Jones, Helen M
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1204–5
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1269–72, 1281
Questions
Attendance allowance, Warrington 534–5w
Electroconvulsive therapy 376w
Employment, Tax yields 167w
Magistrates, Warrington 666
NHS, Contracts 538w
Ottawa Convention 1010
Patient or Prisoner Report Working Group 696–7w
Patients' transport 691w
Patients' transport, Merseyside 691w
Prison medical services 435w
Prison medical services, Mentally disturbed offenders 586w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 680, (09.12.97) 846–50
Questions
Electronic tagging 589w
Probation and aftercare, Research 589w
Social security abuse, Prosecutions 533w

Jones, Ms Jenny
Questions
India, Immigration applications 369w
India, Visas 405w

Jones, Ms Jenny—continued
Smoke alarms, Publicity 100w
Urban areas, Trees 110w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1054, 1063, 1085–6
Questions
Consumer expenditure, Building societies 507w
Developing countries, Debts written off 613w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 327w
Educational standards, Vocational training 651w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 382
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 732, 735–8, 746–7
Questions
Agenda 21, Wales 679w
All Wales agri-environment scheme, Finance 517w
Biodiversity 500–1w
Chocolate, Food labelling 20w
Farmers, Marginal land 350w
Nutrition and health 536w
Part-time employment, Conditions of employment 163w
Pedestrian areas 397–8w
United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards, Disclosure of information 19–20w
Wales Agri-environment Scheme Working Group, Public appointments 517w
Water pollution, Pollution control 630w
Wood, Wales 679w

Jowell, Ms Tessa, Minister for Public Health, Dept of Health
Questions
Cellular phones, Health warnings 456w
Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment 181w
Developing countries trade, Dept of Health 343w
Drug abuse, Finance 456w
Drugs, EC law 736–7w
EC Health Council 458–9w
Gene Therapy Advisory Committee, Public appointments 598–9w
George House Trust, Members' correspondence 256w
Housing standards, Health 688w
Influenza, Vaccination 786–7
Meningitis 457–8w
Ministerial statements, Dept of Health 262w
NHS, Information technology 537w
NHS, Training 790
NHS finance 782
NHS trusts 790–1
NHS trusts, Licensing 464w
NHS trusts, Road accidents 782–3
Nutrition and health 536w
Parking, Dept of Health 459w
Patient pack initiative 736w
Patients, Medical treatments 792–4
Pay, Dept of Health 182w
Phantom limb pain, Medical research 736w
Slimming 540w
Tobacco advertising, Disclosure of information 733w

Joyce, Eric
337w

Jubilee line
Costs 221w
Millennium Exhibition 167w

Judges
Ethnic minorities 330w
Public appointments 661
Welsh language 329–30w

Judiciary
Probation and aftercare 207w
Surveys 207w
Training 453w, 667w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Questions
George House Trust, Members' correspondence 256w

Keeble, Ms Sally
Questions
Food labelling 353w
NHS, Training 790
Radar, Motor vehicles 208w

Keen, Mr Alan
Questions
World Cup 654–5

Keen, Ann
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1275–9, 1284, 1302
NHS (09.12.97) 805

Keetch, Mr Paul
Questions
Albania, Official visits 122w
Beef, Food labelling 717w
Beef, Imports 718w
Herefordshire Health Authority, Bureaucracy 779
New deal for young unemployed 1166
Single regeneration budget 105w

Keighley
Criminal proceedings 452–3w

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 375–6
Industrial disputes, Points of order (02.12.97) 187
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 934–7, 944
Questions
Animal feed, Food labelling 684w
Beef, Farmers 476–7
Beef, Quality control 525w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 355w, 684w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Inquiries 503w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Scotland 149
Skye bridge 675–6w

Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust
783
Pathology 178–9w, 454w, 733–4w

Kenya
Ministers' visits abroad 323–4w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Defence industries (03.12.97) 280–3
Questions
Chinook helicopters 263–4w
Metropolitan Police, Mass media 505w
Military discipline 12
Military exercises 706w
Ministry of Defence, Accounting 502w
Police raids, Mass media 505w, 696w

Key, Mr Robert—continued
Wiltshire Constabulary, Police raids 505w, 696w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1022–3

Kidderminster Hospital
177–8w, 787

Kidney, Mr David
Questions
Dental services, Staffordshire 259w
Drugs 181w
House purchase 29w
Legal aid 666w
Legal aid, Damages 665w
Legal aid, Expenditure 664–5w
Medical malpractice, No-fault compensation 329w
Railway safety 280w
Railway track, Fences 110–1w
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Crown Prosecution Service 482

Kidney patients
Elderly 733w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of Public Service
Questions
Official hospitality, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 376–7w
Open government, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 164–5w
Publicity, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 377w

King, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 67–9, 71
Questions
NHS trusts 790–1

King, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1239–42
Questions
Beef, Farmers 475–6
Cohabitation 415–6w
Commuters 285–6w
Farm buildings 150w
"Household Growth Consultation Paper", Public meetings 109w
Housing, Building alterations 107–8w
Housing construction 282w, 416–8w
Housing construction, Land use 108–9w
Housing construction, Urban areas 282w
Planning appeals, Building alterations 109w
Social rented housing 284w
Sustainable development 107w
Town and country planning, Commuters 32–3w

Kingham, Ms Tess
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1190
Questions
UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara, UK contributions 498–9w

Kingston upon Hull
Espionage 171w

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 64

Kirkbride, Miss Julie—continued
Questions
Supermarkets, Planning permission 632–3w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1122–3, 1136–7
Questions
House of Commons Commission, Passive smoking 131w
Offal, Cattle 679–80w
Rendering industry 680w
Rendering industry, Government assistance 680–2w
School transport, Scotland 157–8w, 461w

Know-how Fund
439w, 611w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Biochemistry, Skill shortages 720w
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council 720–1w
Further education colleges, Educational finance 655w
New deal for young unemployed, North East region 652–3w

Labour and employment
997

Labour market
Statistics 168w

Labour Party
1008–9
Finance 4w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 444, 450–1, 458
Questions
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust, Pathology 178–9w, 454w, 733–4w

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Questions
Neighbourhood nuisance, Scotland 149
NHS, VAT 688w
Uniform business rate, Wales 269w
VAT, NHS 642w
VAT repayment, NHS trusts 642w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui,
Questions
Schools, Deprivation indicators 1168

Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust
Public appointments 692w

Lancashire
Magistrates' courts 665–6

Land nationalisation
Zimbabwe 303w, 407w, 994

Land ownership and tenure
Scotland 152w

Land pollution
Land reclamation 220w

Land reclamation
Land pollution 220w

Land use
Housing construction 108–9w

Languages education
Secondary education 460w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 108, 111, 113–4

Lansley, Mr Andrew*—*continued
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 498
Special education (05.12.97) 624–9
Questions
Ministry of Defence, Government buildings 23w
NHS, Capital investment 788–9
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 151w

Lasers
628w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Administration of justice 480–1
Civil proceedings 663
Court rules and procedures 662
Information technology 666–7w

"Law Relating to Social Security"
203w

Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 870–4, 876
Questions
EC Finance Council 513–4w
House of Commons questions, Costs 641w
National Assembly of Wales 268w
Personal pensions, Compensation 640–2w
Public service pensions 641w

Lead pipes
Water distribution 399w

Leasehold housing
630w

Leeds
NHS trusts 786

Legal aid
666w
Conditional fee agreements 663–4
Damages 665w
Expenditure 664–5w
Handicapped 663–4w
Personal injury compensation 662–3
Social security recipients 576w

Legal costs
668w
Insurance 116w, 666w
South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive 633w

Legal profession
Intelligence services 303w

Legislative process
155–6

Leicestershire
584w

Leicestershire Health Authority
Patients 542w

Leigh Infirmary
Accident and emergency departments 343–4w

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Food standards, Expenditure 353w

Leslie, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 169–70
Questions
Water pollution, EC law 289–91w

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 98, 114
Business questions (04.12.97) 509–10
European Communities (04.12.97) 530–2, 536, 538, 545, 557–9
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 229, 239, 255, (03.12.97) 400–1, 403, 412, 414–6, 422
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 737, 746–9, 755
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 46, 49, 51–2, 56, 60–1, 63–4, 66–8
Questions
Indonesia, Arms trade 124–6w
Tobacco advertising, Sports sponsorship 4w

Leukaemia
Children 181w

Levitt, Mr Tom
Questions
Hospitals, Complaints 458w
Palace of Westminster, Aids for handicapped 404w
Tax allowances, Minibuses 573w
Television, Aids for handicapped 468w
United Nations, Curriculum 239w
Water distribution, Lead pipes 399w

Lewis, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
NHS (09.12.97) 808
Questions
EC Telecommunications Council 525–6w
World War II, Property law 595w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 208–13
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 700, 703, 711, 716, 756, 761
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1263–9, 1271, 1275–6, 1286, 1295, 1299, 1304, 1307, 1309, 1318–21, 1323–4, 1327, 1330
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1022
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 270w
Know-how Fund 611w
Trident 14–5

Liability
Council tax 37w
Transport of radioactive materials 228w

Liaison Committee
see House of Commons Liaison Committee

Libraries
Training 373w

Libyan Arab Republic
Sanctions 584w

Licensed premises
(11.12.97) 1214
Gaming machines 292w

***Liddell, Mrs Helen**, Economic Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Building societies 507w
Consumer expenditure, Building societies 507w
Credit unions 709w
EC budget 407w
Economic and monetary union 245w, 707–8w
Economic growth 560w
Euro, Publicity 365–6w

Liddell, Mrs Helen*—*continued
European Commission, Information 641–2w
Exchange rates 171w
Financial institutions, Economic and monetary union 168w
Funerals, Manpower 169w
Government assistance to industry, Costs 644w
House of Commons questions, Costs 641w
International Monetary Fund, South Korea 642–3w
Labour market, Statistics 168w
Methadone, Death 574w
NHS finance 693–4w
Parking, Treasury 507w
Pay 169–72w
Pay, Treasury 170w
Pension funds, EC budget 168w
Personal pensions, Compensation 640–2w
Productivity 366w
Public service pensions, EC countries 508–9w
South Korea, UK contributions 643–4w
Surveys, Scotland 509–10w
Tax collection, Euro 5–6w
Unemployment 169w
Unemployment, Statistics 573w

Life imprisonment
Parole 295–6w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Questions
Euro, Publicity 365–6w
Ministers, Codes of practice 320–1w
Offshore trusts, Guernsey 575–6w
Offshore trusts, Taxation 576w
Robinson, Geoffrey, Shares 575–6w, 707w

Linton, Donald
Retirement (09.12.97) 795

Lindane
682–3w

Line of route
House of Commons catering 403w

Literacy
366w, 1170
Adult education 1171
Educational assessment 1170–1
Educational finance 658–9w
Teaching methods 1180

Literacy summer schools initiative
430w, 1179–80

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1049, 1057–9, 1091
Questions
Children 121w
World Summit for Children 121w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 676, 715–22, (09.12.97) 824, 869, 875–6
Questions
Hill livestock allowances, Wales 269–70w
National Assembly of Wales 337–8

***Lloyd, Mr Tony**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Homicide 230w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Missing persons 230w
Brazil, Crops 499w
Caribbean, British dependent territories 577w
Diplomatic immunity 302w

Lloyd, Mr Tony—continued
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 647–8w
Nigeria, Vision 2010 405–6w
Ottawa Convention 300w, 497w, 649w
Parking, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 407w
Public bodies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 647w
Sierra Leone, Foreign policy 500w
Torture, Equipment 300w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Child workers 649w
Zambia, Armed conflict 711–2w
Zimbabwe, Land nationalisation 303w, 407w

Lloyd Committee
see Gene Therapy Advisory Committee

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 376, 384
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 729–30, (09.12.97) 859–64
Questions
A470, Road construction 678w
Agriculture, Wales 341–2
CS sprays 208w
Family conciliation services 378–9w
Family conciliation services, Publicity 379w
Judges, Ethnic minorities 330w
Judges, Welsh language 329–30w
Meirionnydd 584w
National Assembly of Wales, Sustainable development 304w
National Family Mediation 378w
Sheep dipping, Organophosphates 351–2w
Sheep premiums, Wales 451w
Welsh Office, Government buildings 272–3w
Wind power 672–3w
Windfall tax, Local government revenue 272w

Loan guarantee scheme
252w

Local authorities
Millennium compliance 286–7w

Local authority powers
Travelling people 107w

Local education authorities
Cycling 138w
Scotland 462w
Wales 270–1w

Local enterprise agencies
Scotland 155w

Local exchange and trading schemes
543w, 602w

Local government
Wales 338

Local government expenditure
494w, 703–4w, 727w
Cardiff County Council 85–6w
Millennium compliance 287w
Wales 518w

Local government finance
34–5w, 286w, 346–7, 418–9w, 545–6w
Dorset (10.12.97) 1155–63
Harrogate 418w
Inflation 417–8w
Ministerial statements (02.12.97) 157–73
Scotland 215–8w
Wales 117–8w, 270w

Local Government Housing Act 1989
Questions
544w

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982
Questions
637w

Local government reform
Finance 400–1w

Local government revenue
Members' facilities 728–9w
Windfall tax 272w

Local government services
Best value 227–8w
Contracts for services 228w

Local government social services
Oxfordshire County Council 49w, 89w

Local government staff
Down District Council 364w
Political activities 544w

Locate in Scotland
147

Lock, Mr David
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 951, 960–1, 965
Questions
Health authorities, Worcestershire 787–8
Rape, Criminal proceedings 483

Lockerbie
Bombings 408w

London Underground
106w
Expenditure 545w

Lone parent premium
669–70w

Lone parents
Child benefit 328w, 473–4w, (10.12.97) 1033–148
Children 328w
Employment 600w
Expenditure 328–9w, 732w
Income support 276w, 328w, 473–4w, 600w
Pupils 658w
Social security benefits 534w

Longstone Edge
(03.12.97) 322–9

Long-Term Care Charter
375w

Long-Term Care Royal Commission
540w, 691w
Ministerial statements (04.12.97) 489–99

Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education Etc
Annual reports 491w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Ministerial policy advisors 667w
Official residences 452w
Parliamentary building maintenance and repair 452w
Scottish Parliament 408w

Lost working days
Stress related illnesses 9w
Teachers 9w

Lotteries
295w
Finance 467w

Loughton, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 114, 117
Special education (05.12.97) 607, 616–21

Loughton, Mr Tim—continued
Questions
A27, Worthing 220–1w
Cattle, Ear tagging 149w
Cerebral palsy, Special education 138w
Council tax 354
Flood control, Set-aside schemes 150w
Museums and galleries, Admission charges 652
National Assembly of Wales 267w
Pensions appeal tribunals 330w
Sexual offences, Sentencing 208w
South Africa, Homicide 120–1w
Special education 391w
Travelling people, Local authority powers 107w
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator 130w

Love, Mr Andrew
Questions
Building societies 507w

Low flying
Military aircraft 27w

Lowell Park Mortgages
30w

Luff, Mr Peter
Questions
Minimum wage, Horticulture 529–30w
Rural Development Commission 495w
Rural Development Commission, Public appointments 547w

Lunar House
Manpower 296w
Telephones 433w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 494
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 481

M25
Air pollution 30–1w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 184
Questions
Day care of children, Scotland 608w
Housing finance, Scotland 151
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 995–6
Temporary employment, Conditions of employment 530w
Trident 14
Trident missiles, Defence procurement 27w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Questions
Aircraft 11
Social security benefits, Political refugees 381–2w

McCafferty, Ms Chris
Questions
Birds, Nature conservation 473

***McCartney, Mr Ian**, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 121–5
Questions
Barclays Bank, Industrial disputes 529w
Company accounts, Economic and monetary union 89–90w
Contracts of employment 317w
Digital broadcasting 596–7w
Duty free allowances, EC action 94w

McCartney, Mr Ian*—*continued
EC Social Charter 725–6w
Employment Appeal Tribunal 93–4w
Employment opportunities, EC action 15w, 723w
Employment protection, EC law 342w
Foreign investment in UK 529w
Foreign investment in UK, USA 529w
Funerals, Unfair dismissal 92w
Invest in Britain Bureau 530–1w
Minimum wage 162–3w
Minimum wage, Horticulture 529–30w
Part-time employment, Conditions of employment 163w
Pay, Dept of Trade and Industry 163w
Post Office 93w
Post Office, Executives 341w
Post offices, Closures 161w
Post offices, Urban areas 340w
Professional qualifications, Accountants 532w
Temporary employment, Conditions of employment 530w
Trade unions 532w
Unfair dismissal, Industrial tribunals 527–8w

McCartney, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1219, 1224, 1226–9, 1234–5, 1241–3
Questions
Council house sales, Northern Ireland 425–6w
Northern Ireland government 425w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Young offenders 347

Macdonald, Mr Calum*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Homicide 230w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Missing persons 230w

McDonnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1053, 1079
Questions
One parent benefits 353–4

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 426w
Airports, Privatisation 308w
Ambulance services, Northern Ireland 308w
Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment 181w
Demonstrations, Northern Ireland 127w, 363w
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 308w
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 307–8w, 516w
Northern Ireland Civil Service 8w
Northern Ireland Civil Service, Employment discrimination 8w
Northern Ireland Civil Service, Equal opportunities 8–9w
Social security benefits, Legislation 532–3w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 170

MacGregor, Rt Hon John*—*continued
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 494–5
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 363

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1204
Canary Wharf, Points of order (01.12.97) 20
Questions
Agenda 2000 356w
Armed forces training, Otterburn 262w
Child Support Agency 606w
Common agricultural policy, Rural areas 352w
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 619w
Dept of Health, Press 345w
EC enlargement 229–30w
Employment opportunities, Wales 304w
European fighter aircraft 22w
European fighter aircraft, Defence review 383w
Health education, Performance standards 685w
Higher education admission, Educational standards 429w
International conferences, Canary Wharf 4w
Local government finance, Inflation 417–8w
Millennium Exhibition, Expenditure 609w
National Audit Office 17–8
Northallerton Hospital 456w
Overseas aid 322–3w
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Finance 11w
Railway industry, Regulatory systems 225w
Tourist industry, Employment 319w
Windfall tax 367w

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1217, 1236–7, 1251

McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Questions
Higher education, Scotland 142–3
New deal for young unemployed, Self-employed 659–60w

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Questions
Floods, Thames estuary 350w
M25, Air pollution 30–1w
Medals 22w
Private Members' bills 154
Prosecutions, Crime victims 322w
Young people, Dance 470w

Mackintosh, Cameron
Pay 165w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Questions
Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust, Public appointments 692w

McLeish, Mr Henry*, *Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office
Questions
Alternatives to prison, Scotland 623w
Complaints against police, Scotland 627–8w
Cornton Vale Prison 625w
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 619w
Homicide, Appeals 368w
Lasers 628w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Scotland 148–50

McLeish, Mr Henry*—*continued
Prisoners, Counselling 625w
Prisoners, Expenditure 626w
Prisoners, Scotland 622w
Prisoners, Women 621–2w, 625w
Proceeds of crime, Scotland 623–4w
Scottish Office 95w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 95–7w, 151w, 318w
Transsexuals, Scotland 622w

Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1186–7
Questions
Millennium Exhibition 660

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Longstone Edge (03.12.97) 322–5

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Doctor Assisted Dying Bill, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (10.12.97) 1027–8
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1054, 1134–5
Questions
Complaints against police 589–90w
Complaints against police, Scotland 627–8w
Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland, Royal Ulster Constabulary 246w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 616w
Personal records, Disclosure of information 246w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 554–8w

McNulty, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 508
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 431–4
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1291, 1295, 1327–8
Special education (05.12.97) 602–9
Questions
EC aid 611w
Local government services, Best value 227–8w
Television licences 636w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 530, 551
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 216
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 498
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 22–3, 30
Questions
British Airways, Aircraft 494w
Developing countries trade, Dept of Health 343w
Labour and employment 997
RJB Mining 348–9
Yorks and Lancaster Regimental Museum 24w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Questions
Attorney General, Advertising 578w
India, Immigration applications 496–7w
Indian subcontinent, Immigration applications 496w
President of the Council, Advertising 491w
Public libraries, Information services 465w

Mactaggart, Fiona—continued
School leaving, Educational qualifications 654w

McWalter, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 184–5

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1243–6, 1250–1

Magistrates
Warrington 666

Magistrates' courts
Administration of justice 452w
Lancashire 665–6

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1070–3, 1092
Questions
Armed forces recruitment, Ethnic minorities 12–3

Maintenance
Children 472w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Questions
Prisoners, Drug abuse 504w
Quarantine Advisory Group, Public appointments 355w

Mallaber, Judy
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 476

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1225–7, 1229, 1235, 1237–8, 1245

Managers
NHS 539w

Manchester United Football Club
Planning permission 135w

Mandelson, Mr Peter, Minister Without Portfolio
Questions
Jubilee line, Millennium Exhibition 167w
Mackintosh, Cameron, Pay 165w
Millennium Exhibition 2–3w, 659–61
Millennium Exhibition, Admission charges 475w
Millennium Exhibition, Advertising agencies 165–6w
Millennium Exhibition, Compensation 166w
Millennium Exhibition, Construction 166w, 609w
Millennium Exhibition, Consultants 166w, 659
Millennium Exhibition, Contracts 165w, 476–7w
Millennium Exhibition, Expenditure 609w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 476w
Millennium Exhibition, Tourism 476w
Ministerial policy advisors, Minister Without Portfolio 668w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 490–1
NHS (09.12.97) 799–801

Maples, Mr John—continued
Questions
Herefordshire Health Authority, Bureaucracy 779–80
Tobacco advertising, Disclosure of information 733w

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 677, 752
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1084, 1089
Questions
CELTEC, Redundancy 306w
St Helena, Airports 999
Town and country planning, Wales 305w

Marginal land
Farmers 350w
Hill livestock allowances 361w

Marketing
Funerals 91w

Married people
Taxation 1003–5

Married personal allowance
Handicapped 367w

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Questions
Literacy, Adult education 1171
Sex shops, Legislation 637w
Sex shops, Prosecutions 637w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Employment zones, Glasgow 139–40
Scottish Standards Action Group, Secondary education 154–5w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Questions
Church schools, Muslims 1182

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 381
Questions
Hospitals, Carlisle 788

Marylebone Cricket Club
465w

Mass media
Metropolitan Police 505w
Ownership 466w
Police raids 505w, 696w

Maternity hospitals
Closures 212w

Maternity services
Scotland 212w

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Debates etc.
Companies political contributions, Points of order (08.12.97) 667
Questions
British Museum, Admission charges 653
Charities, Finance 657–8
Jubilee line, Millennium Exhibition 167w
Mackintosh, Cameron, Pay 165w
Millennium Exhibition 660–1
Millennium Exhibition, Advertising agencies 165–6w
Millennium Exhibition, Consultants 166w
Millennium Exhibition, Contracts 165w
Tourist industry, Minimum wage 2w

Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Questions
Highways Agency, Members' correspondence 634w
Members' correspondence 402w

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 34, 75
Questions
Athletics, Handicapped 654
Company accounts, Economic and monetary union 89–90w
Enterprise zones, Internet 250–1w
Further education, Educational finance 662w
Local government reform, Finance 400–1w
Public expenditure, Scotland 154w
Special constables, Compensation 291–2w
Television, Aids for handicapped 468w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael, Minister for the Environment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force, Public appointments 288w
Pollution control 635w
Rural Development Commission, Public appointments 547w
Water pollution, EC law 289–91w

Means tested benefits
Handicapped 731–2w
Take-up 731–2w

Measurement
Alcoholic drinks (12.12.97) 1331

Medals
22w

Medical examinations
Incapacity benefit 606w

Medical malpractice
No-fault compensation 329w

Medical records
Organophosphates 110w

Medical research
Breast cancer 344w
Phantom limb pain 736w
Scotland 618–9w
Scottish Office 617w

Medical students
Scotland 460w, 677w
Student grants 599w

Medical treatments
Cannabis 291w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 692w
Elderly 537w
Patients 537w, 792–4
Terminal care (10.12.97) 1025–30

Medway NHS Trust
Finance 685–6w

Meetings
NHS trusts (10.12.97) 1149

Meirionnydd
584w

Members' allowances
153

Members' correspondence
291w, 402w, 595w
Child Support Agency 204–5w
George House Trust 256w
Handicap benefits 669w
Highways Agency 634w

Members' facilities
Local government revenue 728–9w

***Members' facilities**—continued*
Speaker's rulings and statements (04.12.97) 487–8

Members' travel
Costs 491w

Meningitis
346w, 457–8w

Mental Health (Amendment) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1263–331

Mental health services
Finance 89w

Mental illness
Prisoners 588w

Mental illness specific grant
Scotland 620w

Mental patients
Consent to medical treatment (03.12.97) 393–5

Mentally disadvantaged
Ministerial statements (10.12.97) 1011–24
Witnesses 453w

Mentally disturbed offenders
Prison medical services 586w

Mergers
Health authorities 785–6
NHS trusts 785–6

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Insurance companies, Company accounts 526–7w
Voting System Independent Commission 57–8w

Merseyside
Patients' transport 691w

Methadone
Death 574w

Metropolitan Police
Mass media 505w
Police corruption 637w

MI5
Disclosure of information 434w

***Michael, Mr Alun**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Cats 49w
Cats, Norfolk 49w
Community policing 362w
Complaints against police 589–90w
Crime prevention, Community action 362–3w
Crime victims, Disclosure of information 294–5w
Crimes against the person, Sentencing 294w
Criminal injuries compensation 363w
Criminal records, Voluntary organisations 363w
CS sprays 208w
Driving offences, Prosecutions 590–1w
Driving offences, Sentencing 294w
EC law 82–4w
Electric shock equipment 592w
Firearms, Compensation 210w, 295w, 503–4w, 639w, 696w
Homicide, Convictions 591w, 697–8w
Human Rights Bill (HL) 1997/98, Sentencing 297w
Metropolitan Police, Mass media 505w
Metropolitan Police, Police corruption 637w
Official secrets 298–9w
Perjury 209–10w

***Michael, Mr Alun**—continued*
Police, Manpower 505–6w
Police, Video recordings 296–7w
Police authorities 299w
Police equipment, Codes of practice 504–5w
Police raids, Mass media 505w, 696w
Radar, Motor vehicles 208w
Safer cities scheme, Government grants 210w
Secure training centres, Private sector 299w
Sex shops, Legislation 637w
Sex shops, Prosecutions 637w
Sexual offences, Data banks 207–8w
Special constables, Compensation 291–2w
Speed limits, Cameras 289w, 506w
Surveillance, Complaints against police 506w
Theft, Sheep 637w
Wiltshire Constabulary, Police raids 505w, 696w
Young offenders, Police cautions 695–6w
Youth Justice Task Force 637–8w
Youth organisations, Performance standards 295w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
NHS trusts, Industrial health and safety 538–9w
UK Sports Institute 653–4

Michie, Mrs Ray
Questions
Ferries, Scotland 147–8
Student numbers, Argyll and Bute 155–6w

Middle East
Peace negotiations 711w

***Milburn, Mr Alan**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Anaesthetics 180w
Aricept, Prescription drugs 540w
Ashford Hospital NHS Trust 347w
Bereavement counselling 88w
Bereavement counselling, Contracts for services 88–9w
Berkshire Health Authority, Finance 791–2
Birmingham Health Authority 783–4
Buckinghamshire Health Authority, Finance 535w
Community health councils 343w, 453–4w
Computer Aided Medical Systems, Income 87–8w
Computers in National Health Service, Capital investment 87w
Computers in National Health Service, Classification schemes 88w
Dental services, Consumer protection 455w
Dental services, Private health services 259w
Dental services, Staffordshire 259w
Dental students, Student grants 599w
Dental students, Tuition fees 260w
Dept of Health, Annual reports 184–5w
Dept of Health, Public appointments 86w
Drugs 181w
Early retirement, NHS 686–7w
Ethnic minorities, Dept of Health 177w
General practitioners, Primary health care 456–7w
GP commissioners 539–40w
GP fundholders, Surrey 348–50w
Health authorities, Administrative costs 455w
Health education, Performance standards 685w
Health service staff 784

***Milburn, Mr Alan**—continued*
Health service staff, Stress related illnesses 687–8w
Health services, Barnet 539w
Health services, Devon 181w
Health services, Greater London 179w
Herefordshire Health Authority, Bureaucracy 779–80
Hospital waiting lists 535–6w
Hospitals 689w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 539w
Incontinence aids, VAT 459–60w
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust 783
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust, Pathology 454w
Kidderminster Hospital 177–8w
Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust, Public appointments 692w
Medical students, Scotland 460w
Medical students, Student grants 599w
Medway NHS Trust, Finance 685–6w
Mental health services, Finance 89w
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS trust, Management 538w
National Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group 375–6w
NHS, Contracts 538w
NHS, Contracts for services 537w, 735w
NHS, Managers 539w
NHS, Performance standards 181–2w
NHS, VAT 688w
NHS administration 537w, 779
NHS finance 791
NHS internal market 541–2w
NHS reform 538w
NHS trusts 542w, 784–5
NHS trusts, Administrative costs 455w
NHS trusts, Blackpool 783
NHS trusts, Debts 784
NHS trusts, Directors 538w
NHS trusts, Industrial health and safety 538–9w
NHS trusts, Public opinion 785
Northallerton Hospital 456w
Occupational pensions 256–8w
Patients, Medical treatments 537w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 347–8w
Prescription drugs, Waste disposal 454–5w
Primary health care 542w
Private finance initiative 690–1w
Private finance initiative, NHS 690w
Public bodies, Dept of Health 692–3w
St Michael's Hospital 692w
St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Hospital waiting lists 348w
School nurses, Manpower 735w
South Western Regional Health Authority, Nurses' training 687w, 735w
Value Added Tax (Drugs Medicines and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997 460w
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust, Public appointments 179–80w

Military aircraft
Cyprus 497–8w
Low flying 27w
Repairs and maintenance 176w

Military discipline
12

Military exercises
706w

Military law
331w

Military police
263w

Milk
Dioxins 353w
Food standards 357w, 490w

Millennium
Greater London 371w

Millennium Commission
373w

Millennium compliance
3w, 89w
Business 594w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 325w
Dept of Social Security 732–3w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 729–30w
Emergency services 433–4w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 711w
Government departments 324–5w
Industrial health and safety 32w
Local authorities 286–7w
Local government expenditure 287w
NHS finance 349–50w
Scotland 621w
Welsh Office 703w, 714w

Millennium Exhibition
2–3w, 659–61
Admission charges 475w
Advertising agencies 165–6w
Compensation 166w
Construction 166w, 609w
Consultants 166w, 659
Contracts 165w, 476–7w
Expenditure 609w
Finance 476w
Jubilee line 167w
Tourism 476w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 81, 91

Mine Information and Training Centre
4
Royal Engineers 3

"Minerals Planning Guidance"
268w

Mines
Bomb disposal 3–5, 611w

Minibuses
Tax allowances 573w

Minimum wage
162–3w, 351
Foreign investment in UK 267w
Horticulture 529–30w
Tourist industry 2w, 651
Wales 267w

Minister for Women
669w

Minister Without Portfolio
Departmental responsibilities 320–1w
Food standards 321w
House of Commons questions 156
Ministerial policy advisors 668w
Oral questions 318w

Ministerial duties
Common agricultural policy 598w

Ministerial policy advisors
Dept for Education and Employment 698–9w
Dept for International Development 364–5w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 544w
Dept of Trade and Industry 721–2w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 667w
Minister Without Portfolio 668w

Ministerial policy advisors—continued
President of the Council 705w
Treasury 708w
Welsh Office 678w

Ministerial statements
152
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 372–89
Dept for Education and Employment 660–1w
Dept for International Development 240w
Dept of Health 262w
Dept of Social Security 276–7w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 399w
Dept of Trade and Industry 365w
Home Office 209w
Local government finance (02.12.97) 157–73
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 489–99
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1011–24
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 357w
Ministry of Defence 553–4w
NHS (09.12.97) 796–810
Open government (11.12.97) 1183–96
Prime Minister 320w
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 357–71
Scottish Office 619w
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 174–85
Welsh Office 273w

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Women's Issues
534w

Ministers
Codes of practice 320–1w
Security 502–3w
Shares 255w

Ministers' visits abroad
Dept for International Development 132–3w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 396–8w
India 13w, 463w
Kenya 323–4w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 479–80w
Russia 25–6w
Treasury 645–6w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Civil servants' visits abroad 480–3w
Ministerial statements 357w
Ministers' visits abroad 479–80w
Official hospitality 477–9w
Pay 264–7w
Publicity 483–6w
Technology foresight programme 19w

Ministry of Defence
Accounting 502w
Government buildings 23w
Ministerial statements 553–4w
New deal for young unemployed 24–5w
Parking 440w
Pay 175–7w
Permanent secretaries 336w
Publicity 441–9w

Mink
Farms 714–6w

Mink Keeping Order 1992
Questions
714w

Mink Keeping Order 1997
Questions
715–6w

Missing persons
Bosnia-Herzegovina 230w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 958–60, 964
Questions
Coal, Electricity generation 94w
Driving, EC action 591–2w
EC law 82–4w
European Council 11w
Financial institutions, Economic and monetary union 168w
Intergovernmental Conference 1996 11–2w
Nuclear weapons, Expenditure 21–2w
Tax collection, Euro 5–6w
Tax harmonisation 6w
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 20w, 148w

Mixed credits
239w

Mixed oxide fuel
Emergency planning 492–3w
Export controls 528w
Exports 248–9w
Japan 122w, 492w
Terrorism 548w
Transport of radioactive materials 122w

Mobility allowance
669w

Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee
156

Moffatt, Laura
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1023–4
Questions
Armed forces women 15
Further education colleges, Welfare to work 654–5w

Monuments
Prisoners of war (03.12.97) 460–8

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 378

Moore, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 303

Moran, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 181
Questions
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 539w
Territorial Army, New deal for young unemployed 653w
Women's National Commission 602w

Moray Firth
Fisheries 624w
Oil pollution 624w

Morgan, Mr Alasdair
Debates etc.
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 306
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 370
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 152w
Guinness 462w

Morgan, Mr Alasdair*—*continued
Immigration controls, Relocation of employees 433w
Locate in Scotland 147
Lunar House, Manpower 296w
Lunar House, Telephones 433w
New deal for young unemployed, Rural areas 1166
Scottish National Sleep Laboratory 626w
Welfare to work, Scotland 676–7w

Morgan, Ms Julie
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 856–9
Questions
New deal fos lone parents 601w
Private finance initiative, Wales 268w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 675, 689, 722–31, 753, (09.12.97) 826–7, 831, 833–4, 838–9, 858, 869, 871, 874
Open government (11.12.97) 1193–4
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1047
Questions
Brecon Beacons National Park, Management 119–20w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Contracts 117w
Computer Aided Medical Systems, Income 87–8w
Computers in National Health Service, Capital investment 87w
Computers in National Health Service, Classification schemes 88w
Day care of children, Equal opportunities 1168–9
Government buildings, Insurance 225–6w
Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee 156
National Assembly of Wales 304w
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 338–9
Permanent secretaries, Dept for Education and Employment 317w
Permanent secretaries, Dept of Health 349w
Permanent secretaries, Dept of Social Security 329w
Permanent secretaries, Ministry of Defence 336w
Permanent secretaries, Scottish Office 678w
Permanent secretaries, Welsh Office 306w

Morley, Mr Elliot*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 259, 261–6
Questions
Agricultural land, Pollution control 598w
Agricultural policy 480
Agriculture, Environment protection 353w
Agriculture, Young people 150w
Animal welfare 264w
Biodiversity 352w
Birds, Nature conservation 473
Cats 149w
Cats, Departmental coordination 148–9w
Cats, Norfolk 149w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 480–3w
Common fisheries policy 469–70
Environment protection, Norfolk Broads 350–1w
Farm buildings 150w

Morley, Mr Elliot*—*continued
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 469
Flood control, Set-aside schemes 150w
Floods, Thames estuary 350w
Hill farming, Farm incomes 350w
Millennium compliance, Welsh Office 714w
Mink, Farms 714–6w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 477–9w
Ostriches, Slaughterhouses 358w
Pay, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 264–7w
Publicity, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 483–6w
Set-aside schemes 149w

Morris, Ms Estelle*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 580–6, 594–5, 631–7
Questions
Cerebral palsy, Special education 138w
Curriculum, Developing countries 520–1w
English language, Educational standards 661w
Headteachers, Professional qualifications 552–3w
Home-school partnership agreements 137–8w
Music education, Curriculum 520w
Physical education, Curriculum 551w
Physical education, Educational standards 520w, 551w
Physical education, National vocational qualifications 520w
Pre-school education 553w
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Finance 11w
School admission 317w
School admission, Primary education 521w
Special education 391w
Special education, Children in care 1169
Special education, Finance 1169–70
Special Educational Needs Tribunal, Annual reports 551–2w
Teacher training, Information technology 698w
Teacher training, Shortage subjects 393–4w
Teacher training, Vacancies 393w
Teaching methods 1173

Morris, Rt Hon John*, *Attorney-General
Questions
Administration of justice, Law reform 480–1
Animal cruelty, Prosecutions 481–3
Attorney General, Advertising 578w
Attorney General, Extradition 322w
Crown Prosecution Service 481
Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964, Prosecutions 322w
Nadir, Asil 321–2w
Perjury, Prosecutions 484
Prosecutions, Crime victims 322w
Prosecutions, Police 322w
Rape, Criminal proceedings 483
Rape, Witnesses 483–4
Rights of audience 484–5
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Crown Prosecution Service 482
Sentencing, Appeals 240w

Mortgages
Income support 275w, 732w
Interest rates 1009

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1224–5

Motor industry
(09.12.97) 918–26

Motor vehicle testing
633–4w

Motor vehicles
Radar 208w

Motorcycles
Orange badge scheme 494w

Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS trust
Management 538w

Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie*, *Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Police (Northern Ireland) Bill, 1R (05.12.97) 579
Questions
Archives, Northern Ireland 713w
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 713w
Northern Ireland, Best value 712–3w
Northern Ireland government 425w
Northern Ireland Information Service, Higher civil servants 364w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Questions
Surveillance, Complaints against police 506w

Multilateral Agreement on Investment
723w, 995–6

Murphy, Mr Denis
Questions
Incapacity benefit 275w
Invest in Britain Bureau 530–1w
National Lottery, Museums and galleries 134–5w

Murphy, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1048–50
Questions
School buildings, Scotland 153w

Murphy, Mr Paul*, *Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 426w
Airports, Privatisation 308w
Council house sales, Northern Ireland 425–6w
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 308w
Ethnic minorities, Northern Ireland Office 7w
Government contracts, Northern Ireland Office 427w
Northern Ireland Civil Service 8w
Northern Ireland Civil Service, Employment discrimination 8w
Northern Ireland Civil Service, Equal opportunities 8–9w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Manpower 712w
Northern Ireland Office, Public appointments 127–8w
Official hospitality, Northern Ireland Office 616w
Pay, Northern Ireland Office 424w
Planning permission, Portadown 424w
Probationer driver plates, Northern Ireland 9w

Murphy, Mr Paul—continued
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 423–4w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 616–7w
Sheep, Northern Ireland 676w
Tax avoidance, Northern Ireland Office 127w

Museum of Europe
12–3w

Museums and galleries
653
Admission charges 652–3
National Lottery 134–5w
Wheelchairs 211w

Music education
Curriculum 520w

Muslims
Church schools 1182

MV Green Lily
Inspections 47w

Nadir, Asil
321–2w

National Assembly of Wales
267–8w, 304w, 337–8, 342, 345, 352, (08.12.97) 671–768, (09.12.97) 815–906
Alyn and Deeside 338, 449w
Costs 342–3
Foreign investment in UK 343–4
Parliamentary buildings 337–9, 341–2, 450w
Public expenditure 510–3w
Sustainable development 304w
Youth organisations 267w

"National Assembly of Wales Accommodation Options"
449–50w

National asset register
5w, 509w
Fees and charges 506–7w
Intelligence services 321w
Norwich 279w
Nuclear fuels 249–50w

National Audit Office
17–8

National Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group
375–6w

National childcare strategy
522w

National Coaching Foundation
Teacher training 514–5w

National cycling strategy
282w

National Disability Council
Disclosure of information 310w

National Family Mediation
378w

National Health Service Act 1997
Questions
539w

National income
Wales 516–7w

National insurance contributions
205–6w, 383w, 731w
Actors 275–6w

National Lottery
319w, 467w
Eastern region 319w
Museums and galleries 134–5w
Northavon 318w
Romford 371–2w

National Lottery—continued
Village halls 656–7

National Lottery Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
467w

National Lottery Charities Board
467–8w

National parks
Management 119–20w
Power industry 544–5w

National Sound Archive
Property transfer 469–70w

National Sports Institute
see UK Sports Institute

National vocational qualifications
Physical education 520w

Nationality
Immigrant detainees 438–9w

NATO
Costs 9–10

Nature conservation
Birds 473

Nature reserves
Birds (02.12.97) 258–66

Naysmith, Dr Douglas
Questions
NHS, Performance standards 181–2w
UNESCO, Higher education teachers 392w

Nazi victims
Gold 370w

Negligence
Conditional fee agreements 115w

Neighbourhood nuisance
Scotland 148–50

New deal for lone parents
328w, 601w, 1005
Costs 328–9w

New deal for long term unemployed
312w, 519w

New deal for schools
396w
Rushey Mead School 520w

New deal for sick and disabled people
203w

New deal for young unemployed
430–2w, 652–3w, 1166, 1178–9
Educational qualifications 1166
Further education 240w
Further education colleges 432w
Great Yarmouth 1180–1
Jobseeker's allowance 652w
Ministry of Defence 24–5w
North East region 652–3w
Nottingham 1165–6
Rural areas 1166
Self-employed 659–60w
Service industries 652w
Small businesses 1177–8
Territorial Army 653w
Training 1179
Vocational training 389–90w, 432w

New Millennium Experience
Conditions of employment 165w
Contracts for services 165–6w
Saatchi and Saatchi 166w

"New NHS White Paper"
(09.12.97) 796–810

NHS
1009–10
Bureaucracy 792

NHS—continued
Capital investment 788–9
Contracts 538w
Contracts for services 537w, 735w
Early retirement 686–7w
Information technology 537w
Managers 539w
Ministerial statements (09.12.97) 796–810
Performance standards 181–2w
Private finance initiative 690w
Scotland 150–1w
Training 790
VAT 428w, 642w, 688w

NHS administration
537w, 779, 792
Expenditure 273–4w
NHS trusts 270w
Scotland 152–3w

NHS finance
693–4w, 780, 782, 791
Information technology 781
Millennium compliance 349–50w
Northern Ireland 7w
Warwickshire 780–1

NHS (General Medical Services) (Scotland) Regulations 1995
Questions
213–4w

NHS internal market
541–2w

NHS reform
538w

NHS trusts
542w, 784–5, 790–1
Administrative costs 455w
Blackpool 783
Debts 784
Directors 538w
Industrial health and safety 538–9w
Leeds 786
Licensing 464w
Meetings (10.12.97) 1149
Mergers 785–6
NHS administration 270w
North Wales 450w
Public appointments 789–90
Public opinion 785
Road accidents 782–3
VAT repayment 642w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Points of order (08.12.97) 668
European Communities (04.12.97) 515
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1277, 1295, 1309, 1312–6, 1319–21
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1035
Questions
Elderly 782

Nigeria
British embassies 14w
Immigration applications 14w
Political refugees 84w
Vision 2010 405–6w

Nimrod aircraft
263w, 332w

"No More Excuses White Paper"
49–50w

No-fault compensation
Medical malpractice 329w

Noise control
Factories 37w

Non-domestic rates
112–4w, 634–5w, 727w
Bed and breakfast accommodation 729w
Scotland 158w
Standard spending assessments 222w
Wales 119w

Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(11.12.97) 1214

Non-fossil fuel obligation
254w

Non-governmental organisations
Manpower 239w

Non-teaching staff
432w

Norfolk
Cats 49w, 149w
Digital television (10.12.97) 977–83

Norfolk Broads
Environment protection 350–1w

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
see NATO

North East region
New deal for young unemployed 652–3w

North Sea
Gas supply industry 279w

North Wales
NHS trusts 450w
Police 272w

North West region
Theatres 372w

North Western Electricity Board
Electric cables 255–6w

Northallerton Hospital
456w

Northavon
National Lottery 318w

Northern Cyprus
370w
Official visits 710w

Northern Ireland
Ambulance services 308w
Archives 713w
Best value 712–3w
Council house sales 425–6w
Criminal investigation (09.12.97) 916
Demonstrations 127w, 363w
Detection rates 674–5w
EC grants and loans 308w
Employment discrimination 307–8w, 516w
Firearms 615–6w
NHS finance 7w
One parent benefits 1007–8
Police (05.12.97) 579
Pre-school education 516w
Probationer driver plates 9w
Public expenditure 423–4w
Public order offences 307w
Sheep 676w
Terrorism 127w, (11.12.97) 1215–54
Weapons 554–8w

Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities
7–8w

Northern Ireland Civil Service
8w
Employment discrimination 8w
Equal opportunities 8–9w

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R* (11.12.97) 1215–54

Northern Ireland government
425w, 1008

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Manpower 712w

Northern Ireland Information Service
Higher civil servants 364w

Northern Ireland Office
Ethnic minorities 7w
Government contracts 427w
Official hospitality 616w
Pay 116–7w, 424w
Public appointments 127–8w
Publicity 616–7w
Tax avoidance 127w

Northumberland
Hill farming 350w

Norwich
National asset register 279w

Nottingham
New deal for young unemployed 1165–6

Nuclear accidents
Disclosure of information 252w
Emergency planning 222w

Nuclear fuels
National asset register 249–50w

Nuclear safety
250w
Codes of practice 281w
Licensing 223–4w
Treaties 249w

Nuclear weapons
Expenditure 21–2w

Numeracy
366w

Numeracy Task Force
549w

Nurses
Scotland 618–9w

Nurses' training
South Western Regional Health Authority 687w, 735w

Nursing homes
Scotland 617w

Nutrition and health
536w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Questions
English language, Educational standards 661w
Firearms, Compensation 639w

O'Brien, Mr Mike, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Questions
British citizenship 436w
Campsfield House Detention Centre, Prison riots 83–4w
Deportation 50w
Ferries, Passports 85w
Illegal immigrants 100w
Immigrant detainees 292–3w
Immigrant detainees, Nationality 438–9w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Manpower 104w
Immigration appeals 57w
Immigration controls, Relocation of employees 433w
Lunar House, Manpower 296w

O'Brien, Mr Mike—continued
Lunar House, Telephones 433w
Members' correspondence 291w
Parking, Home Office 437–8w
Political refugees 436w
Political refugees, Algeria 435w
Political refugees, Czech Republic 504w
Political refugees, Dover 361–2w
Political refugees, Nigeria 84w
Political refugees, Reviews 99w, 293–4w
Political refugees, Sri Lanka 50–1w, 636w
Security industry, Immigrant detainees 85w
Sierra Leone 638w
Transsexuals 503w

O'Brien, Mr William
Questions
Clergy, Pensions 16–7
Educational finance 1175
Magistrates' courts, Administration of justice 452w
National Lottery, Village halls 656–7
Warships, Defence procurement 23w

Occupational pensions
256–8w

Offal
Cattle 679–80w
Poultry 17–8w
Rendering industry 21w
Waste disposal 17–8w

Offences against children
Bangladesh 577–8w

Offices
British Library 470w

Official engagements
212w, 597–8w

Official gifts
Heads of state 584w
Royal family 584w

Official hospitality
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 376–7w
Dept of Trade and Industry 726w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 477–9w
Northern Ireland Office 616w
Prime Minister 411w
10 Downing Street 502w

Official residences
Lord Chancellor's Dept 452w

Official secrets
298–9w
Telecommunications industry 298w

Official Secrets Act 1911
Questions
298–9w

Official visits
Albania 122w
Northern Cyprus 710w

Offshore trusts
1005–6
Guernsey 575–6w
Taxation 576w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Questions
Social Exclusion Unit 4w

Oil pollution
Moray Firth 624w

Olner, Mr Bill
Questions
NHS finance, Warwickshire 780–1

Ombudsman
Funerals 91w

Oncology
Hospital consultants 128w, 712w

One parent benefits
353–4
Northern Ireland 1007–8

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Questions
Regional planning and development 145–6

Open general export licences
671w, 722w

Open government
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 164–5w
Dept for Education and Employment 549w
Dept of Trade and Industry 95w
Ministerial statements (11.12.97) 1183–96

Opencast mining
352
Environment protection 268w

Opera
Young people 470w

Opik, Mr Lembit
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 683, 689, 713, 732, 737, 740, 751–60, (09.12.97) 823, 825, 854
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1218, 1222, 1234, 1248–9
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 344
Animal feed, EC countries 713–4w
Beef, Exports 685w
Council tax benefits 606w
Criminal injuries compensation 363w
EC grants and loans, Wales 518w
Further education, Cost per student 309w, 551w
Further education, Educational finance 241w, 309w
Further education, Student numbers 240–1w
Gaming machines 292w
Gaming machines, Licensed premises 292w
Music education, Curriculum 520w
National Assembly of Wales, Youth organisations 267w
New deal for young unemployed, Further education 240w
NHS finance, Northern Ireland 7w
Railway transport, Fines 285w
Social security benefits, Students 380w
Train operating units, Performance related pay 493w

Opposition days
Business (01.12.97) 81–127
Disability living allowance (01.12.97) 22–80
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 22–80

Oral contraceptives
Drug side effects 738w

Oral questions
Minister Without Portfolio 318w

Orange badge scheme
Motorcycles 494w

Order Paper
Speaker's rulings and statements (12.12.97) 1285

Organophosphates
Medical records 110w
Sheep dipping 351–2w, 683w

Osborne, Ms Sandra
Questions
Archives, Northern Ireland 713w
NHS, Scotland 151w

OSPAR Commission (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(09.12.97) 913

Ostriches
Slaughterhouses 358w

Ottawa Convention
300w, 497w, 649w, 1010

Ottaway, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 582

Otterburn
Armed forces training 262w

Out of school childcare grant scheme
Training and enterprise councils 549–50w

Out of town shopping centres
401–2w

Overseas aid
239–40w, 322–3w, 610w, 994, 998
Armenia 134w
Bangladesh 609w
Children 238–9w
Democratic Republic of the Congo 3–4w
Water treatment 614–5w
Zimbabwe 324w

Overseas investment
Yemen 719w

Overseas students
Parental contributions 550w

Overseas trade
India 12w

Own resources
EC enlargement (11.12.97) 1210

Oxfordshire County Council
Local government social services 49w, 89w

P and O
India 595w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 172
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 936, 940–2
Questions
Animal feed 18w
Battery hens 18w
Battery hens, EC action 18w
Bed and breakfast accommodation, Non-domestic rates 729w
Beef 477–8
Beef, Imports 718w
Beekeeping 717w
Green pound, Compensation 21w
Hemp, Licensing 21w
Honey, Imports 717w
Horse racing 100w
Offal, Rendering industry 21w
Poultry, Animal feed 16w
Poultry, Offal 17–8w
Poultry meat 16w
Poultry meat, Food consumption 17w
Poultry meat, Food hygiene 19w
Poultry meat, Food imports 718w
Poultry meat, Production 16–7w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Questions
Down District Council, Local government staff 364w

Paisley, Rev Ian*—*continued
IRA 1008
Northern Ireland Information Service, Higher civil servants 364w

Pakistan
Immigration applications 497w
Visas 405w

Palace of Westminster
Aids for handicapped 404w
Blood donors 403–4w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Questions
Export of live animals, Pigs 355–6w
Prison Service 585w

Parental contributions
Overseas students 550w
Tuition fees 550w

Parking
Dept for Education and Employment 430–1w
Dept of Health 459w
Dept of Social Security 474w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 422w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 407w
Home Office 437–8w
House of Commons 404w
Ministry of Defence 440w
Treasury 507w

Parliamentary broadcasting
(11.12.97) 1255–62

Parliamentary building maintenance and repair
Lord Chancellor's Dept 452w

Parliamentary buildings
European Parliament 710w
National Assembly of Wales 337–9, 341–2, 450w
Scottish Parliament 95–7w, 151w, 318w

Parliamentary elections
Scottish Parliament 152w

Parliamentary private secretaries
Early day motions 410w

Parole
Life imprisonment 295–6w

Parole Board
Public appointments 295–6w

Part-time education
Access funds 660w

Part-time employment
Conditions of employment 163w

Party conferences
Intelligence services 301w

Passive smoking
House of Commons Commission 131w

Passports
Ferries 85w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1206
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 424
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 762, (09.12.97) 818–9, 874–8, 880, 890
Ministers, Points of order (11.12.97) 1209–10
Questions
National Assembly of Wales 342
National Assembly of Wales, Costs 343

Pathology
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust 178–9w, 454w, 733–4w

Patient or Prisoner Report Working Group
696–7w

Patient pack initiative
736w

Patients
Leicestershire Health Authority 342w
Medical treatments 537w, 792–4

Patients' transport
691w
Merseyside 691w

Pay deductions
Prisoners of war 5–6, 25w

Peace negotiations
Middle East 711w

Pearson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 370–1
Questions
Housing, West Midlands 288–9w

Pedestrian areas
397–8w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
Insurance premium tax 508w
Insurance premium tax, Holiday and travel insurance 507–8w, 567w, 644w
National insurance contributions, Actors 275–6w

Pension funds
EC budget 168w
Economic and monetary union 575w

Pensioners
354
Astra Training Services 10w
Energy prices 606–7w
Heating 730w
Income support 202w
Winter fuel payments 276w, 327w

Pensions
603w
Clergy 16–7

Pensions Act 1995
Questions
Secondary legislation 731w

Pensions appeal tribunals
330w

Performance related pay
Train operating units 493w

Perjury
209–10w
Prosecutions 484

Permanent secretaries
Dept for Education and Employment 317w
Dept of Health 349w
Dept of Social Security 329w
Ministry of Defence 336w
Scottish Office 678w
Welsh Office 306w

Persian Gulf
Armed forces deployment 18

Personal equity plans
353

Personal injury compensation
Legal aid 662–3

Personal pensions
Compensation 640–2w

Personal records
Barnardos 346–7w
Disclosure of information 246w

Personal savings
351–2, 1006–7
Tax allowances 349

Personal social services
Government grants to local authorities 184w

Pesticides
Health hazards 624w

Pet foods
Imports 718w

Petroleum exploration licences
Shetland 342w

Phantom limb pain
Medical research 736w

Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme
347–8w

Philippines
Bridges 646w

Physical education
Challenge Fund 515w
Curriculum 551w
Educational standards 520w, 551w
National vocational qualifications 520w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Community care, Private sector (03.12.97) 330–3
Questions
Access to countryside 352w
Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education Etc, Annual reports 491w
Magistrates' courts, Lancashire 665–6

Pigs
Export of live animals 355–6w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 517
House of Commons divisions, Points of order (10.12.97) 1152
Local government finance (02.12.97) 168
Questions
Anaesthetics 180w
Common agricultural policy, Eastern Europe 474
Defence land 8–9
Habitual residence test 380w
Legislative process 155–6
NHS trusts, Public opinion 785

Planning appeals
36w
Building alterations 109w
Housing construction 287–8w, 399–400w
Supermarkets 36w

Planning permission
Aerials 426w, 543w
Alternative energy 595w
Manchester United Football Club 135w
Portadown 424w
Supermarkets 632–3w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Questions
Probationer driver plates, Northern Ireland 9w

Plastic surgery
Breasts 675w

Play
Children 467w

Playing fields
Property transfer 661w
Schools 649–50

Plutonium
Disclosure of information 163–4w
Dounreay 249w
Radioactive waste disposal 163–4w
Sellafield 249w

Police
Manpower 505–6w
North Wales 272w
Northern Ireland (05.12.97) 579
Prosecutions 322w
Video recordings 296–7w
Wales 272w

Police Act 1997
Questions
363w, 506w

Police authorities
299w
Finance 118–9w
Wales 118–9w

Police cautions
Young offenders 695–6w

Police corruption
Metropolitan Police 637w

Police equipment
Chemical weapons 208w
Codes of practice 504–5w

Police grant
100–2w

Police (Northern Ireland) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (05.12.97) 579

Police raids
Mass media 505w, 696w
Wiltshire Constabulary 505w, 696w

Police training
Indonesia 406w, 615w

Political activities
Local government staff 544w

Political parties
Finance 2[illegible]w

Political prisoners
Turkey 370w

Political refugees
436w
Algeria 435w
Czech Republic 361–2w, 504w
Dover 361–2w
Nigeria 84w
Reviews 99w, 293–4w
Slovakia 504w
Social security benefits 381–2w
Sri Lanka 50–1w, 636w

Pollard, Mr Kerry
Questions
Children, Play 467w

Pollution control
422–3w, 635w
Agricultural land 598w
Water pollution 630w

Pond, Mr Chris
Questions
Gene Therapy Advisory Committee, Public appointments 598–9w
Pay 169–70w
Primary health care 777–8
Schools, Finance 659w

Population
Commonwealth 609w

Port state control
Flotta 31w
Sullom Voe 31w

Portadown
Planning permission 424w

Portcullis House
578–9w, (12.12.97) 1332

Porton Down
Animal experiments 171–5w

Ports
India 501w, 577w

Portsmouth
Youth unemployment 390w

Post Office
93w
Executives 341w

Post offices
Closures 161w
Urban areas 340w

Postal services
Wales (05.12.97) 638–48

Poultry
Animal feed 16w
Offal 17–8w

Poultry meat
16w
China 358w
Food consumption 17w
Food hygiene 19w
Food imports 718w
Production 16–7w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 411–7

Poverty
Departmental responsibilities 383–4w
Sanctions 615w

Powell, Ray,
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 698–702

Power industry
National parks 544–5w

Power stations
160w

Prayer
House of Commons procedure 130w

Premium bonds
Self-assessment of tax 243w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 83, 91–2
Open government (11.12.97) 1193
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1064, 1074–5
Questions
Agriculture, Young people 150w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 20w
Cannabis, Medical treatments 291w
Church property 16w
Dental services, Consumer protection 455w
Dental services, Wales 304–5w
Dentists, Wales 305w
Espionage, Fishing vessels 173w
Hill farming 472
Hill farming, Farm incomes 350w

Prentice, Mr Gordon—continued
Hindley, Myra, Prison sentences 56w
Judges, Public appointments 661
Kidney patients, Elderly 733w
Lone parent premium 669–70w
Low flying, Military aircraft 27w
Maintenance, Children 472w
Metropolitan Police, Police corruption 637w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 176w
Millennium compliance, Government departments 324w
Millennium Exhibition, Compensation 166w
Millennium Exhibition, Construction 166w, 609w
National asset register 509w
Perjury 209–10w
Perjury, Prosecutions 484
Phantom limb pain, Medical research 736w
RAF Menwith Hill 263w
Road haulage industry, Training 549w
Sports facilities, Cricket 135–6w
Textile industry 250w
Theft, Sheep 637w
Vocational training, Inspections 387w

Pre-school education
553w
Northern Ireland 516w

Prescott, Rt Hon John, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and the Regions
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 157–73
Local government finance, Ministerial statements (02.12.97) 157–73
Regional development agencies, Ministerial statements (03.12.97) 357–71
Regional Development Agencies Bill, 1R (10.12.97) 1024
Questions
Political parties, Finance 226w

Prescription drugs
Aricept 540w
Beta-interferon 540w
Waste disposal 454–5w

President of the Council
Advertising 491w
Ethnic minorities 130w
Ministerial policy advisors 705w

Press
Dept of Health 345w

Press Complaints Commission Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (09.12.97) 813–4

Primarolo, Ms Dawn, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Consolidated Fund Bill, 1R (09.12.97) 907
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties 244w
Aviation fuels, Taxation 645w
Bicycles, Tax allowances 423w
Capital gains tax, Investment 708w
Chernobyl Children Lifeline 367w
Corporation tax 709w
Day care of children, Taxation 707w
Duty free allowances 244w
Duty free allowances, Employment 559w
Employment, Tax yields 167w
Family credit, Income tax 429w
Gas supply industry, North Sea 279w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—continued
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 7w
Insurance premium tax 428w, 508w
Insurance premium tax, Holiday and travel insurance 507–8w, 567w, 644w
Married personal allowance, Handicapped 367w
Self-assessment of tax 279w, 574w
Self-assessment of tax, Premium bonds 243w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 245w
Smuggling, EC internal trade 428–9w
Smuggling, Tobacco 244–5w
Tax administration, Rural areas 6w
Tax allowances, Minibuses 573w
Tax burden 560w
Tax collection 5w
Tax harmonisation 6w, 168w
Tax rates and bands 167w, 559w
Teachers, Tax allowances 427–8w
VAT, Charities 428w
VAT, Health services 561w
VAT, Home care services 508w
VAT, Home energy efficiency scheme 631–2w
VAT, Home insulation scheme 5w
VAT, Incontinence aids 560–1w
VAT, NHS 428w, 642w
VAT repayment, NHS trusts 642w
Veterinary services, Tax yields 508w

Primary education
Class sizes 139–47w, 431w, 651w
School admission 521w
Sportsmark 650

Primary health care
542w, 777–9
General practitioners 456–7w
GP fundholders 778

Prime Minister
Civil servants' visits abroad 411w
Electronic mail 411w
Ministerial statements 320w
Official hospitality 411w
Publicity 412w

Prime Minister's questions
153–4

Prior, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 86
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 201–3
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 258–61
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 543w
Coal 463w
Food exports, Farm incomes 480
Millennium Exhibition, Admission charges 475w
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco advertising 464w

Priority routes
Road length 286w

Prison discipline
436w

Prison medical services
435w
Mentally disturbed offenders 586w

Prison population
593w

Prison riots
Campsfield House Detention Centre 83–4w

Prison sentences
Hindley, Myra 56w

Prison Service
585w

***Prison Service**—continued*
Advertising 53–4w
Information services 52–3w

Prison visitors
Annual reports 51–2w

Prisoners
Age 436w
Counselling 577–8w, 625w
Death 55–6w, 586w
Drug abuse 504w, 638w
Expenditure 626w
Mental illness 588w
Scotland 621–2w, 625–6w
Suicide 435w, 587–8w
Women 621–2w, 625w

Prisoners of war
Armed forces officers' pay 4–5
Monuments (03.12.97) 460–8
Pay deductions 5–6, 25w

Prisoners' rights
Publications 58w

Prisoners' transfers
Campbell, Jason 9w

Prisons
Performance standards 54–5w
Private sector 54–5w

Prisons Ombudsman
55–6w

Privacy
Telecommunications technology 229w

Private education
General Teaching Council 552w

Private finance initiative
566–8w, 690–1w
Government departments 571–3w
Hospitals 539w
NHS 690w
Wales 268w

Private health services
Dental services 259w

Private Members' bills
154–5

Private sector
Community care (03.12.97) 330–6
Prisons 54–5w
Secure training centres 299w

Privatisation
Airports 308w

Probation and aftercare
589w
Government grants 207w
Judiciary 207w
Research 589w

Probation officers
207w

Probationer driver plates
Northern Ireland 9w

Proceeds of crime
Scotland 623–4w

Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995
Questions
623–4w

Productivity
366w

Professional qualifications
Accountants 532w
Headteachers 552–3w

Property law
World War II 595w, 673w

Property transfer
Armed forces housing 331–2w
British Library 468–9w
Government buildings 272–3w
National Sound Archive 469–70w
Playing fields 661w

Prosecutions
Animal cruelty 481–3
Crime victims 322w
Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964 322w
Driving offences 590–1w
Industrial health and safety 42–3w, 412–4w
Perjury 484
Police 322w
Sex shops 637w
Social security abuse 533w
Waste management 42w
Water pollution 421–2w

Prosser, Mr Gwyn
Questions
New deal for young unemployed, Service industries 652w
Primary health care 777–8

Prosthetics
246w
Eastern Health and Social Services Board 128–9w
Hospital waiting lists 128–9w, 246–7w

Protection from Harassment Act 1997
Questions
85w

Public appointments
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force 288w, 410w
Dept of Health 86w
Disability Rights Task Force 242–3w
Disclosure of information 326w
Ethnic minorities 326w
Gene Therapy Advisory Committee 598–9w
Judges 661
Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust 692w
NHS trusts 789–90
Northern Ireland Office 127–8w
Parole Board 295–6w
Pay 615w, 647w, 692–3w, 700–2w
Quarantine Advisory Group 355w
Rural Development Commission 547w
Security Service Commissioner 584w
Wales Agri-environment Scheme Working Group 517w
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust 179–80w

Public bodies
Dept for Education and Employment 700–2w
Dept for International Development 615w
Dept of Health 692–3w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 647w

Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) (National Health Service Trusts) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(10.12.97) 1149

Public expenditure
185–6w, 559w, 561–6w, 568–72w, 1006
Dept of Trade and Industry 672w
National Assembly of Wales 510–3w
Northern Ireland 423–4w
Scotland 152w, 154w
Scottish Parliament 510–3w
Training and enterprise councils 274w
Wales 345, 580–3w

Public finance
Accounting 366w

Public House Names Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (12.12.97) 1332

Public Interest Disclosure Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R* (12.12.97) 1331

Public libraries
635–6w
Information services 465w

Public meetings
"Household Growth Consultation Paper" 109w

Public opinion
Conditional fee agreements 115–6w
NHS trusts 785

Public order offences
Northern Ireland 307w

Public petitions
Atkinson, George (10.12.97) 1154
British Board of Film Classification (09.12.97) 917
Universities (10.12.97) 1154

Public Record Office
Disclosure of information 452w

Public sector assets
560w

Public sector housing
Expenditure 28–30w

Public service pensions
641w
EC countries 508–9w

Public transport
Scotland 152w
Wales 450w

Public utilities
Energy consumption 463w

Publications
Council for Science and Technology 342–3w
Prisoners' rights 58w

Publicity
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 377w
Dept for International Development 131–2w
Economic and monetary union 369w
Euro 365–6w
Family conciliation services 379w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 483–6w
Ministry of Defence 441–9w
Northern Ireland Office 616–7w
Prime Minister 412w
Smoke alarms 100w
Tuition fees 137w

Pupils
Lone parents 658w

Pupil-teacher ratios
312–6w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 548
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 365

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Finance 11w

Quality control
Beef 525w

Quarantine Advisory Group
Public appointments 355w

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital Margate
788

***Quin, Ms Joyce**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Altcourse Prison 592–3w
Bail hostels, West Midlands 436–7w
Blakenhurst Prison 52w
Category A prisoners 638w
Community service orders 295w
Driving, EC action 591–2w
Electronic tagging 589w
Gloucester Prison, Rehabilitation of offenders 437w
Group 4 Securitas, Civil servants 434–5w
Judiciary, Probation and aftercare 207w
Parole Board, Public appointments 295–6w
Patient or Prisoner Report Working Group 696–7w
Prison discipline 436w
Prison medical services 435w
Prison medical services, Mentally disturbed offenders 586w
Prison population 593w
Prison Service, Advertising 53–4w
Prison Service, Information services 52–3w
Prison visitors, Annual reports 51–2w
Prisoners, Age 436w
Prisoners, Counselling 577–8w
Prisoners, Death 56w, 586w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 638w
Prisoners, Mental illness 588w
Prisoners, Suicide 435w, 587–8w
Prisoners' rights, Publications 58w
Prisons, Private sector 54–5w
Prisons Ombudsman 55–6w
Probation and aftercare 589w
Probation and aftercare, Government grants 207w
Probation and aftercare, Research 589w
Probation officers 207w
Remand in custody, Women 588w
Sexual offences, Sentencing 208w
Treaty of Amsterdam, EC immigration 236w

Quinn, Mr Lawrie
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Hill farming 471–2

Racial harassment
Armed forces 13
Court rules and procedures 85w

Radar
Motor vehicles 208w

Radiation hazards
Chatham Dockyard 26w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 397, 402–5, 416, 418–9, 422, 428, 443, 446, 450, 452–7

Radio
Sports 373w

Radio engineering
Railway safety 280w

Radioactive waste disposal
Beaufort Dyke 219–20w
Plutonium 163–4w

RAF Menwith Hill
263w

RAF Quedgeley
Development plans 554w

Railtrack
398–9w, 421w
Repairs and maintenance 399w

Railway industry
Regulatory systems 225w

Railway network
Cardiff 704w
Channel tunnel 284–5w, 421w

Railway safety
280w
Radio engineering 280w
Telephone services 280w

Railway signals
Central line 634w

Railway track
Fences 110–1w

Railway transport
Cairngorms 628w
Fines 285w

Railway travel
Telephones 46w

Rain forests
Brazil 1001

Rammell, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 421–5

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Special education (05.12.97) 600–2
Questions
Antismoking campaign 347w
Biodiversity 1001
Drug abuse, Finance 456w
Elderly, Social services 454w
General practitioners, Primary health care 456–7w
Joyce, Eric 337w
Libraries, Training 373w
Out of school childcare grant scheme, Training and enterprise councils 549–50w
Teacher training, Information technology 698w

Rape
Criminal proceedings 483
Witnesses 483–4

***Raynsford, Mr Nick**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Conuygar Quarry (08.12.97) 772–6
Local government finance, Dorset (10.12.97) 1155–63
Longstone Edge (03.12.97) 325–9
Shopping centres (10.12.97) 985–92
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 543w
Bed and breakfast accommodation, Homelessness 35–6w
Bed and breakfast accommodation, Non-domestic rates 729w
Building regulations, Inspections 286w
Cohabitation 415–6w
Council housing 284w
Council housing, Greater London 419w
Council tax 493w
Council tax, Liability 37w
Council tax capping 493w
European Charter of Local Self-Government 115w, 496w
Government grants to local authorities 634w
Greater London Authority 35w
Homelessness, Greater London 111w

***Raynsford, Mr Nick**—continued*
House purchase 29w
"Household Growth Consultation Paper", Public meetings 109w
Housing, Building alterations 107–8w
Housing construction 282w, 416–8w
Housing construction, East Sussex 400w
Housing construction, Greater London 283w
Housing construction, Land use 108–9w
Housing construction, Urban areas 282w
Housing construction, Water supply 223w
Housing improvement, Finance 222w
Leasehold housing 630w
Local authorities, Millennium compliance 286–7w
Local exchange and trading schemes 543w
Local government expenditure 494w, 727w
Local government finance 34–5w, 286w, 418–9w, 545–6w
Local government finance, Harrogate 418w
Local government finance, Inflation 417–8w
Local government reform, Finance 400–1w
Local government staff, Political activities 544w
Lowell Park Mortgages 30w
Millennium compliance, Local government expenditure 287w
National parks, Power industry 544–5w
Non-domestic rates 634–5w
Non-domestic rates, Standard spending assessments 222w
Out of town shopping centres 401–2w
Oxfordshire County Council, Local government social services 49w
Parking, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 422w
Planning appeals 36w
Planning appeals, Building alterations 109w
Planning appeals, Housing construction 287–8w, 399–400w
Public sector housing, Expenditure 28–30w
Rents, Housing associations 283–4w
Rough sleepers initiative, Greater London 726–7w
Social rented housing 284w
Standard spending assessments 33–5w, 112w
Standard spending assessments, Greater London 33–4w
Supermarkets, Cockermouth 634w
Supermarkets, Planning appeals 36w
Town and country planning, Commuters 32–3w
Travelling people, Local authority powers 107w
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority, Finance 420–1w

Reckless driving
Convictions 697–8w

Recording industry
567w

Redundancy
Camelon 140
CELTEC 306w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 81–93, 95, 100
Questions
Business 255w
Coal mine closures 670w
Coal mine closures, Gas fired power stations 160w
Coal mine closures, Regional aid 160w
Coal mining 254–5w, 340w
Energy policy 531w

***Redwood, Rt Hon John**—continued*
Export licensing, Administrative delays 159w
Foreign investment in UK 255w
Gas fired power stations 531–2w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 254w
Power stations 160w
Retail prices 159w
Simon of Highbury, Lord 255w
Tobacco advertising, Sports sponsorship 340w

Reed, Mr Andrew
Questions
New deal for young unemployed, Jobseeker's allowance 652w

Reeves Advisory Group
see National Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group

Referendums
Uganda 993–4
Voting System Independent Commission 348
Western Sahara 498–9w

Reform of Quarantine Regulations Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R order read (12.12.97) 1331

Refugees
Transcaucasus 123w
Wales 580w

Regional aid
Coal mine closures 160w

Regional development agencies
106w, 729w
Ministerial statements (03.12.97) 357–71

Regional Development Agencies Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (10.12.97) 1024

Regional government
496w

Regional planning and development
145–6
Wales 345–6

Regional selective assistance
Scotland 140–1

Regulatory systems
Agriculture 360w
Railway industry 225w

Rehabilitation of offenders
Gloucester Prison 437w

Rehman, Abdul
Visas 122w

***Reid, Dr John**, Minister for the Armed Forces*
Debates etc.
Ballistic missile defence (04.12.97) 574–8
Stankovic, Milos (10.12.97) 973–6
Questions
Aircraft 11
Armed forces, Drug abuse 441w
Armed forces, Racial harassment 13
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 440–1w
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 24w, 27w
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 18
Armed forces officers, Armed forces recruitment 22w
Armed forces recruitment 27w
Armed forces recruitment, Ethnic minorities 12–3
Armed forces strength 175w
Armed forces training, Otterburn 262w

***Reid, Dr John**—continued*
Armed forces women 15
Army strength 11–2
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces women 263w
C17 aircraft 11
Combined Cadet Force, Schools 502w
Courts martial 336w
Defence medical services 22–3w
Defence review 26w
Defence review, Armed forces reserves 22w
Espionage, Fishing vessels 171w, 173w
Frigates, Caribbean 706w
Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College 384–5w
Harrier aircraft 706w
Joyce, Eric 337w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 176w
Military discipline 12
Military police 263w
Ministerial statements, Ministry of Defence 553–4w
Ministry of Defence, Accounting 502w
Ministry of Defence, New deal for young unemployed 24–5w
Poverty, Departmental responsibilities 383–4w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 441–9w
RAF Menwith Hill 263w
Royal Irish Regiment, Army strength 176w
Royal Naval College 384w
Royal Naval College, Crown immunity 384w
Royal yacht 333–5w, 385w
Sea Harrier aircraft, Defence procurement 706w
Stabilisation Force in Bosnia 24w
Territorial Army 1
Territorial Army, Army strength 173–5w
Territorial Army, Defence review 331w
Territorial Army, New deal for young unemployed 653w
Territorial Army, Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers 2–3
Transport of radioactive materials 337w
Warships, Defence procurement 23w, 705w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 554–8w
West Indies Guardship 383w

Relocation of employees
Immigration controls 433w
Scottish Office 95w

Remand in custody
Women 588w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 31, 35, 48, 52–8
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 183
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1052, 1082–4, 1112–3
Questions
Council tax benefits 604–5w
Council tax benefits, Social security recipients 599–600w
Ministerial statements 152
NHS finance 791
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 5
Tuition fees, Non-payment 651w

Rendering industry
680w
Government assistance 680–2w
Offal 21w

Rented housing
Greater London 283w

Rents
Housing associations 283–4w

Rescue services
49w
HMS Daedalus 419w

Research councils
Contracts of employment 253w

Research finance
Animal experiments 586w
Economic and Social Research Council 670w

Residential care
Wiltshire 686w

Residential care of children
Wales 340

Retail prices
159w

Retail trade
Cars 252w
Vitamin B6 20w, 148w, 360w, 374w

Retirement
Limon, Donald (09.12.97) 795
Teachers 552w

Retirement age
431w

Retirement pensions
Age addition 603w
Index linking 730–1w

Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel
179w

Reviews
Political refugees 99w, 293–4w

Richmond upon Thames
J Sainsbury 632–3w

Rights of audience
484–5

Ritual slaughter
Food labelling 19w

RJB Mining
348–9

Road accidents
A38 543–4w
A49 36–7w
Death 543–4w
NHS trusts 782–3

Road construction
A465 346
A470 678w

Road haulage industry
Training 549w

Road haulage licences
548w

Road length
Priority routes 286w

Road safety
Cellular phones 421w

Road Traffic Act 1988
Questions
48w

Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(11.12.97) 1214

Roads
Deeside 704w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1208
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 399, 401–2, 427
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1222
Questions
Army strength 11–2
Common agricultural policy, Birds 474
Prime Minister's questions 153–4

***Robertson, Rt Hon George**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Questions
Contingency reserve, Yugoslavia 24w
Defence expenditure 10
Defence review 705w
European fighter aircraft 639w
Mine Information and Training Centre 4
Mine Information and Training Centre, Royal Engineers 3
Mines, Bomb disposal 3–5
Ministers' visits abroad, Russia 25–6w
Ministry of Defence, Government buildings 23w
NATO, Costs 9–10
Nuclear weapons, Expenditure 21–2w
Royal yacht 6–7, 175w, 554w
Trident 14–5, 335–6w
Western European Union 705w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 84
Business questions (11.12.97) 1203
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 251–3
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 740–1, (09.12.97) 829, 853–6
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 945
Questions
Advance corporation tax 1010
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 150w
Conditional fee agreements, Insurance 663
Educational finance, Gloucestershire 1175
Fox hunting 437w
Gibraltar, European Parliament elections 499w
Human Rights Bill (HL) 1997/98, Sentencing 297w
Royal yacht 175w
Sierra Leone, Foreign policy 500w
Structure plans, Gloucestershire 400w
Sudan, Foreign policy 499w
Zimbabwe, Land nationalisation 407w

Robinson, Geoffrey
Shares 575–6w, 707w

***Robinson, Mr Geoffrey**, Paymaster General*
Questions
Literacy 366w
Private finance initiative, Government departments 571–3w
Public finance, Accounting 366w
Tax credits, USA 244w
Windfall tax 367w

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Questions
Breast cancer, Surgery 247–8w
Eastern Health and Social Services Board, Prosthetics 128–9w
Prosthetics 246w
Prosthetics, Hospital waiting lists 128–9w, 246–7w

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 308–12
Questions
Arms exports, Export credit guarantees 718–9w
Arms trade, Indonesia 464w, 721w
Arms trade, Turkey 93w, 340w, 671w
Business link 254w
Debts 672w
Duty free allowances, Employment 253w
EC Telecommunications Council 525–6w
Enterprise zones, Internet 250–1w
Export Control Organisation 596w
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Disclosure of information 94–5w
Export licensing 671w, 722w
Export promotion 596w
Home Office exports initiative 245–6w
Loan guarantee scheme 252w
Millennium compliance 89w
Millennium compliance, Business 594w
Mixed oxide fuel, Export controls 528w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 723w
Open general export licences 671w, 722w
Overseas investment, Yemen 719w
P and O, India 595w
Small businesses, Debts 723w
Small businesses, Staffordshire 254w

Rockall
14w

Rodents
Water and sewerage companies 111w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
House of Commons stationery, Contracts 704w
Mine Information and Training Centre, Royal Engineers 3
NHS finance 782
Palace of Westminster, Aids for handicapped 404w
Palace of Westminster, Blood donors 403–4w
Parking, House of Commons 404w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 688, 698–9, 702, (09.12.97) 843–4

Roll-on roll-off ships
Transport of radioactive materials 413–5w

Romford
National Lottery 371–2w

***Rooker, Mr Jeff**, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal (03.12.97) 318–21
Questions
Agenda 2000 356w
Agricultural subsidies 714w
Agriculture, Regulatory systems 360w
Animal feed 18w
Animal feed, EC countries 713–4w
Animal welfare 479–80
Battery hens 18w
Battery hens, EC action 18w
Beef 477–9
Beef, Exports 475, 685w
Beef, Farmers 475–8
Beef, Food labelling 717w

***Rooker, Mr Jeff**—continued*
Beef, Imports 718w
Beekeeping 717w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 477
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 682w, 685w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 476
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 20w, 150w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Slaughterhouses 354w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 525w
Cattle, Data banks 356–7w
Cattle, Ear tagging 149w, 682w
Cattle, Transport of animals 359w
Chocolate, Food labelling 20w
Common agricultural policy, Rural areas 352w
Dairy farming 478–9
Ear tagging 717w
Export of live animals, Pigs 355–6w
Food exports, Farm incomes 480
Food hygiene, Civil service agencies 360w
Food hygiene, Expenditure 361w
Food imports 352w
Food labelling 353w
Food packaging, Consumer information 524w
Food standards 354–5w
Food standards, Expenditure 353w
Fruit 355w
Green pound, Compensation 21w
Hemp, Licensing 21w
Hill livestock allowances, Marginal land 361w
Honey, Imports 717w
Integrated administration and control system, Agricultural land 598w
Irradiated food 524–5w
Lindane 682–3w
Milk, Dioxins 353w
Ministerial statements, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 357w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Technology foresight programme 19w
Offal, Cattle 679–80w
Offal, Rendering industry 21w
Pesticides, Health hazards 524w
Poultry, Animal feed 16w
Poultry, Offal 17–8w
Poultry meat 16w
Poultry meat, China 358w
Poultry meat, Food consumption 17w
Poultry meat, Food hygiene 19w
Poultry meat, Food imports 718w
Poultry meat, Production 16–7w
Quarantine Advisory Group, Public appointments 355w
Rendering industry 680w
Rendering industry, Government assistance 680–2w
Ritual slaughter, Food labelling 19w
Sheep dipping 683w
Sheep dipping, Organophosphates 351–2w, 683w
Tobacco industry, Subsidies 358w
United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards, Disclosure of information 19–20w
Untreated milk 683–4w
Vitamin B6, Retail trade 20w, 148w, 360w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 173
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Departmental publications 203w

Rooney, Mr Terry—continued
Private Members' bills 154–5
Public libraries 635–6w
Rehman, Abdul, Visas 122w
Sierra Leone 638w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 506
Questions
"Designed to Care White Paper" 491–2w
Electricity generation, Energy resources 219w
Employment opportunities, Tayside 141–2
Local government finance, Scotland 215–8w
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 158w

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 834, 862, 867–70
Questions
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Manpower 712w
Northern Ireland Office, Public appointments 127–8w
Sheep, Northern Ireland 676w

Rough sleepers initiative
Greater London 726–7w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1205
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 181–2
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 284–5w
Chevening scholarship programme 1000–1
Criminal records, Voluntary organisations 363w
Firearms, Compensation 210w
Medway NHS Trust, Finance 685–6w
Primary health care 778
Rape, Witnesses 483–4
Teaching methods 1173
Youth organisations, Performance standards 295w

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 221, 233–7, 247
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 675, 682, 708, (09.12.97) 829–37
Questions
Day care of children, Wales 303–4w
Educational qualifications, Tuition fees 387w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 344
Invalidity benefits 533w
NHS administration, Expenditure 273–4w
Torture, Equipment 300w

Royal Commission on Long-term Care
see Long-Term Care Royal Commission

Royal Engineers
Mine Information and Training Centre 3

Royal family
Official gifts 584w

Royal Irish Regiment
Army strength 176w

Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers
Territorial Army 2–3

Royal Naval College
13, 384w
Crown immunity 384w

Royal Shakespeare Company
650–1

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Crown Prosecution Service 482

Royal Ulster Constabulary
Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland 246w

Royal yacht
6–7, 175w, 320w, 333–5w, 385w, 554w

Ruane, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 962–3
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 855
Questions
Housing benefits 273–4w

Ruddock, Ms Joan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Equal opportunities 604w
Equal Opportunities Commission, Government grants 533–4w
Minister for Women 669w
Women, Armed forces deployment 604w
Women, Cabinet committees 534w
Women, Internet 471–2w
Women's National Commission 602w

Ruffley, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 100, 115–7
Open government (11.12.97) 1190
Questions
Cabinet Office, Information technology 277–8w
Government of Wales Bill 1997/98 340–1

Rural areas
Common agricultural policy 352w
New deal for young unemployed 1166
Scotland (10.12.97) 927–47
Tax administration 6w

Rural Development Commission
495w
Public appointments 547w

Rushey Mead School
New deal for schools 520w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 964, 966
Questions
Child benefit 603w
House of Commons, Tobacco 403w
Ritual slaughter, Food labelling 19w
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco advertising 136w
Veterinary services, Tax yields 508w
Welfare to work, Armed forces cadets 388w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
World Cup 466w

Russia
Espionage 173w
Foreign relations 12w
Ministers' visits abroad 25–6w

Saatchi and Saatchi
New Millennium Experience 166w

Safer cities scheme
Government grants 210w

"Safer Ships Cleaner Seas"
43–4w

Safety equipment
Fishing vessels 547–8w

Safety measures
Industrial accidents 221w

Safety standards
Toys and games 161–2w, 343w
Transport (02.12.97) 188–90
Transport of radioactive materials 413–5w

Sainsbury, Lord
709–10w

Sainsburys
see J Sainsbury

St Aubyn, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 741, (09.12.97) 878–80, 888
Members' constituency work, Points of order (10.12.97) 1152
Special education (05.12.97) 609–13, 615, 619, 632
Questions
EC regional policy, Scotland 153w

St Helena
999
Airports 999

St Michael's Hospital
692w

St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust
347w
Hospital waiting lists 348w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 290–7, 301, 304, 307, 309–10
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1034, 1064, 1138–9
Questions
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary elections 152w

Salter, Mr Martin
Questions
University of Ulster, Springvale initiative 248w

Sanctions
Iraq 354–6, 407w, 584w
Libyan Arab Republic 584w
Poverty 615w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Questions
National Lottery Charities Board 467–8w
Railway travel, Telephones 46w

Sandwich courses
Tuition fees 657w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Caribbean, Bananas 612w
Mines, Bomb disposal 3
Public transport, Scotland 152w
Tourist industry, Welfare to work 465–6w

Sawford, Mr Phil
Questions
Non-teaching staff 432w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Animal cruelty, Prosecutions 482–3
Church Commissioners, Advance corporation tax 17
Pension funds, Economic and monetary union 575w
Pensions 603w
Public service pensions, EC countries 508–9w

Schengen Agreement
123w, 296w, 303w, 648–9w

School admission
317w
Class sizes 431w
Primary education 521w

School buildings
Scotland 153w

School leaving
Educational qualifications 654w

School nurses
Manpower 735w

School Standards and Framework Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (04.12.97) 512
Questions
429w

School transport
Scotland 157–8w, 461w

Schools
Clubs 515w
Combined Cadet Force 502w
Deprivation indicators 1168
Educational standards 655–6w
Finance 392w, 659w
Hackney (01.12.97) 130–8
Head lice 345w
Internet 9–10w
Performance standards 661w
Playing fields 649–50
Teaching methods 552w
Vandalism 271–2w
Wales 272w

Science and technology research
Corporation tax 489–90w

Scotland
After school clubs 353
Alternatives to prison 623w
Antismoking campaign 213–5w
Asbestos 212–3w
Companies 146–7
Complaints against police 627–8w
Council house sales 461–2w
Criminal proceedings 619w
Day care of children 608w
Dental services 620w
Dental students 460w, 677w
EC regional policy 153w
Educational finance 143
Employment opportunities 139
Environmental health 151
Ferries 147–8
Fisheries 624–5w
Foreign investment in UK 144–6, 152w
Grant maintained schools 462w
Higher education 142–3, 461w
Higher education admission 156w
Housing 150–1
Housing finance 151
Land ownership and tenure 152w
Local education authorities 462w
Local enterprise agencies 155w
Local government finance 215–8w
Maternity services 212w
Medical research 618–9w
Medical students 460w, 677w
Mental illness specific grant 620w
Millennium compliance 621w
Neighbourhood nuisance 148–50
NHS 150–1w
NHS administration 152–3w
Non-domestic rates 158w
Nurses 618–9w
Nursing homes 617w
Prisoners 621–2w, 625–6w
Proceeds of crime 623–4w
Public expenditure 152w, 154w
Public transport 152w

Scotland—continued
Regional selective assistance 140–1
Rural areas (10.12.97) 927–47
School buildings 153w
School transport 157–8w, 461w
Smoking related diseases 214–5w, 318w
Student numbers 154w
Students 143–4
Surveys 509–10w
Tourist industry 140–1
Transport policy 153–4w
Transsexuals 622w
Tuition fees 144, 151–2, 156–7w, 213w, 461w
Unemployment 141
Voluntary organisations 701–3w
Welfare to work 159w, 676–7w

"Scotlands Parliament White Paper"
151w

Scottish Agricultural College Order Confirmation Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (03.12.97) 336
Rep (09.12.97) 777
3R (10.12.97) 992

Scottish Islands
Universities 619–20w

Scottish National Sleep Laboratory
626w

Scottish Office
95w
Advertising 367–8w
Electronic mail 677w
Ethnic minorities 211w
Medical research 617w
Ministerial statements 619w
Pay 215w
Permanent secretaries 678w
Relocation of employees 95w

Scottish Parliament
Finance 707w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 408w
Parliamentary buildings 95–7w, 151w, 318w
Parliamentary elections 152w
Public expenditure 510–3w
Statistics 620–1w

Scottish renewables obligation
219w

Scottish Standards Action Group
Secondary education 154–5w

Screening
Breast cancer 259–60w, 344–5w

Sea Harrier aircraft
Defence procurement 706w

Sea pollution
32w
Fylde 31–2w
Shipping safety 43–4w

Sea transport
Transport of radioactive materials 281w, 413–4w

Secondary education
Languages education 460w
Scottish Standards Action Group 154–5w

Secondary legislation
Animal experiments 209w
Pensions Act 1995 731w

Secure training centres
Private sector 299w

Security
Ministers 502–3w

Security industry
Immigrant detainees 85w

Security Service
see MI5

Security Service Act 1989
Questions
584w

Security Service Commissioner
Public appointments 584w

Security vetting
BBC external services 370w

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Schools, Hackney (01.12.97) 130–2

Self-assessment of tax
279w, 574w
Premium bonds 243w

Self-employed
New deal for young unemployed 659–60w

Sellafield
Plutonium 249w

Sentencing
Appeals 240w
Crimes against the person 294w
Driving offences 294w
Homicide 368w
Human Rights Bill (HL) 1997/98 297w
Sexual offences 208w
Young offenders 49–50w

Service industries
New deal for young unemployed 652w

Set-aside schemes
149w
Flood control 150w

Sex Offenders Act 1997
Questions
207–8w

Sex shops
Legislation 637w
Prosecutions 637w

Sexual offences
Data banks 207–8w
Sentencing 208w

Shares
Building societies 507w
Ministers 255w
Robinson, Geoffrey 575–6w, 707w

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Chatham Dockyard, Radiation hazards 26w
Educational standards, Schools 655–6w
Youth Justice Task Force 102w

Sheep
Northern Ireland 676w
Theft 637w

Sheep dipping
683w
Organophosphates 351–2w, 683w

Sheep premiums
Wales 451w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Oral questions, Points of order (10.12.97) 1032
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 366
Questions
Brazil, Rain forests 1001
Driving offences, Sentencing 294w
Influenza, Vaccination 786–7
Slimming 540w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Questions
British Museum, Admission charges 652
National Audit Office 17–8

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 501–2, (11.12.97) 1197–9
Questions
Defence land 337w
Poultry meat, China 358w

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1202
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 416
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 671, (09.12.97) 816, 837–41, 887
Open government (11.12.97) 1188
Questions
Bail hostels, West Midlands 436–7w
Local government, Wales 338
National Assembly of Wales 352

Shetland
Petroleum exploration licences 342w

Shipbuilding
EC grants and loans 252–3w

Shipley, Ms Debra
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1202
Questions
Russia, Foreign relations 12w

Shipping accidents
Inquiries 224w

Shipping safety
Sea pollution 43–4w

Ships
Inspections 47w

Shopping centres
(10.12.97) 984–92

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Bangladesh, Overseas aid 609w
Biodiversity 500–1w, 1001
Brazil, Rain forests 1001
Caribbean, Bananas 612w
Child workers, Contracts 615w
Climate Change Convention 611w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 995
Defence review, International cooperation 439–40w
Democratic Republic of the Congo, Overseas aid 3–4w
Dept for International Development, Civil service recruitment 613–4w
Developing countries 1002
Developing countries, Debts 993–4
Developing countries, Debts written off 613w
Developing countries, Health education 993
Developing countries, Spectacles 614w
EC aid 611w
EC aid, Environment protection 501w
EC Development Council, Sustainable development 501w
EC Environment Council, EC Development Council 501w
Free trade 996–7
India, Ports 501w
Indonesia, Police training 615w
Japan, International cooperation 612–3w
Know-how Fund 439w, 611w

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**—continued*
Labour and employment 997
Mines, Bomb disposal 611w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 364–5w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 995–6
Overseas aid 610w, 994
Overseas aid, Water treatment 614–5w
Philippines, Bridges 646w
Public bodies, Dept for International Development 615w
Sanctions, Poverty 615w
South America, Children 611–2w
Sustainable development 613w
UNESCO, Costs 613w
World Bank, Development aid 610w
Zimbabwe, Land nationalisation 994

Shortage subjects
Teacher training 393–4w

Sierra Leone
638w
Foreign policy 500w

Signposts
Airports 547w

Silicone
Health hazards 517w

Simon of Highbury, Lord
255w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 170
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1088, 1139–42
Questions
Energy conservation, Performance standards 110w
Food imports 352w
Government assistance to industry, Costs 644w
Home energy efficiency scheme, VAT 631–2w
House of Commons Commission, Passive smoking 131w
New deal for young unemployed, Nottingham 1165–6
Pensioners, Heating 730w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 261
Questions
Armed forces officers, Armed forces recruitment 22w
Cats 49w, 149w
Cats, Departmental coordination 148–9w
Cats, Norfolk 49w, 149w
Courts martial 331w, 336w
Millennium Exhibition, Consultants 659
Trade unions 532w

Singh, Mr Marsha
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 50
Questions
Pollution control 635w

Single regeneration budget
105–6w

Sites of special scientific interest
Hatfield Moor 226–7w, 285w
Thorne Moors 226–7w, 285w

Sixth form colleges
Educational standards 1167–8

Skill shortages
Biochemistry 720w

Skilled workers
Vocational training 658w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (11.12.97) 1200, 1203
Business questions (04.12.97) 504
Companies political contributions, Points of order (08.12.97) 667
Cycling (10.12.97) 966
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 495
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1268
NHS (09.12.97) 809
Open government (11.12.97) 1187
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 36
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 179–80
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1109
Tax avoidance, Points of order (01.12.97) 20–1
Questions
Nadir, Asil 321–2w
Opencast mining 352
Sports, Young people 649–50

Skye bridge
675–6w

Slaughterhouses
680w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 354w
Ostriches 358w

Slimming
540w

Slovakia
Human rights 121w
Political refugees 504w

Small businesses
Debts 723w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 550w
Employment discrimination 243w, 519w
New deal for young unemployed 1177–8
Staffordshire 254w

***Smith, Rt Hon Andrew**, Minister for Employment and Disability Rights, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Child care, Vocational training 429w
Employment zones 523–4w
Equal Opportunities Commission, Government grants 522w
New deal for long term unemployed 312w, 519w
New deal for young unemployed 430–2w, 652–3w, 1166, 1178–9
New deal for young unemployed, Educational qualifications 1166
New deal for young unemployed, Further education colleges 432w
New deal for young unemployed, Jobseeker's allowance 652w
New deal for young unemployed, North East region 652–3w
New deal for young unemployed, Nottingham 1165–6
New deal for young unemployed, Rural areas 1166
New deal for young unemployed, Self-employed 659–60w
New deal for young unemployed, Small businesses 1177–8
New deal for young unemployed, Training 1179
New deal for young unemployed, Vocational training 432w

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew—continued
Vocational training, Skilled workers 658w
Welfare to work 311–2w
Welfare to work, Ethnic groups 388w

Smith, Angela
Debates etc.
Waste Minimisation Bill, 1R (08.12.97) 670
Questions
Defence land, Hunting 27w
Mink, Farms 714–6w

Smith, Rt Hon Chris, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Art works, Insurance 1–2w
British Museum, Admission charges 652–3
Charities, Finance 657–8
Children, Play 467w
Ethnic minorities, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 2w
Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College 695w
Lotteries, Finance 467w
Mass media, Ownership 466w
Millennium, Greater London 371w
Millennium Commission 373w
Museums and galleries 653
Museums and galleries, Admission charges 652–3
National Lottery, Village halls 656–7
National Lottery Charities Board 467–8w
Public libraries 635–6w
Sports, Finance 657
Sports sponsorship 655–6
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco advertising 655
Television, Aids for handicapped 468w
Television licences 636w
Tourist industry, Minimum wage 2w
Young people, Dance 470w

Smith, Miss Geraldine
Questions
North Western Electricity Board, Electric cables 255–6w

Smith, Jacqui
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 375
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 306
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 54, 64–6
Questions
Defence Diversification Agency 7–8
Developing countries, Health education 993
EC Industry Council 341w
Leasehold housing 630w
Minimum wage 162w
Schools, Performance standards 661w

Smith, Mr John
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 850–3
Railway travel, Points of order (03.12.97) 391
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 34–5
Questions
National Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group 375–6w

Smith, Mr Llew
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1194–5
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1064

Smith, Mr Llew—continued
Questions
A465, Road construction 346
Chronic fatigue syndrome 260–2w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Medical treatments 692w
Defence expenditure 10
Nuclear fuels, National asset register 249–50w
Opencast mining, Environment protection 268w

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 927–9, 932, 938, 942
Questions
Housing, Scotland 150–1
Railway transport, Cairngorms 628w

Smoke alarms
56–7w
Publicity 100w

"Smoking Epidemic"
214–5w

Smoking related diseases
Death 737w
Scotland 214–5w, 318w
Wales 271w

Smuggling
Alcoholic drinks 244–5w
EC internal trade 428–9w
Tobacco 244–5w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Questions
NHS trusts 784–5
Oncology, Hospital consultants 128w, 712w

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1056, 1066–9
Questions
Public expenditure 1006

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 505
Questions
Ear tagging 717w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 711w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 789–90

Social Exclusion Unit
4w, 319w, 408–10w
Children 1007

Social rented housing
284w

Social security abuse
Prosecutions 533w

Social security benefits
Advertising 475w
Expenditure 380w
Finance 380–1w
Legislation 532–3w
Lone parents 534w
Opposition days (01.12.97) 22–80
Political refugees 381–2w
Students 380w, 430w
Take-up 475w

Social security benefits backdating
Blind 97–8w
Deaf 97–8w

Social security benefits rates
186–201w

Social security benefits uprating
Average earnings 471w

Social security benefits uprating—continued
Ministerial statements (02.12.97) 174–85

Social Security Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1033–148

Social security claims
Industrial diseases 603–4w

Social security recipients
Council tax benefits 599–600w
Legal aid 576w

Social security reform
202–4w
Handicap benefits 451–2w

Social services
Elderly 454w
VAT 428w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1051–5

Solicitors
664–5
Fees and charges 666w

South Africa
Homicide 120–1w
Information technology 998

South America
Children 611–2w

South Downs
Environment protection 46–7w

South East Asia
Foreign investment in UK 344

South Korea
International Monetary Fund 245w, 642–3w
UK contributions 643–4w

South Western Regional Health Authority
Nurses' training 687w, 735w

South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive
Legal costs 633w

South Yorkshire Supertram
Costs 221w

Speaker and deputies, For rulings and statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings and statements
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (01.12.97) 22, 81, (08.12.97) 671, (10.12.97) 1033, 1097, 1122, (11.12.97) 1221, 1232
Committal and instruction to committee motions (09.12.97) 900
Conduct of proceedings (01.12.97) 46, 50, 53, 67, 71, 81, 86–7, 89, 105–6, 113, 116, 122, 130, (02.12.97) 167–8, 170, 173, 183, 187, 190, 260, (03.12.97) 307, 329, 338, 345, 353, 365, (04.12.97) 473, 517, (08.12.97) 681, 731, 763, 767, (09.12.97) 803–4, 810, 839, 846, 877–8, 890–2, 901, 917, (10.12.97) 931, 969, 976, 1002, 1004, 1006, 1011, 1037, 1049, 1062, 1079, 1084, 1091, 1099, 1122–3, 1145, 1146, (11.12.97) 1196, 1217–8, 1230, 1235, (12.12.97) 1294–5, 1321
Disallowed questions (01.12.97) 13, (04.12.97) 473, (11.12.97) 1193
EC documents motions (09.12.97) 907
Naming of Members (12.12.97) 1263
Orders and regulations motions (10.12.97) 1148–9, (11.12.97) 1214
Points of order (01.12.97) 19–21, 87, 90, 119, 124, (02.12.97) 187, (03.12.97) 301, 312, 390–2, (04.12.97) 512, (05.12.97)

Speaker and deputies—continued
637, (08.12.97) 667–70, (09.12.97) 811–2, (10.12.97) 1031–2, 1091, 1149, 1152–3, (11.12.97) 1209–10
Private Members' bill orders (12.12.97) 1331–2

Speaker's rulings and statements
Clerk of the House (09.12.97) 795
Disclosure of information (03.12.97) 390–1
Members' facilities (04.12.97) 487–8
Order Paper (12.12.97) 1285

Special constables
Compensation 291–2w

Special education
391w, (05.12.97) 580–637
Cerebral palsy 138w
Children in care 1169
Finance 1169–70
Headteachers 315w

Special Educational Needs Tribunal
Annual reports 551–2w

Spectacles
Developing countries 614w

Speed limits
Cameras 289w, 506w

***Spellar, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence*
Debates etc.
Defence industries (03.12.97) 280, 283–9
Prisoners of war, Memorials (03.12.97) 365–8
Questions
Armed forces housing, Property transfer 331–2w
Arms trade, Chile 177w
ASTOR system, Defence procurement 23–4w
Chatham Dockyard, Radiation hazards 26w
Chinook helicopters 263–4w
COBRA Project 28w
Defence Diversification Agency 7–8
Defence equipment, Exhibitions 335w
Defence industries, Diversification 25w
Defence Intelligence Staff 336–7w
Defence land 8–9, 337w
Defence land, Fox hunting 385w
Defence land, Housing 9
Defence land, Hunting 27w, 385–6w
Defence procurement 332–4w
Defence support agencies, Armed forces civilians 176w
European fighter aircraft 22w
European fighter aircraft, Defence review 383w
Foxley, Gordon, Defence contracts 553w
HMS Caroline 502w
Low flying, Military aircraft 27w
Medals 22w
Military exercises 706w
Nimrod aircraft 263w, 332w
Parking, Ministry of Defence 440w
Pay, Ministry of Defence 175–7w
Permanent secretaries, Ministry of Defence 336w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 171–5w
Prisoners of war, Armed forces officers' pay 4–5
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 5–6, 25w
RAF Quedgeley, Development plans 554w
Trident missiles, Defence procurement 27w
Yorks and Lancaster Regimental Museum 24w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 387
Questions
Food hygiene, Civil service agencies 360w
Food hygiene, Expenditure 361w
Hill livestock allowances, Marginal land 361w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 387
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 371
Questions
Educational finance, Scotland 143
NHS finance 791

Sports
466w
Broadcast Journalism 374w
Conferences 515w
Finance 657
Radio 373w
Young people 515–6w, 649–50

Sports facilities
Cricket 135–6w

Sports sponsorship
465w, 655–6
Tobacco advertising 4w, 136w, 340w, 464w, 655

Sportsmark
514–5w
Primary education 650

Spring, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1271, 1275, 1290, 1293, 1296, 1304, 1306, 1318, 1324–7
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 44–7
Questions
Armed forces recruitment 27w
Challenge Fund, Physical education 515w
Higher education admission 651–2w
National Coaching Foundation, Teacher training 514–5w
Physical education, Curriculum 551w
Physical education, Educational standards 520w, 551w
Physical education, National vocational qualifications 520w
Sports, Conferences 515w
Sportsmark 514–5w
Sportsmark, Primary education 650
Young people, Sports 515–6w

Springvale initiative
University of Ulster 248w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Questions
Employment opportunities, Fife 141
Mines, Bomb disposal 611w
Royal yacht 554w

Sri Lanka
Political refugees 50–1w, 636w

Stabilisation Force in Bosnia
24w

Staffordshire
Dental services 259w
Small businesses 254w

Stakeholder pensions
532w

Standard spending assessments
33–5w, 112w
Greater London 33–4w

Standard spending assessments—continued
Non-domestic rates 222w

Standards Action Group
see Scottish Standards Action Group

Standards and Privileges Select Committee
(03.12.97) 459

Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights
Employment discrimination 516w

Standing Order No 24 applications
Industrial disputes (02.12.97) 186–7

Stankovic, Milos
(10.12.97) 970–6

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 47
Questions
Buckinghamshire Health Authority, Finance 535w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Technology foresight programme 19w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 380w
Social security benefits, Finance 380–1w

Statistics
Labour market 168w
Scottish Parliament 620–1w
Unemployment 573w

"Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals in Great Britain 1996"
50w

Statistics of Trade Act 1947
Questions
463w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Press Complaints Commission Bill, 1R (09.12.97) 813–4
Questions
Haemophilia, Factor VIII 536w
Members' allowances 153
School admission 317w
Tax collection 5w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 368
Questions
Tuition fees, University finance 1174

Stevenson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 105–9, 119

Stewart, Mr David
Questions
Agriculture, Environment protection 353w
NHS, Scotland 150–1w

Stewart, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Foreign investment in the UK (03.12.97) 297–301
Questions
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 347–8w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Questions
Breast cancer 734–5w
Breast cancer, Finance 182w
Breast cancer, Medical research 344w
Breast cancer, Screening 259–60w, 344–5w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Questions
Berkshire Health Authority, Finance 791–2
Fruit 355w
Vocational training, Skilled workers 658w

Stott, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 367

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin, Minister of State for Transport, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 544w

Straw, Rt Hon Jack, Secretary of State for the Home Dept
Questions
Church Commissioners, Advance corporation tax 17
Church of England, General Electric Company 15
Clergy, Pensions 16–7
Electronic surveillance, Cellular phones 299w
Emergency services, Millennium compliance 433–4w
Ethnic minorities, Home Office 54w
European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters 298w
General Electric Company 16
Hindley, Myra, Prison sentences 56w
Home Office, Early retirement 54w
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 297w
Intelligence services, Finance 298w
Intelligence services, Performance standards 297–8w
MI5, Disclosure of information 434w
Ministerial statements, Home Office 209w
Official secrets, Telecommunications industry 298w
Pay, Home Office 102–4w
Police grant 100–2w
Prison Service 585w
Schengen Agreement 296w
Telephone tapping 299w
Telephone tapping, Intelligence services 297w
Voting System Independent Commission 57–8w
Young offenders, Sentencing 49–50w
Youth Justice Task Force 102w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 560–5
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 442–51
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 930
Questions
Nazi victims, Gold 370w
Treaty of Amsterdam 159–60w

Stress related illnesses
Health service staff 687–8w
Lost working days 9w

Stringer, Mr Graham
Questions
Fire services, Manpower 58–82w
Non-domestic rates 112–4w

Structure plans
Gloucestershire 400w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1017

Stuart, Ms Gisela—continued
Questions
NHS, Information technology 537w

Student grants
662w
Dental students 599w
Higher education admission 1172–3
Medical students 599w

Student loans
661–2w
Finance 1172
Teacher training 1171–2

Student numbers
Argyll and Bute 155–6w
Further education 240–1w
Scotland 154w
Tuition fees 651w, 657w

Student wastage
Universities 660w

Students
Civil service agencies 662w
Expenditure 621w
Finance 551w
Housing benefits 98w
Income support 98w
Scotland 143–4
Social security benefits 380w, 430w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1207
Questions
Environmental Task Force, Domestic energy conservation 631w
Fuel poverty 629w
Home energy efficiency scheme 630–1w
Housing standards, Health 688w
Tuition fees, Student numbers 651w

Sudan
Foreign policy 499w
UN resolutions 406–7w

Suicide
Prisoners 435w, 587–8w

Sullom Voe
Port state control 31w

Supermarkets
Cockermouth 634w
Planning appeals 36w
Planning permission 632–3w

Supply estimates
(09.12.97) 907

Surgery
Breast cancer 247–8w

Surrey
GP fundholders 348–50w

Surveillance
Complaints against police 506w

Sustainable development
107w, 613w
EC Development Council 501w
National Assembly of Wales 304w

Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 496
Questions
NHS reform 538w
Teaching methods 1173

Sutherland
Agricultural workers 140

Sutherland Commission
see Long-Term Care Royal Commission

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Atkinson, George, Public petitions (10.12.97) 1154
Business questions (04.12.97) 508–9, (11.12.97) 1206–7
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 203–4, 244–5, 254–6, (03.12.97) 398, 402, 425–6, 452–3
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 676, 712, 724, 729–30, 736, 738–41
Questions
Contingency reserve, Yugoslavia 24w
NHS, Managers 539w

Swinney, Mr John
Debates etc.
Opposition, Points of order (10.12.97) 1031–2
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 182
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1048, 1059–62, 1067
Questions
Employment opportunities, Scotland 139
Homicide, Appeals 368w
Scottish Parliament, Statistics 620–1w
Social security benefits, Advertising 475w
Social security benefits, Take-up 475w
Surveys, Scotland 509–10w

Syms, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 721, 731–5
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1294
Questions
Royal yacht 6

Tai Cymru
see Housing for Wales

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 217, 221

Task Force on Youth Justice
see Youth Justice Task Force

Tax administration
Rural areas 6w

Tax allowances
Airport tax 367w
Bicycles 423w
Company cars 573w
Minibuses 573w
Personal savings 349
Teachers 427–8w

Tax avoidance
Northern Ireland Office 127w

Tax burden
560w

Tax collection
5w
Euro 5–6w

Tax credits
USA 244w

Tax evasion
709w

Tax harmonisation
6w, 168w

Tax rates and bands
167w, 559w
Income tax 7w

Tax yields
Employment 167w
Veterinary services 508w

Taxation
Aviation fuels 645w
Day care of children 707w
Gas supply industry 279w
Married people 1003–5
Offshore trusts 576w

Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992
Questions
575–6w

Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements (04.12.97) 500–12, (11.12.97) 1197, 1199–208
Limon, Donald, Retirement (09.12.97) 795
Questions
Ethnic minorities, President of the Council 130w
House of Commons Chamber 131w
House of Commons procedure, Prayer 130w
House of Commons questions, Minister Without Portfolio 156
House of Commons special standing committees 130–1w
House of Commons times of sittings 130w
House of Commons, Operating costs 704w
Legislative process 155–6
Members' allowances 153
Members' travel, Costs 491w
Minister Without Portfolio, Oral questions 318w
Ministerial policy advisors, President of the Council 705w
Ministerial statements 152
Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee 156
President of the Council, Advertising 491w
Prime Minister's questions 153–4
Private Members' bills 154–5
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator 129–30w

Taylor, Ms Dari
Questions
Education action zones 1167
Foxley, Gordon, Defence contracts 553w
NHS, Contracts 538w
Social Exclusion Unit, Children 1007

Taylor, Mr David
Questions
Leicestershire 584w
Zambia, Armed conflict 711–2w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 202, 207, 213–8, 222
Questions
Cellular phones, Health warnings 456w

Taylor, Rt Hon John D
Questions
Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust, Flags 128w
Cyprus, Armed forces deployment 497–8w
Pre-school education, Northern Ireland 516w

Taylor, Mr John M
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 506–7
Questions
Rights of audience 484–5
St Helena, Airports 999

Taylor, Keith
410w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Cycling (10.12.97) 952–6
Questions
EC Environmental policy, EC presidency 576–7w
Export Credits Guarantee Dept, Disclosure of information 94–5w
Facsimile transmission, Dept for Education and Employment 388–9w
India, Ports 501w, 577w
NHS trusts, Licensing 464w
Open government, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 164–5w
Open government, Dept for Education and Employment 549w
Open government, Dept of Trade and Industry 95w
P and O, India 595w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 240–4, 255, (03.12.97) 428, 430–1
Local government finance (02.12.97) 172
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 495
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1055–7
Questions
Employment protection, EC law 342w

Tayside
Employment opportunities 141–2

Teacher training
Finance 698w
Information technology 698w
National Coaching Foundation 514–5w
Shortage subjects 393–4w
Student loans 1171–2
Vacancies 393w

Teachers
Holiday leave 392w
Lost working days 9w
Retirement 552w
Tax allowances 427–8w
Wales 270–1w

Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
583w, 656–7w

Teaching methods
1173
Literacy 1180
Schools 552w

Technology foresight programme
462–3w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 19w

Technology transfer
Developing countries 998

Telecommunications industry
Official secrets 298w

Telecommunications technology
Privacy 229w

Telephone services
Railway safety 280w

Telephone tapping
299w
Electronic surveillance 321w
Intelligence services 297w

Telephones
Aids for handicapped 46w
Lunar House 433w
Railway travel 46w

Television
Aids for handicapped 468w

Television licences
636w

Temple-Morris, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 539–43

Temporary employment
Conditions of employment 530w

10 Downing Street
Cats 103–5w
Official hospitality 502w

Terminal care
182–3w
Medical treatments (10.12.97) 1025–30

Territorial Army
Army strength 173–5w
Defence review 331w
New deal for young unemployed 653w
Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers 2–3

Terrorism
Egypt 300–1w
Mixed oxide fuel 548w
Northern Ireland 127w, (11.12.97) 1215–54

Textile industry
250w

Thames estuary
Floods 350w

Theatres
Birmingham 372w
Inner city areas 466–7w
North West region 372w

Theft
Cattle 637w
Sheep 637w

Thomas, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 694, 701, 762, (09.12.97) 864–7, 875
Postal services, Wales (05.12.97) 638–41, 645–6
Questions
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 440–1w
Beef, Farmers 478
Cardiff County Council, Local government expenditure 85–6w
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 713w
Civil proceedings, Law reform 663
Contracts for services, Competition 307w
Housing for Wales 306w
Literacy 1170
National Assembly of Wales 345

Thompson, Mr William
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 382

Thorne Moors
Sites of special scientific interest 226–7w, 285w

Tibet
EC external relations 405w
Human rights 405w

Timms, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 166
Questions
Armed conflict, Children 1000

Timms, Mr Stephen—continued
Gas supply industry, North Sea 279w
International Monetary Fund, South Korea 245w
Millennium Exhibition 659–60
Political refugees, Sri Lanka 50–1w
Public expenditure 568–72w
Scottish Parliament, Public expenditure 510–3w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Questions
Solicitors 664–5

Tobacco
House of Commons 403w
Smuggling 244–5w

Tobacco advertising
Disclosure of information 733w
EC action (03.12.97) 459
Sports sponsorship 4w, 136w, 340w, 464w, 655

Tobacco industry
Subsidies 358w

Todd, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 385
Questions
Air displays, Indonesia 722w
Government contracts, Northern Ireland Office 427w
Invalid care allowances 606w
Local government finance 545–6w
Patients, Medical treatments 792–4

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 497
Shopping centres (10.12.97) 984–5, 988–9
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1073–4
Questions
Algeria, EC external relations 406w
Aviation fuels, Environment protection 495w
Aviation fuels, Taxation 645w
Indonesia, Arms trade 577w
Local government finance 346–7
Mental health services, Finance 89w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 723w
National Disability Council, Disclosure of information 310w
New deal for long term unemployed 312w
Out of town shopping centres 401–2w
Overseas aid 994
Racial harassment, Court rules and procedures 85w
Tibet, EC external relations 405w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Handicapped 310w
Turkey, Political prisoners 370w
UNESCO, Higher education teachers 646–7w
United Arab Emirates, Child workers 577–8w

Torture
Equipment 300w

Touhig, Mr Don
Questions
Educational standards 522w

Tourism
Aids for handicapped 651
Graduates 386w
Higher education 386–7w
Income 466w
Investment 465w
Millennium Exhibition 476w

Tourist industry
650, 659
Employment 136w, 319w, 514w
Employment opportunities 465–6w
Finance 136w
Greater London 136w
Minimum wage 2w, 651
Scotland 140–1
Training 136w, 658
Welfare to work 465–6w, 514w

Tourists
Westminster Hall cafeteria 403w

Town and country planning
Commuters 32–3w
Wales 305w

Townend, Mr John
Questions
Personal savings 1006–7

Toys and games
Safety standards 161–2w, 343w

Trade promotion
India 463w

Trade unions
532w

Train operating units
Performance related pay 493w

Training
Athletics 467w
Judiciary 453w, 667w
Libraries 373w
New deal for young unemployed 1179
NHS 790
Road haulage industry 549w
Tourist industry 136w, 658

Training and enterprise councils
660w
Chambers of commerce 673–4w
Finance 164w
Out of school childcare grant scheme 549–50w
Public expenditure 274w
Wales 274w

Transcaucasus
Refugees 123w

Transport
Death 225–6w
Government grants to local authorities 727w
Safety standards (02.12.97) 188–90

Transport of animals
Cattle 359w

Transport of radioactive materials
337w
Air freight transport 281–2w
Channel tunnel 280–1w
Liability 228w
Mixed oxide fuel 122w
Roll-on roll-off ships 413–5w
Safety standards 413–5w
Sea transport 281w, 413–4w

Transport policy
212w
Cycling 282w
Scotland 153–4w

Transport Safety Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (02.12.97) 188–90

Transsexuals
503w
Scotland 622w

Travelling people
Local authority powers 107w

Treasury
Ministerial policy advisors 708w
Ministers' visits abroad 645–6w
Parking 507w
Pay 170w

Treaties
Nuclear safety 249w

Treaty of Amsterdam
122–3w, 159–60w, (02.12.97) 191–256, (03.12.97) 396–459, 710–1w
EC immigration 236w
Handicapped 310w

Trees
Urban areas 110w

Trickett, Mr Jon
Questions
Community care, Government grants to local authorities 184w
National insurance contributions 205–6w
Personal social services, Government grants to local authorities 184w

Trident
14–5, 335–6w

Trident missiles
Defence procurement 27w
USA 27w

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1215–7, 1219–22, 1229–33, 1235, 1243
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 365–6
Questions
Demonstrations, Northern Ireland 127w
Planning permission, Portadown 424w
Public order offences, Northern Ireland 307w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 127w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Questions
Social security benefits rates 186–201w

Tuberculosis
Drug resistance 540–1w

Tuition fees
656–8w, 1174
Costs 11w, 310–1w
Dental students 260w
Educational qualifications 387w
Higher education 10–1w, 656–8w
Non-payment 651w
Parental contributions 550w
Publicity 137w
Sandwich courses 657w
Scotland 144, 151–2, 156–7w, 213w, 461w
Student numbers 651w, 657w
University finance 656w, 1174

Turkey
Arms trade 93w, 340w, 671w
Greece 710w
Political prisoners 370w

Turnberg Review
see Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel

Turner, Mr Dennis
Questions
House of Commons, Tobacco 403w
Line of route, House of Commons catering 403w

Turner, Dr George
Debates etc.
Digital television, Norfolk (10.12.97) 977–82

Turner, Dr George—continued
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1285–8
Nature reserves, Birds (02.12.97) 260
Questions
Educational finance 1176

Twigg, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 429
Questions
Lotteries, Finance 467w
Petroleum exploration licences, Shetland 342w

Twigg, Mr Stephen
Questions
Child workers, Contracts 615w
London Underground 106w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Child workers 649w
World War II, Property law 673w
Young offenders, Sentencing 49–50w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 503–4, (11.12.97) 1200
Disclosure of information, Points of order (11.12.97) 1209
Farm incomes, Points of order (01.12.97) 19–20
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 936–7
Questions
Beef, Farmers 474–5
Further education colleges, Educational finance 654w
Health authorities, Mergers 785–6
House of Commons times of sittings 130w
Local authorities, Millennium compliance 286–7w
St Michael's Hospital 692w

Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority
Finance 420–1w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Questions
Disclosure of information 708w
Military police 263w
Treasury, Ministerial policy advisors 708w
World Bank, Development aid 610w

Uganda
Referendums 993–4

UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator
129–30w

UK Sports Institute
653–4

UN
see United Nations

UN Conference on Environment and Development
1008

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
Child workers 649w

UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara
UK contributions 498–9w

UN resolutions
Iraq 13w
Sudan 406–7w

UN Security Council
211w

UN Special Commission on Iraq
Armed forces reserves 27w

Unemployment
169w
Aid financed trade 238w
Scotland 141
Statistics 573w

UNESCO
Costs 613w
Higher education teachers 392w, 646–7w

Unfair dismissal
Funerals 92w
Industrial tribunals 527–8w

Uniform business rate
Charities 428w
Wales 269w

United Arab Emirates
Child workers 577–8w

United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards
Disclosure of information 19–20w

United Nations
Curriculum 239w

Universities
Fees and charges 660w
Highlands of Scotland 619–20w
Public petitions (10.12.97) 1154
Scottish Islands 619–20w
Student wastage 660w

University finance
Tuition fees 656w, 1174

University of Ulster
Springvale initiative 248w

Untreated milk
683–4w
Food standards 357w

Urban areas
Housing construction 282w
Post offices 340w
Trees 110w

USA
Foreign investment 529w
Foreign investment in UK 529w
Investment income 244w
Tax credits 244w
Trident missiles 27w

Vacancies
Teacher training 393w

Vaccination
Children 579–80w
GP fundholders 305w
Influenza 786–7
Wales 305w

Valuation
Council tax 729w

Value Added Tax (Drugs Medicines and Aids for the Handicapped) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(09.12.97) 913–6
Questions
428w, 460w, 561w

Vandalism
Schools 271–2w

VAT
Charities 428w
Drugs (09.12.97) 913–6
Energy prices 606–7w
Health services 561w
Home care services 508w
Home energy efficiency scheme 631–2w
Home insulation scheme 5w
Incontinence aids 262w, 459–60w, 560–1w
NHS 428w, 642w, 688w
Social services 428w

VAT repayment
NHS trusts 642w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service 382–3w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 421w
Chernobyl Children Lifeline 367w
Child Support Agency, Belfast 606w
Civil service, Conditions of employment 325–6w
Deportation 50w
Ethnic minorities, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 2w
Ethnic minorities, Dept for Education and Employment 662–3w
Ethnic minorities, Dept for International Development 132w
Ethnic minorities, Dept of Health 177w
Ethnic minorities, Dept of Trade and Industry 255w
Ethnic minorities, Home Office 54w
Ethnic minorities, Northern Ireland Office 7w
Ethnic minorities, President of the Council 130w
Ethnic minorities, Scottish Office 211w
House of Commons stationery, Contracts 704w
Illegal immigrants 100w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Manpower 104w
Immigration appeals 57w
Immigration applications 120w, 500w
India, British embassies 13w, 120w, 300w
India, Immigration applications 120w
India, Ministers' visits abroad 13w
India, Overseas trade 12w
Leicestershire Health Authority, Patients 542w
Millennium Commission 373w
Ministers' visits abroad, India 463w
New deal for schools 396w
Overseas investment, Yemen 719w
Post Office, Executives 341w
Post offices, Urban areas 340w
Public bodies, Dept for Education and Employment 700–2w
Public bodies, Dept for International Development 615w
Public bodies, Dept of Health 692–3w
Public bodies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 647w
Railtrack 398–9w, 421w
Railtrack, Repairs and maintenance 399w
Rushey Mead School, New deal for schools 520w
Visas 500w
Wheelchairs, Administrative delays 183w

Veterinary Products Committee
683w

Veterinary services
Tax yields 508w

Video recordings
Police 296–7w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1190
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 685w
Defence land 9
Educational standards, Sixth form colleges 1167–8
HM Coastguard 291w
Japan, International cooperation 612–3w

Village halls
National Lottery 656–7

Vis, Dr Rudi
Questions
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 7w

Visas
500w
India 405w
Intelligence services 302–3w
Pakistan 405w
Rehman, Abdul 122w

Vision 2010
Nigeria 405–6w

Vitamin B6
Retail trade 20w, 148w, 360w, 374w

Vocational guidance
Expenditure 521–2w
Greater London 521–2w

Vocational training
Child care 429w
Educational standards 651w
Inspections 387w
New deal for young unemployed 389–90w, 432w
Skilled workers 658w

Voluntary organisations
Criminal records 363w
Scotland 701–3w

Voluntary schools
1181–2

Voting methods
European Parliament 13w

Voting System Independent Commission
57–8w
Referendums 348

Wales
Agenda 21 679w
Agriculture 269w, 337–8, 341–2, 344
Antismoking campaign 271w
Day care of children 303–4w
Dental services 304–5w
Dentists 305w
EC grants and loans 518w
Employment opportunities 304w, 450–1w
Family practitioner services 579–80w
Farmers 339–40
Foreign investment in UK 270w, 343–4, 449w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 451w
Hill livestock allowances 269–70w
Hospital waiting lists 269w
Housing construction 344–5
Independent Tribunal Service 185w
Local education authorities 270–1w
Local government 338
Local government expenditure 518w
Local government finance 117–8w, 270w
Minimum wage 267w
National income 516–7w
Non-domestic rates 119w
Police 272w
Police authorities 118–9w
Postal services (05.12.97) 638–48
Private finance initiative 268w
Public expenditure 345, 580–3w
Public transport 450w
Refugees 580w
Regional planning and development 345–6
Residential care of children 340
Schools 272w
Sheep premiums 451w
Smoking related diseases 271w
Teachers 270–1w
Town and country planning 305w
Training and enterprise councils 274w
Uniform business rate 269w
Vaccination 305w

Wales—continued
Wood 679w

Wales Agri-environment Scheme Working Group
Public appointments 517w

Walker, Mr Cecil
Questions
Sentencing, Appeals 240w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 937
Questions
Companies, Scotland 146–7
Dental services, Scotland 620w
Dental students, Scotland 677w
HM Coastguard 45–6w
Millennium compliance, Scotland 621w
MV Green Lily, Inspections 47w
Port state control, Flotta 31w
Rescue services 49w
Shipping safety, Sea pollution 43–4w
Ships, Inspections 47w

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1201
Questions
Nuclear accidents, Disclosure of information 252w
Nuclear accidents, Emergency planning 222w
Nuclear safety, Licensing 223–4w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Transport of radioactive materials 413–5w
Sports, Broadcast Journalism 374w
Sports, Radio 373w
Territorial Army, Army strength 175w
Territorial Army, Defence review 331w
Transport of radioactive materials, Sea transport 413–4w

Walter, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 384–5
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (03.12.97) 403–6
Local government finance, Dorset (10.12.97) 1161
Questions
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 269w

War pensions
Asbestosis 201–2w

Ward, Ms Claire
Questions
Millennium Exhibition, Contracts 476w
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS trust, Management 538w
World Cup 466w

Warrington
Attendance allowance 534–5w
Disability living allowance 534–5w
Magistrates 666

Warships
Defence procurement 23w, 705w

Warwickshire
NHS finance 780–1

Waste disposal
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 313–21, 525w
Offal 17–8w
Prescription drugs 454–5w

Waste management
Gilberts Animal By-Products 727–8w
Prosecutions 42w
West Yorkshire 37–42w

Waste Minimisation Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (08.12.97) 670
2R* (12.12.97) 1332

Water and sewerage companies
Rodents 111w

Water conservation
36w

Water distribution
Lead pipes 399w

Water pollution
629w
EC law 289–91w
Pollution control 630w
Prosecutions 421–2w

Water supply
Hampshire 629w
Housing construction 223w

Water treatment
Overseas aid 614–5w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1103–8, 1111, 1113
Questions
Agriculture, Regulatory systems 360w
Animal experiments, Secondary legislation 209w
Animal welfare 264w
Antismoking campaign 376w
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 18
Housing construction, East Sussex 400w
Long-Term Care Charter 375w
South Downs, Environment protection 46–7w
Tourist industry 650

Watts, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1204
Questions
EC Internal Market Council 527w
Government grants to local authorities 634w
Non-domestic rates 727w
Non-domestic rates, Standard spending assessments 222w
Youth unemployment 522–3w

Weapons
Northern Ireland 554–8w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 28–9, 40, 57, 61, 68
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 180
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1033–7, 1053, 1092–3, 1097, 1099–100
Questions
Building regulations, Inspections 286w
Day care of children 316–7w
Family credit, Income tax 429w
Income support, Lone parents 276w, 600w
Ministerial statements, Dept for Education and Employment 660–1w
Ministerial statements, Dept for International Development 240w
Ministerial statements, Dept of Health 262w
Ministerial statements, Dept of Social Security 276–7w
Ministerial statements, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 399w

Webb, Mr Steve—continued
Ministerial statements, Dept of Trade and Industry 365w
Ministerial statements, Home Office 209w
Ministerial statements, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 357w
Ministerial statements, Ministry of Defence 553–4w
Ministerial statements, Prime Minister 320w
Ministerial statements, Scottish Office 619w
Ministerial statements, Welsh Office 273w
National insurance contributions 383w
National Lottery, Northavon 318w
Patients, Medical treatments 537w
Retirement pensions, Age addition 603w
Tax rates and bands 167w, 559w
VAT, Home insulation scheme 5w

Weights and Measures (Beer and Cider) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R* (12.12.97) 1331

Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995
Questions
358w

Welfare to work
311–2w
Armed forces cadets 388w
Ethnic groups 388w
Further education colleges 654–5w
Scotland 159w, 676–7w
Tourist industry 465–6w, 514w

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
European Communities (04.12.97) 547–50
Questions
Bananas, Windward Islands 470–1
Greenbelt, Hertfordshire 583w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 379–80
Questions
Council house sales, Scotland 461–2w
Educational finance 11w
Higher education, Scotland 142
Higher education admission, Scotland 156w
Housing benefits, Students 98w
Tuition fees, Scotland 156–7w, 213w

Welsh Affairs Select Committee
(08.12.97) 768

Welsh Assembly
see National Assembly of Wales

Welsh Grand Committee
(01.12.97) 21, 129

Welsh language
Judges 329–30w

Welsh Office
Government buildings 272–3w
Millennium compliance 703w, 714w
Ministerial policy advisors 678w
Ministerial statements 273w
Pay 119w
Permanent secretaries 306w

West Hertfordshire Health Authority
Management 538w

West Indies Guardship
383w

West Midlands
Bail hostels 436–7w
Housing 288–9w

West Yorkshire
Driving offences 289w
Waste management 37–42w

Western European Union
705w

Western Sahara
Referendums 498–9w

Westminster Hall cafeteria
Tourists 403w

Wheelchairs
Administrative delays 183w
Museums and galleries 211w

Whisky
Duty free allowances 625–6w

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 104
Local government finance (02.12.97) 168
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1273–4, 1283, 1298, 1311, 1316–24
Open government (11.12.97) 1195

Whitney, Sir Ray
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 206, 212, 238–40
Open government (11.12.97) 1189

"Who Decides Consultation Paper"
(10.12.97) 1011–24

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Family income 381–2w
Pupils, Lone parents 658w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1021

Wigan and Bolton Health Authority
Accident and emergency departments 343–4w

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Points of order (05.12.97) 637
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 677, 689, 702–10, 720, 753, 763, 765
Postal services, Wales (05.12.97) 641–2, 644–6
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1036, 1050–1
Special education (05.12.97) 633–4

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 88–9, 104
Business questions (11.12.97) 1205
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Com (02.12.97) 213
NHS (09.12.97) 806
Open government (11.12.97) 1189
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 369
Questions
C17 aircraft 11
EC Social Charter 725–6w
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 342
Tobacco industry, Subsidies 358w

Willetts, Mr David,
Questions
Higher education, Departmental publications 429–30w
Higher education, Tuition fees 10–1w
Literacy summer schools initiative 430w
New deal for young unemployed 430w

Willetts, Mr David,—continued
Overseas aid 610w
Retirement age 431w
Tuition fees 1174
Tuition fees, Costs 11w
Unemployment 169w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
Independent Tribunal Service, Wales 185w
National Assembly of Wales, Parliamentary buildings 337
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 274w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 384
Questions
NHS trusts, NHS administration 270w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Debates etc.
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (08.12.97) 749–51
Questions
Local government finance, Wales 270w
Tourism, Aids for handicapped 651

Willis, Mr Phil
Questions
Barnardos, Personal records 346–7w
Class sizes, Primary education 431w
Council tax capping 493w
Further education colleges, Educational finance 655w
General Teaching Council, Fees and charges 552w
General Teaching Council, Private education 552w
General Teaching Council for Wales 583w
Headteachers, Professional qualifications 552–3w
Higher education, Access funds 660w
Local government finance, Harrogate 418w
New deal for long term unemployed 519w
New deal for young unemployed 431–2w, 653w
New deal for young unemployed, Further education colleges 432w
One parent benefits, Northern Ireland 1007–8
Student grants 662w
Students, Civil service agencies 662w
Teachers, Holiday leave 392w
Training and enterprise councils 660w
Tuition fees 657–8w
Tuition fees, Higher education 656–8w
Tuition fees, Parental contributions 550w
Tuition fees, Sandwich courses 657w
Tuition fees, Student numbers 657w
Tuition fees, University finance 656w
Universities, Fees and charges 660w
Universities, Student wastage 660w

Wills, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal (03.12.97) 316–7
Social security benefits (01.12.97) 48–53
Questions
Driving offences, Prosecutions 590–1w
Homicide, Convictions 591w, 697–8w

Wilshire, Mr David
Questions
Ashford Hospital NHS Trust 347w
GP fundholders, Surrey 348–50w
Hospital discharges 349w
Police authorities 299w

Wilshire, Mr David*—*continued
St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Hospital waiting lists 348w

Wilson, Mr Brian, Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office
Questions
Companies, Scotland 146–7
Day care of children, Scotland 608w
Dental students, Scotland 677w
Educational finance, Scotland 143
Electricity generation, Energy resources 219w
Foreign investment in UK, Devolution 147
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 144–6, 152w
Grant maintained schools, Scotland 462w
Higher education, Scotland 142–3, 461w
Higher education admission, Scotland 156w
Languages education, Secondary education 460w
Local education authorities, Scotland 462w
Local enterprise agencies, Scotland 155w
Locate in Scotland 147
Medical students, Scotland 677w
Regional planning and development 145–6
School buildings, Scotland 153w
School transport, Scotland 157–8w, 461w
Scottish Parliament, Statistics 620–1w
Scottish Standards Action Group, Secondary education 154–5w
Student numbers, Argyll and Bute 155–6w
Student numbers, Scotland 154w
Students, Scotland 143–4
Tuition fees, Scotland 144, 156–7w, 213w, 461w
Universities, Scottish Islands 619–20w
Welfare to work, Scotland 159w, 676–7w
Whisky, Duty free allowances 625–6w

Wilson Action Group
see Scottish Standards Action Group

Wiltshire
Residential care 686w

Wiltshire Constabulary
Police raids 505w, 696w

Wind power
672–3w

Windfall tax
367w
Local government revenue 272w

Windward Islands
Bananas 470–1

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business questions (04.12.97) 503
Doctor Assisted Dying Bill, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (10.12.97) 1025
Parliamentary broadcasting (11.12.97) 1255–8, 1261–2
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 183–4
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1052
Questions
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 647–8w
Iraq, Sanctions 407w

Winter fuel payments
Pensioners 276w, 327w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1018

Winterton, Mrs Ann*—*continued
Regional development agencies (03.12.97) 366–7
Rural areas, Scotland (10.12.97) 932–4
Questions
National Assembly of Wales, Costs 342
NHS trusts, Directors 538w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Business (01.12.97) 91
Business questions (04.12.97) 507
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 892
Industrial health and safety, Points of order (10.12.97) 1031
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 496
Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (12.12.97) 1273, 1279, 1294, 1297–302, 1310
Mentally disadvantaged (10.12.97) 1020
NHS (09.12.97) 805–6
Northern Ireland (Emergency Powers) Bill, Rep (11.12.97) 1245
Opposition, Points of order (10.12.97) 1032
Questions
Beef 479
East Cheshire NHS Trust 786
Voluntary schools 1181–2

Winterton, Ms Rosie
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 382
Local government finance (02.12.97) 169

Winyard Working Group
see Patient or Prisoner Report Working Group

Wise, Audrey
Debates etc.
Long-Term Care Royal Commission (04.12.97) 493–4
Social security benefits uprating (02.12.97) 182
Social Security Bill, Rep and 3R (10.12.97) 1037–41, 1088
Questions
Child care, Vocational training 429w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 606w
Married personal allowance, Handicapped 367w

Witnesses
Mentally disadvantaged 453w
Rape 483–4

Women
Armed forces deployment 604w
Cabinet committees 534w
Internet 471–2w
Prisoners 621–2w, 625w
Remand in custody 588w

Women's National Commission
602w

Wood
Wales 679w

Wood, Mr Mike
Questions
Local government staff, Political activities 544w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.12.97) 1207
Government of Wales Bill, 2R (09.12.97) 860, 880–2

Woolas, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Local government finance (02.12.97) 171

Worcestershire
Health authorities 787–8

Working conditions
Agriculture 223w
Building industry 223w

World Bank
Development aid 610w
UK contributions 610w

World Cup
466w, 654–5

World Summit for Children
121w

World Trade Organisation
Dept for International Development 365w

World War II
Property law 595w, 673w

Worthing
A27 220–1w

Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust
Public appointments 179–80w

Worthington, Mr Tony, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Ambulance services, Northern Ireland 308w
Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust, Flags 128w
Breast cancer, Surgery 247–8w
Central Community Relations Unit, Finance 675–6w
Eastern Health and Social Services Board, Prosthetics 128–9w
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 516w
NHS finance, Northern Ireland 7w
Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities 7–8w
Oncology, Hospital consultants 128w, 712w
Pre-school education, Northern Ireland 516w
Prosthetics 246w
Prosthetics, Hospital waiting lists 128–9w, 246–7w
University of Ulster, Springvale initiative 248w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Debates etc.
Prisoners of war, Memorials (03.12.97) 360–5
Questions
New deal for young unemployed, Great Yarmouth 1180–1

Wright, Dr Tony
Debates etc.
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (03.12.97) 383
Open government (11.12.97) 1188

Wyatt, Derek
Debates etc.
Open government (11.12.97) 1196
Questions
Exhibitions, Departmental responsibilities 695w

***Wyatt, Derek**—continued*
Millennium Exhibition, Tourism 476w

Xenotransplantation
349w

Yemen
Overseas investment 719w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Questions
Local government finance 34–5w
Marylebone Cricket Club 465w
Members' facilities, Local government revenue 728w
Planning appeals, Housing construction 287–8w, 399–400w
Sainsbury, Lord 709–10w
Standard spending assessments 33–5w, 112w
Standard spending assessments, Greater London 33–4w
Supermarkets, Planning appeals 36w

Yorks and Lancaster Regimental Museum
24w

Young, Sir George,
Questions
Defence expenditure 10
Defence land, Housing 9
Defence review 26w

Young offenders
347
Police cautions 695–6w
Sentencing 49–50w

Young people
Agriculture 150w
Alcoholic drinks 503w
Dance 470w
Housing benefits 473w
Opera 470w
Sports 515–6w, 649–50

"Your Right to Know White Paper"
(11.12.97) 1183–96

Youth employment
653–4w

Youth Justice Task Force
102w, 637–8w

Youth organisations
National Assembly of Wales 267w
Performance standards 295w

Youth unemployment
230–1w, 522–3w
Portsmouth 390w

Yugoslavia
Contingency reserve 24w

Zambia
Armed conflict 711–2w

Zimbabwe
Land nationalisation 303w, 407w, 994
Overseas aid 324w